

4. Marwaris and Moral Economies: From Rain to Ghee

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From 1895 to 1900, the fear that rain gambling might be outlawed caused a minor sensation in Calcutta society. After all, it had become an immensely popular and profitable pastime in local trading circles. Rain gambling was introduced to Calcutta public life by the Marwaris sometime in the nineteenth century, either by the 1820s (as Marwaris claimed) or by the 1870s (as the colonial government claimed). Rain gambling was confined to Cotton Street in the heart of Burabazar in northern Calcutta. Until 1882, bets were placed at small stalls lining the street, which caused considerable congestion, so one leading Marwari opened up the courtyard at Number 67 to the trade. Though two other sites were also opened up for rain gambling, No. 67 remained the most popular location. ¹ On one of my trips to Burabazar I walked along Cotton Street and found the original courtyard at No. 67, now somewhat dilapidated, but still intact. As I excitedly looked around the large and empty courtyard, a few passersby came to see what I was doing. I explained to one man that Marwaris had used the space a hundred years ago to register bets on the rainfall, but that it was now illegal. He told me, in a whisper, that rain gambling still goes on in Calcutta, now conducted discreetly over the telephone.

The basics of rain gambling at the turn of the century were as follows. Bets on the rainfall were registered during three periods during the day, from 5 A.M. to 9 A.M. or noon; from noon to 9 P.M., and sometimes until midnight. ² During the rain gambling season, corresponding with the monsoon rains, the courtyard at No. 67 Cotton Street was full of dozens of people all negotiating with the Marwari-financed brokers who handled bets on how much rain would fall during a certain period of time and when. The brokers at each stall yelled out, *Khayaga, Khayaga?* (literally meaning, "Will you eat?") *Puchis men khayaga?* ("Will you eat at twenty-five?"). When the customer was satisfied with his bet, he would call out, *khaya, khaya* ("I have eaten"). The broker only managed the placing of bets, and the Marwari financier was personally responsible for paying them off if the bet were won. The person financially guaranteeing the operation and responsible for paying off the bets, again through the broker, was generally a Marwari trader who operated on a system of credit offered by the broker. ³

During the later years of British colonial rule in India, starting from the late 1890s, new colonial regulations governing money and commodity exchange developed an added moral edge that contributed to a negative public image for gambling, to which Marwaris were compelled to respond politically as a community. Though other social groups also engaged in the same practices, colonial reports singled out the Marwaris as the primary culprits associated with such activities. The debates over regulation of gambling and financial

and commodity speculation were crucial to the emergence of the Marwari community as a visible actor in colonial public life. The issue of rain gambling, in particular, provided one of the first occasions in which Marwaris gathered as a sort of voluntary association in public life and began to chart out an interstitial, institutional space between the Marwari community and the colonial state.

The antigambling and antiadulteration legislation that the colonial state enacted in the early twentieth century put forward demands that the Marwaris would have never faced in the precolonial days: that both the flow of capital and the inner substance of commodities must be made visible. The visibility requirement was in fact central to new regimes of economic regulation enacted by the colonial state. Significantly, the contests between the government and the Marwaris over legislation concerning gambling, speculation, and commodity adulteration proved to be a rallying point for the emergence of Marwari political solidarity. The debate over rain gambling in particular prompted those Marwaris who engaged in speculative networks to create forums for adopting the language of democratic society and public culture.

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Despite the immense popularity of gambling and speculation as Marwari pastimes, these activities are seldom acknowledged in Marwari narratives of self-description, such as business, caste, and family histories. People I interviewed spoke generally about the prevalence of speculation but were reluctant to speak about specifics, particularly regarding their own families. Biographical materials on various Marwari families also do not acknowledge, at least openly, that fortunes were built from gambling and speculation. In fact, family history accounts often attempt to boast that the family's wealth did *not* arise from speculation. Many biographical sketches describe the virtue of the man who avoided speculation. The biographer of merchant Seth Ramniranjan, for instance, wrote: "One most remarkable fact about the business of the family is that neither Seth Ramniranjandasji nor his ancestors ever went into any speculative business. Whatever wealth they earned they earned from unspeculative sound business, untiring zeal and exertion, business foresight, knack and tact." ⁴ The very mention of the family having engaged only in "sound" business may actually express anxiety about its having been associated with speculation. The practice prompted debates among reformers who argued that speculation was an anti-national menace. Speculation, it was claimed, did not promote any kind of real national economic development, but was pursued out of a selfish interest in money and material gain. ⁵

The profitability of such transregional activities derived in part from a tradition and infrastructure of speculative practices in Rajasthan, especially in Shekhawati, that was maintained through intricate and sophisticated channels of cross-country communication from Rajasthan to Assam. Timberg

writes:

Why the Shekhavati migrants showed such aptitude for these markets is not clear. The Shekhavati region had a speculative tradition. As noted by a British visitor in the 1870s their home areas of Shekhavati and Bikaner had vigorous speculative markets... The fact that their fellows were already doing a considerable ready opium business in the Malwa area, made the futures operation a natural extension for Marwaris. It was one also for which they had superior access to commercial intelligence. The sophistication of their banking system and system of accounting also provided the possibility for coordinated speculation. ⁶

The communication networks between the Marwari speculators relied on both old and new technologies, in which the telegraph played a prominent part. ⁷ In 1872 the English had set up post offices in eastern Rajasthan, but only Jaipur and Ajmer had telegraph service. Calcutta Marwari merchants wired the current rates for opium to Jaipur. Agents in Jaipur used a system of mirrors to flash the rates from hilltop to hilltop; from the final hill outside of Jhunjhunu a runner would come to the city and inform the merchants of the rates. At night, if information needed to be supplied, gunpowder explosions were deployed along the same route. By 1896 the telegraph had come to Churu and Sikar, and later to Fatehpur and Sardarshahar, ⁸ and the transregional speculation networks worked very well and very profitably for several decades.

Speculation on the opium, gold, and silver markets was so important, in fact, that Bhimsen Kedia wrote in 1949 that, "speculation and agency system is the chief root of the accumulation of [Marwari] wealth." ⁹ Sir Sarupchand Hukumchand, for instance, was a noteworthy opium speculator who conducted five million rupees worth of business on the day he opened his Calcutta office in 1915, and by the end of the year he was worth ten million. ¹⁰ This transregional economy of speculation and gambling, centered in Calcutta, was done on a national scale and a monthly basis. The Marwari "fathers" of *satta* (commodity figure gambling) were described by the colonial government as "keen men of business with an intimate knowledge of trade and market fluctuations. They introduced monthly figure gambling on the price of opium and appealed to a clientele of business men: both bookmakers and backers watched the market and laid their money with discrimination." ¹¹ Widespread Marwari speculation on the exchanges helped raise the price of opium, in particular, to levels that were highly profitable to the colonial state.

Concurrent with this speculation that produced profit not only for Marwaris but for other groups of people as well were metropolitan discourses about the immorality of gambling. The colonial state used these critiques to its advantage in outlawing some practices. The presence of plural cultural logics gave these activities an ambiguity that had to be negotiated with regard to the colonial state's efforts to moralize and control. The social life of commodities and business practices—the changing meanings assigned to gambling, speculation, and commodity flows—also enabled a politics of colonial difference. ¹² This set of negotiations contributed to the rise of "Marwari" as a viable identity tag in public life.

Gambling Laws as a Question of Class in European Contexts

English law has a long history of legislating against gambling, going back at least as early as 1388, when Richard II commanded his subjects to stop gambling on dice and other games. ¹³ At the end of the nineteenth century, gambling posed a difficult legal challenge to both the metropolitan and colonial states. Historians of gambling have discussed how, for the British, the practice of gambling threatened the high moral ground associated with hard work, thrift, and self-denial, which was epitomized by writers such as Samuel Smiles in his 1859 treatise, *Self Help*. ¹⁴

The first difficulty the British state faced in regulating gambling was in establishing what aspect of gambling itself was the problem, in addition to decrying the more obvious and despised secondary effects of bankruptcy, delinquency, and overall moral decline. As W. Douglass Mackenzie noted in a short book on the subject in 1896, even the Calcutta Diocesan Conference was reported to have spent an entire day "trying to discover what was wrong about gambling, but did not succeed. They carried a resolution, however, declaring it to be the duty of all to discountenance betting." ¹⁵ To address this puzzle, Mackenzie relied on the words of Herbert Spencer, who claimed that the essential immorality of gambling lay in the fact that pleasure is obtained at the cost of pain to another: it is antisocial, with no effort made to further the general good. ¹⁶ Gambling was generally perceived as a threat to both state and religion. It was viewed as an activity that depended on the vagaries of chance, and was thereby outside of both rational human action and the workings of Divine Providence.

In response to these moral anxieties, the English state found a fascinating way of managing the problem of gambling, while at the same time making certain gambling practices more visible to the disciplinary gaze of state jurisdiction. The state, in effect, managed to justify allowing upper-class gambling while outlawing working-class gambling. Legislation translated class prejudice into a supposedly objective judgment on the skills of the person in the economic transaction. Sir Earnest Cassel, a private banker to Edward VII, captured this sentiment well by noting that, "When I was

young, people called me a gambler. As the scale of my operations increased I became known as a speculator. Now I am called a banker. But I have been doing the same thing all the time." [17](#)

The politics of class were paramount in metropolitan logics about gambling, and were a vulnerable point for counter-discourses. "To live is to gamble," wrote Romain in his 1891 treatise on gambling, which labeled government intervention in gambling as a form of "legislative exorcism" whose ultimate effect would be to divide English society into economic classes under the guise of repressing a social evil. [18](#) Perceptions of gambling depended heavily on who was playing the game. Defining the limits of bourgeois gambling became a necessary step in articulating legally sanctioned notions of class difference.

In England, the process of creating legal distinctions about gambling—especially regarding betting on football (ie soccer) – became important in the development and spread of gambling as a popular activity among the working classes. [19](#) Sustaining certain elite practices of gambling in public life depended on their supposedly requiring *skill*, as opposed to the pure luck of the working-man's folly. Skill, after all, in the case of horse-racing implies a gentlemanly act of intelligence and masculinity. Mackenzie wrote in 1896 that betting on horse races required knowledge of the horses and skill in calculating probabilities. He argued that this represented a "trained ability," akin to that of a carpenter or a novelist, for which a person could legitimately be paid. [20](#) The recuperation of gambling on horse racing as the preserve of an emergent elite received its moral, legal, and even gendered substantiation because of the skill involved on the part of the gambler. Horse-racing as such was rooted in pre-bourgeois values of masculinity. [21](#) Thus this interpretation of bourgeois gambling as a skilled performance of masculinity changed horse racing into something honorable, that threatened neither the Protestant work ethic nor the class structure of the emerging social order.

As we shall see, the debate over the morality of gambling in both metropolitan and colonial contexts ranged from arguments for implementing morality through legislation on one side to expressions of the historical universality of gambling on the other. The problem of defining gambling and gambling practices was as contentious in the American colonies as it was in Europe. In eighteenth-century Virginia, to cite a North American colonial example, cockfights were seen as a threat to the solidity of class distinctions, but gradually became more popular among the planters as the landed gentry gained confidence in their social position. [22](#)

Gambling in the British Colonies

The study of gambling in non-settler colonial societies remains a far less explored area than gambling in European, colonial America, and modern American contexts, such as Las Vegas. ²³ Clifford Geertz's groundbreaking essay on the symbolic meanings of cockfighting in Indonesia stands as an excellent example of how gambling play mirrors the structure of social relations. ²⁴ For South Asia, the scholarly literature on the topic of gambling is surprisingly underdeveloped, considering the importance and longevity of gambling as a subcontinental practice dating to ancient times. The imagination of gambling is a vital part of a multiplicity of South Asian lifeworlds. The well-known dice-game scene in the *Mahabharata*, when Yudhishthira loses his entire fortune and forces the five Pandava brothers and the princess Draupadi into exile, is a case in point. ²⁵

Commenting on gambling practices under colonial rule, John Rogers argues that in Sri Lanka local practices of gambling constituted resistance to the moral imperatives of colonial rule. Gambling, Rogers argues, constituted lower-class attempts to resist the dominant ideology adopted by the state and local elites that intended to reform, improve, and "make respectable" the cultural habits of Sri Lankan people. Rogers notes that gambling was not a form of resistance in itself but became so when the colonial government and Sinhala elite formed a discourse that de-legitimized it as a social practice. ²⁶ Acknowledging the cultural evidence, which shows that the origins of gambling far predate colonial forms of sociality, discipline, and restraint, Rogers indicates that in the Victorian context gambling carried with it peculiar immoral qualities of vice and lack of discipline. Gambling, after all, goes precisely against the moral imperative of "hard work" associated with the Protestant ethic. ²⁷

The other major study of gambling in South Asia is an anthropological monograph by Ellen Oxfeld on the Hakka Chinese community of Calcutta. ²⁸ Calcutta Chinese Hakka gambling, according to Oxfeld, can be interpreted as an important part of social life, associated with weddings, birthdays, and other family gatherings, and generally practiced in sexually segregated settings. Oxfeld contends that the element of risk and chance inherent to all gambling would at first glance seem to go against the Hakka entrepreneur's ideal qualities, which include frugality, hard work, and painstaking planning. ²⁹ Yet, as Oxfeld argues, those Hakka who themselves control gambling operations can actually profit greatly from such ventures, so that gambling itself can be seen as an entrepreneurial venture. ³⁰ Oxfeld's account demonstrates that in some cases gambling can be a highly rationalized form of profit making, and not necessarily contrary to entrepreneurial ethics.

For Marwaris, it would be wholly incorrect to say that gambling and

commodity speculation necessarily constituted resistance to colonial rule, as Rogers' work on Sri Lanka suggests. My evidence shows that the British actually encouraged certain forms of gambling and speculation, often on commodities such as food, opium, and cloth, despite the appearance of an antigambling colonial discourse that was widely propagated in the case of rain gambling. The lack of governmental interference in Marwari opium speculation, for example, makes much more sense when we understand that the British colonial government actually stood to gain substantial tax revenue from this and certain other forms of Indian gambling. English civilization itself was blamed for the arrival of the vice of gambling in India. It was illegal to lose a rupee on cotton gambling, but not illegal for "a person to lose lakhs of rupees every Saturday at the Kidderpore and Barrackpore race-courses and become a beggar!" ³¹ Many families in Bengal had reputedly been ruined by horse-race gambling, and blame was placed on the governors and viceroys, who set negative examples and encouraged Indian gambling by taking part in it themselves. ³²

M. K. Gandhi wrote about the evils of horse race betting in his magazines *Harijan* and *Young India*. Gandhi hoped to draw attention to how blind elite Indians were to the negative effects of the practice, and the harm that gambling could inflict upon a young and emergent nation. He argued scathingly that the British stood to profit from the introduction of such vices into Indian public life. ³³ Gandhi's colleague Badrul Hassan, who served as the editor of *Young India*, wrote about how the colonial government's policy on alcohol and opium actually served to increase local consumption. He argued, citing statistical data, that the revenue gained from excise taxes on domestic-bound products (both alcohol and opium) and from the imports of opium into the treaty ports of China formed a significant portion of the profit reaped from colonial rule. ³⁴

The colonial economics of gambling, and in particular the ways that the state served to profit, ultimately overshadowed competing moral narratives calling for its elimination. But the management of those moral discourses was a problem that the British needed to address, especially in the heightened politics of colonial laws of inclusion and exclusion.

The Politics of Antigambling Legislation in British India

Antigambling legislation in British India initially took effect only in the three major cities of the colonial presidencies (Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras) after 1856. Subsequent pieces of legislation expanded the geographical jurisdiction of the law to outlaw gambling within ten miles of any railway station house in the *mofussil* (country stations and districts). But the major problem the British faced in such legislation was crafting a legal definition of gambling. Bill No. 2 of 1887, for example, defined a "common gaming house" as a house, room, or any place where "instruments of gambling" such

as dice or cards were kept and used by the owner or occupier of the room for profit or gain.

This law had a search and seizure clause that empowered the police to enter and search at any time premises suspected of being used for gambling purposes, and to take into custody any person found there, any instruments of gambling, and any money or security used for gambling. As one might expect, the liberties given to the police became a sore point in Indian discussions. Even more contentious than increased police powers was the exception granted to English practices of horse-track betting from antigambling legislation. Following the same logic used in Britain, the final clause of the 1887 act declared that games of "mere skill" were to be exempt from the law, thereby creating a legal loophole for the English pastime of horse race betting to continue without laws threatening its existence. The distinction was not completely about class. Even though working-class and elite Indians alike could also bet on horses, the Turf Club still profited from such authorized bets.

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In the discussion of colonial antigambling legislation, Marwaris were specifically singled out as culprits requiring special enforcement, because their habits of gambling were so entrenched that they would probably continue even after the bill was passed. As one official noted, "If Marwaris like to go on betting which of two kites will fly the higher, or which of two drops of rain will first fall from the eaves of a house, Government cannot stop them. But ... we ought to have power to put down organised gambling establishments of this kind, which must exercise a most demoralising influence on the people." ³⁵ Little did this official realize that Marwari gambling on the rain was to become a sweeping issue that would have serious ramifications for commodities speculation and that would ultimately incite communal violence between social groups.

Rain Gambling in Bombay

Marwari practices of "rain gambling" came to the attention of the Bombay Legislative Council several years after the passage of the general Anti-Gambling Act of 1886, when a group of Bombay Marwari rain gamblers took their case to the High Court. Narottamdas Motiram and Hemraj Khimji were accused of running a shed as a common gaming house. Their large shed, the court claimed, was allegedly subdivided into thirty-one stalls, each of which was used by a subletter to register wagers on the rainfall, and of course to collect a commission on every bet placed. The existence of certain devices recovered during a police search was given as evidence of their guilt. These devices included the so-called "Calcutta *mori*" rain gauge (*mori* means "drain"). The term "Calcutta *mori*" suggests the pan—North Indian character of the practice, and may allude to its site of origin.

Fortunately for Motiram and Khimji, the court ruled that gambling on the rainfall did not fall under the scope of the 1886 Act. Rain gambling, the defense had argued, operated on the principles of betting (which was legal), not gambling (which was illegal). The precedent used in the case was the 1889 Bombay High Court case of *Queen-Empress vs. Narottum Das Matiram*, which held that rain gambling was a form of betting and not a form of gambling. In short, the distinction held that gambling required persons to take an active role, whereas betting did not. If it were to be classified as actual illegal "gambling," the so-called rain gambling required a contest and active participation, which could not be proved in persons merely watching the rain fall. Rain gambling was defined as a monsoon event, when bets were placed on the amount of rain that would fall within a three-hour period, a period of time known in Hindi as *pahar*. In order to calculate the precise amount of rain that had fallen, a tank was fitted with a spout from which the rainwater would overflow once a certain amount had fallen. ³⁶ Rain gambling, the defense argued, was really just a form of betting on a contingent event, without any kind of contest acted out between two persons. The defense argued that it was simply not possible for anyone to take an active role in the event, since rain gambling involved placing a bet, and then just watching and waiting to see if, when, and how much it would rain. Even though laws had already been passed in England that outlawed wagers, bets, and gaming houses, similar laws had not been passed in India. This was partly because traditional Hindu law had permitted such wagers. ³⁷

Because of the precedent established by this court case, existing antigambling law could not include rain gambling in its scope. A new act was then proposed that would specifically target rain gambling in Bombay. Rain gambling, known in Hindi as *barsat ka satta*, was said to have a demoralizing effect by attracting gamblers from the rural *mofussil* and other "disorderly" persons, encouraging them to idleness, and inevitably leading to "dissipation ... and the ruin of families." ³⁸ In order to amend the earlier gambling act, the proposed legislation included wagering as an illegal gambling activity. It also outlawed instruments used as a means of gambling, even if they were only watched (as in the case of rain) and not played or tampered with by any of the contenders. Again, the question of skill arose. Unlike horse-race betting, which was protected under law by Act VII of 1867, rain gambling—along with opium betting (*aphin ka satta*) and cotton betting (*kapus ka satta*)—was not perceived by the British to require any skill or other efforts that could justify its equation with betting on horses.

There was an urgency to passing the legislation prohibiting rain gambling before the start of the monsoon in June, when rain gambling flourished. The object of the rain gambling bill, officially called the Bombay Gambling Bill Act I of 1890, was posed in moral terms. The act proclaimed that rain gambling had caused "incalculable harm" and had a "demoralizing effect" on

the youth of Bombay. ³⁹ However, the legislation cautiously noted that the passage of general legislation would jeopardize the forms of gambling that the British public enjoyed. Determining the moral boundaries between proper and improper gambling was therefore foremost in colonial discussions of antigambling legislation. This was especially tricky in a colonial situation where legal distinctions between native subject and foreign ruler were rife with tension. Clearly, this legislation engaged notions of colonial difference: Why was gambling detrimental for Indians and not British?

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One of the official reasons for banning rain gambling in Bombay was that the practice had reputedly spread to other communities. It was claimed that, although Marwaris had introduced the game to Calcutta seventy to eighty years before, it had remained internal to the community until the late nineteenth century. ⁴⁰ The fear that rain gambling networks would now lure non-Marwaris, even poor Europeans, became a sufficient reason to attempt to put it out completely.

Debates over the Morality of Rain Gambling in Calcutta

Surprisingly enough, despite the passage of anti-rain gambling legislation in Bombay, the original initiative to ban rain gambling in Calcutta came from two angry Marwari businessmen, and not, as we might expect, from either the colonial state or foreign missionary groups. But, as we shall see, it was the moral position of the colonial state *vis-à-vis* rain gambling that allowed them to act in this fashion. These two "recent arrivals," identified as Marwaris, were denied permission by other Marwaris to rent space to open a rain gambling shop. As a result of this rejection, the two men started a public agitation against rain gambling. The two recent arrivals contacted newspapers and informed other "public men" of the dangers of rain gambling, eventually submitting to the government a formal memorial outlining the reasons rain gambling was a wicked act and deserved to be banned.

The submission of the memorial elicited considerable commentary from both British and Indian sources. ⁴¹ The supposedly vengeful recent arrivals who initiated the campaign against rain gambling were not hailed as heroes, but were instead ridiculed by the English press. The anti-rain gambling bill was cited as a rare piece of legislation that was initiated "not by the restless and interfering European, but by the ease-loving and innovation-hating native of the country. ... Only circumstances of a very extraordinary character ... could have made such ardent reformers in the matter of rain gambling of a class who can not be persuaded to keep their own streets clean." ⁴² The unsanitary conditions of the Burabazar were held as general evidence of the Marwaris' lack of ability for self-improvement and self-reform. The arguments made against rain gambling in the subsequent Bengal Legislative Council discussion included some devastating cultural critiques of the

Marwari community. According to the government's logic, if the recent arrivals were so motivated as to bring reform into this aspect of their own community life, then the social and economic problems brought about by gambling must have been very damaging indeed.

As in the previous gambling acts, the new legislation held that the presence of any instruments of gambling constituted proof of rain gambling. The police would therefore be authorized to raid any premises to search for dice, cards, or other implements of gambling, thereby opening up numerous possibilities for police harassment of Marwaris. Some Marwaris complained that the police would scarcely be able to prove that cards found on the business or residential premises of Marwaris were used for gambling and not some other purpose. The provisions of the law, which permitted ruthless enforcement on the part of the colonial police, signaled the beginnings of mistrust and the breakdown of British-Marwari relations, a process that was to gradually intensify up until independence.

Community as a Political Actor: Uniting to Defend Rain Gambling

The passage of anti-rain gambling legislation in Calcutta did not go unnoticed by Marwari merchants. On the evening of March 25, 1897, a large group of Marwari merchants gathered in what newspapers described as a "monster protest meeting" at the Dalhousie Institute, a well-known Calcutta social club. The purpose of this unusual meeting was to protest the rain gambling bill under consideration by the Bengal Council. The *Indian Daily News* of March 26, 1897, noted that the overwhelming attendance at the meeting, the massive size of which precluded latecomers from finding a seat, suggested the strength of the "bitter antagonism" found among Marwaris over legislation banning rain gambling. ⁴³ One newspaper account described the Dalhousie Institute as having been "besieged with the Marwaree element from Burra Bazaar." ⁴⁴

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The meeting was held in order to organize a protest to the colonial government claiming that the contents of the memorial against rain gambling did not reflect the sentiments of the Marwari community as a whole. The Marwari meeting at the Dalhousie Institute marked an instance of community formation, political participation, and public identity among the Marwaris in Calcutta. But ironically, the community was formed out of a moment of crisis, an act of betrayal against itself. The press mused as to why a memorial against rain gambling would come from within the community, going against a presumed cohesion. Most Marwaris, it was claimed, felt that they were entitled to a form of gambling so culturally specific to them. To explain this paradox, one report claimed that the Marwari merchants who submitted the memorial did so under threat from some *badmash* (crooks). ⁴⁵

The professed goal of this meeting was to provide the government with the views of the managers and heads of important business firms on the subject of rain gambling and its falsely presumed threats to social peace. Leading merchants, *shroffs* (traditional bankers), bankers, tradesmen, and heads of firms attended the function. The structure of the meeting was quite remarkable in that this occasion marked the first documentable Marwari meeting that conformed to the customary standards of political participation in colonial civil society: the choice of language, the format of speeches, the use of parliamentary procedure. Most unusually, the meeting was conducted in English, a language that would have been quite foreign to most of the members present. Some adjustments were made to accommodate many merchants who did not speak English. Speeches were written for the presiding officers and read out loud by "native gentlemen" who had volunteered for the task. The propositions were translated into Hindi and explained to the entire group before being formally put to the floor.

Babu Hukmee Chand Chowdhury of the Hukmee Chand Sagurmul firm presided over the meeting. An English speech was read out on his behalf, detailing the actions of the two recent arrivals that led up to the Marwari community's gathering in the club that evening. According to Babu Hukmee Chand Chowdhury's speech, the two "recent arrivals" contacted newspapers and informed other "public men" of the dangers of rain gambling, managing to pull together a formal memorial addressed to the government that outlined the reasons rain gambling should be banned immediately. Chowdhury's resolution implored the government to discuss the matter thoroughly and not to pass legislation against rain gambling in a hurried fashion.

The memorial was purportedly introduced into the Bengal Legislative Council at a particularly crucial season, and also when its main opponents were out of government. The retirement and departure of Sir Charles Elliot, combined with the timely absence of the liberal Mr. H. J. S. Cotton in Assam, provided a window of opportunity for the bill to be easily passed at a critical moment before the beginning of the summer recess and, of course, the summer rains. Marwaris appealed to the long history of rain gambling as a way of justifying its legal existence for at least one more rainy season. One pro-rain gambling newspaper report mused that society would hardly be "turned topsy-turvy" if a seventy-five-year-old tradition of rain gambling were allowed to last a few months more. ⁴⁶ A more leisurely discussion of the issues, argued opponents to the memorial, ostensibly to allow the legislature to exercise its best judgment in the matter, would also mean the passing of the seasons into monsoon rains and the resumption of one more season of intense rain gambling activity.

Babu Sewpersad Garulia of the firm of Sonee Ram Jutmall moved a resolution at the "monster protest meeting" that pointed out the hypocrisy

of the Council's passage of what was effectively "class" legislation outlawing one community's form of gambling without disturbing gambling in the European community. Garulia contended that the legislation only served to give the police an excuse to harass the Marwaris, while other forms of gambling were actually much more dangerous to society. Garulia asked, "Why then should they have singled out one form of gambling to the exclusion of another? Thousands were ruined every year on account of their indulgences in stocks and share speculations, but who had ever heard that a person was ruined by rain gambling?" ⁴⁷ The hypocrisy of European exclusionary practices in allowing some forms of gambling and speculation but not others was not lost on the Marwari merchants.

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At the end of the meeting, a final proposal was moved by Babu Sligoam Lokhani that the Marwari community should no longer speculate on government opium sales. ⁴⁸ This threat, albeit implying some financial loss for the Marwaris, would indicate to the colonial government the community's strong disapproval of the passage of the anti-rain gambling legislation. A one-day boycott of opium speculation would seem to be a very small sacrifice on the part of the community to protest the abolition of a gambling practice of great enough importance to warrant a large protest meeting. Yet the assumption that even one day's lost opium speculation revenue would create enough pressure that the Bengal Legislative Council might reconsider their position on the ruling shows how much, at least in the eyes of these Marwaris, the colonial government depended on their speculation for revenue.

The protest meeting had little impact on reversing the passage of legislation against rain gambling. In a statement from the Government of Bengal, dated April 16, 1897, the lieutenant governor claimed that the bill had the approval of the "most influential" Marwaris, as well as Indians generally. Lt. A. Mackenzie contended that the legislation did not seek to enforce any sort of "morality" on practitioners of rain gambling. Rather, the reasons for the suppression of rain gambling were a result of the need to preserve law and order, the "public convenience." ⁴⁹ In fact, one main objection to the passage of the rain gambling act was that it was perceived that only antigambling organizations had been consulted by the colonial government as they gauged public opinion leading up to discussions of the bill. Only one member of the Bengal Legislative Council, Mr. Hill, had a dissenting opinion. He contended that rain gambling in Burabazar did not create a law-and-order problem. Nor were there any clear indications, he contended, that ruin from rain gambling necessarily led to suicide—a concern that had been repeatedly cited as a reason to ban native gambling. Despite the official ban on native gambling, the Indian press reported active gambling dens and police tolerance. Interested observers noted the hypocrisy of the failure to enforce antigambling laws. These reports claimed that "rowdyism" would probably stop if the gambling dens were shut down. ⁵⁰

Ultimately, the rain gambling act was passed. The lieutenant governor was reputed to have dashed off to a hill station as soon as the bill was signed into law. Though special European constables were stationed in the council chamber, in the event of any Marwari retaliation, such fears were unfounded. ⁵¹ Some officials found the legislation too lenient, and protested that the bill was essentially a dead letter in that it did not regulate rain gambling in private residences. Yet in their reports on the practical effects of the act in the years immediately following its passage, government officials declared that the measure was a great success. Reports that grain brokers and other dealers were being ruined by rain gambling were said to have declined. ⁵² But the legislation had opened up a ripe area of discussion about the ways in which British laws created distinctions between European and Indian subjects.

One Law for Europeans and Another Law for Indians?

English law has been made by similar play on words. Gambling is illegal because it is indulged in by black men, but betting on horse races is legal because white men participate in it. If a black man kills a sahib with kicks it will be called manslaughter, but if the case be reversed, re. if an Indian is kicked to death by a white man it will be called "a case of rupture of the spleen." ⁵³

The colonial government was not unaware of the apparent hypocrisy of their proposed legislation against native (and, specifically, Marwari) gambling. Since the Ilbert Bill controversy of 1883—84, when the colonial state proposed to limit the jurisdiction of Indian officials over European subjects, there was an increased sensitivity over laws that distinguished between colonizer and colonized. ⁵⁴ The lieutenant governor himself pointed out the hypocrisy of prohibiting one form of gambling for one "class" while allowing other forms of gambling practiced by other classes. Many newspaper reports written by both British and Indian alike called for the suppression of rain gambling. The case against rain gambling, though seen as a violation of a popular Marwari pastime, was sometimes justified on various grounds. One report, in assessing the dangers that rain gambling posed to the general population, especially to the middle classes, claimed that "the small losses which such men suffer in rain gambling are of more consequence to them and to the community than the big losses which are sustained by rich people in horse-race gambling. Middle class men who indulge in rain gambling have been known to extort ornaments from their wives and pawn them, or to beat their wives when they refused [to hand over] their ornaments. Poor men, who indulge in this form of gambling, have often turned into thieves. It is only the rich who indulge in . . . [horse track] gambling, but it is chiefly middle class people who indulge in the latter. It is, therefore, very well that Government is going to suppress rain gambling." ⁵⁵ Assuming that these reports were not all forged or coerced, it is clearly difficult to make the

argument that the British were uniformly against native gambling and Indians were necessarily eager to preserve it.

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Some Muslim commentators stated that all forms of gambling, including rain gambling and gambling on the race-track, ought to be banned. It was alleged that the reason the colonial government did not pass a general law against gambling was that colonial officials themselves partook of the practice. ⁵⁶ Others warned of the dire political consequences that would prevail if Marwari rain gambling were checked and at the same time horse-track betting remained legal. The *Banavasi* noted that the Marwaris typically did not hold political meetings, but now even they were making public speeches and threatening remarks against the government. As mentioned, at the protest meeting the Marwaris "resolved to give up opium-betting if the Bill were passed in the teeth of their opposition," threatening financial loss to the government if the threat were carried out. ⁵⁷ The sudden interest in political issues expressed by the Marwaris over rain gambling signified a shift in British-Marwari relations. Sometimes perceived as economic colonial collaborators, central to maintaining credit networks in the economic expansion of the British, political activity in the name of the Marwari *samaj* (community) was a significant development in anti-colonialist nationalism. As the report in the *Banavasi* claimed, preserving rain gambling seemed to be a small price to pay to ensure Marwari loyalty and peace.

The *Englishman* of March 19, 1897, pointed to the "grandmotherly principle" of the proposed rain gambling legislation. Press reports questioned why the English colonial government should interfere with Indian public life much more than the English government would do at home. After all, rain gambling had been practiced for a long time, and did not appear to disturb the public peace, and was therefore not a crime which would demand interference by the colonial government. Arguments against the passage of anti-rain gambling legislation did not always point out the exclusionary aspects of a law that would penalize Indians yet allow Europeans freedom to practice almost identical gambling practices. Gambling on the rain, or gambling on anything else for that matter, was seen as inherent to the Indian soul. Appeals to an orientaling logic became important in establishing the need to keep native gambling legal. It was alleged that to interfere with such deep-seated vices would only stir up trouble. Rain gambling was described as "purely oriental, and deeply-rooted in the native mind," and it was argued that, "meddling and puddling with the ways of the Asiatic ... is a great mistake throughout the country, leading to a feeling of rancour and natural distrust against the Europeans." ⁵⁸ Carefully crafted European images of the essential character of the Indian mind could also be used against the ruling logics of colonial power. The colonial government had acknowledged that, after the suppression of rain gambling in Bombay a few years earlier, a new form of gambling called *jota sowda* had come into practice. ⁵⁹ A letter to the editor in the *Indian Daily News* on March 20, 1897, appealed to the logic that gambling was after all so ingrained in the

human psyche that any attempt to legislate against it would probably have the opposite effect of "rousing much feeling that had much better be left alone." If a man was going to risk his money by gambling, no legislation could stop him from doing it.

An article in *Capital* raised the following question: If the Government of Bengal put down gambling on the rain, perceived as a Marwari pastime, what plans did it have to regulate gambling held dear to other communities, particularly the European penchant for gambling at the Calcutta Turf Club? ⁶⁰ In a further defense of rain gambling, the *Calcutta Statesman* of March 23, 1897 carried a letter to the editor that contained a passionate appeal for rain betting. The letter claimed that horse racing was much more "demoralising" than rain gambling. In horse racing, after all, there were many more chances to cheat. A horse could be whipped or spurred during the race, or the jockeys could lose weight and become unnaturally thin, both creating an unfair advantage. In rain gambling, some Marwaris claimed, such possibilities of deception and fraud were eliminated. Rain gambling was a legitimate game which resisted any attempts at tampering or manipulation. Unlike horse racing, rain gambling was claimed to be a sport that allowed no possibilities for cheating. What man, after all, could interfere with the weather? A letter in *Capital*, attesting to the incorruptible nature of the practice, stated: "No man can manipulate the clouds; the whole transaction is above board, and has nothing shady about it, which is more than can be said of horse racing." ⁶¹

A memorial dated February 27, 1900, and signed by over six hundred persons, mainly Marwari traders resident in Calcutta, was submitted to the colonial government, requesting them to review the passage of the 1897 rain gambling act. This memorial claimed that the bill was passed in flagrant disregard of the objections of the Marwari community, who had enjoyed the practice for over eighty years, as long as they had been in Calcutta. The argument that they had been in Calcutta for such a long time—an attempt to show the persistence of rain gambling as a custom—shows how the consciousness of community formation was influenced by colonial views that identity and culture, in order to be legitimate, were tied to certain places.

The memorial addressed, point by point, each section of the act, commenting on how the assumptions made by lawmakers simply did not apply to the current situation. Two of the arguments are of primary importance here. The first argument questioned whether rain gambling was actually worse than other forms of gambling, and commodities speculation in particular. The memorial noted the irony of the fact that though many more suicides were ascribable to "failures in commercial speculation" than to rain gambling, even by the most conservative of estimates, no philanthropist of any country had ever recommended that commercial speculation be suppressed. ⁶² Furthermore, the memorial claimed that the

passage of the rain gambling act had actually increased the amount of commercial speculation, particularly on silver, thus adopting the colonial argument that, if one form of gambling were suppressed, the urge to gamble would emerge in an even more "dangerous" form. The memorial also employed the European argument regarding skill. Rain gambling required considerable skill in observing the sky, argued the memorial, as opposed to turf betting, wagers on the value of government securities and commercial shares, and other types of forward transaction speculation that depended on blind luck.

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On one level we might say that Marwari counterarguments to the logic of the rain gambling legislation are completely derivative of the colonial discourse against gambling. The memorial reinforces the idea that the ingredient of "skill" morally justifies rain gambling; it also argues that gambling activities leading to suicide and the moral decay of the family should be suppressed for the good of the public. The memorial points out that *jota sowda*, gambling on the price of jute, became immensely popular in Bombay after the passage of that city's own anti-rain gambling act in 1893. In hindsight, this of course is precisely what the colonial government would have wanted, namely, to increase commodities speculation so as to increase sale prices, generating more revenue for the government purse. Accumulation of capital was a perennial preoccupation for the British during the nineteenth century as they sought to consolidate markets and trading routes.

Other claims were made concerning the practical usefulness for the government of having persons who were highly skilled in predicting the weather. This knowledge would be important for mariners and other sailors who were often caught in terrible storms. One writer claimed: "Our maritime disasters would be less excessive if the weather was part of the curriculum of study imposed upon ship-masters." ⁶³ The same writer also made a humanitarian appeal, noting that some of the proceeds from rain gambling went to "infirmaries for aged and useless animals." Part of the proceeds of the rain gambling did indeed go into keeping up two infirmaries for aged animals, sparing them from slaughter. ⁶⁴ Caring for sick and infirm animals, particularly cows, was an important part of Marwari charity and philanthropy. The discourse of humanitarian aid was used as a means of justifying Marwari gambling in the colonial public sphere.

The protection of women was used by the state as a reason to outlaw rain gambling, on account of the damage it could work on Marwari women. The charge was made that Marwari families, ruined by debt, forced the female members of their family into despicable professions. The imagined link between rain gambling and sexual activity added to the urgency to ban the practice. But this turned out to be a relatively easy assumption to counter. As one Marwari merchant asked, ridiculing the overtly gendered logic of the

colonial legislation, "Were they [the colonial government] also to believe that Hindoo female chastity, after having withstood for countless generations every other method of assault, had suddenly succumbed to the approaches of the wily rain-gambler?" [65](#)

The practice of betting on horse races, the colonial government contended, was a well-regulated form of gambling that only occurred on a very few specific race days. In contrast, rain gambling occurred all day, every day. It was here that the colonial logic about the unsanitary conditions of Burabazar could be used against the state. Supporters of rain gambling argued that Cotton Street was already "such a miserable place in itself" that the presence of a small crowd of rain gamblers would hardly have any effect on the flows of either traffic or commerce. The government, the promoters of rain gambling maintained, was not being forthcoming about the actual practices of betting on horse races. Betting on the horses did not only occur on the day of the race itself. Even months before the actual race, money changed hands in the form of bets on certain horses and their jockeys. Some government legislators were themselves adamant gamblers on the turf, further evidence of the insupportable terms of the colonial legislation.

The Trouble with *Satta*: From Rain gambling to Commodity Figure Gambling

While the 1897 rain gambling act did effectively put an end to large-scale rain gambling operations, other forms of gambling arose in the place of rain gambling, possibly operated by the same brokers and dealers who had managed the gambling on rain. By banning rain gambling and attacking opium-figure gambling as well, the government may have counted on the "native instinct" to gamble to encourage former rain-gamblers to take up gambling on the government opium exchange, thereby increasing the government's revenue. The district collector, Major Davies, commenting on a proposed plan to ban rain gambling, wrote that some forty-four shops that organized seasonal rain gambling were used throughout the entire year for gambling in opium. According to Davies, the proposal was apparently aimed at "the suppression not of a form of gambling, but of a mild form of betting on the average price of the monthly opium sales in Calcutta. Those sales are only held once a month, so the evil cannot be very great." [66](#) Since rain gambling was seasonal, according to the monsoon, the shops had ample time for manipulating bets placed on the monthly government sales of opium. The state effort to ban rain gambling had more to do with the state's attempt to prohibit *private* gambling on the monthly price of opium, possibly to encourage speculation on the public opium exchange. The colonial government gained in at least two ways from opium gambling and commodities gambling. First of all, there were substantial price increases because of commodities speculation. Second, to a lesser extent, the government profited on the fees charged for the myriad of telegraphs sent wildly across northern India in preparation for the final commodities sale.

Starting around 1900, bets were placed on opium figures on a daily basis. This daily gambling broadened the range of appeal of opium gambling to a wider spectrum of classes, because daily gambling—usually on the final digit of the sale price—did not require a sophisticated knowledge of the opium market and of opium prices. This type of gambling was known as *tezimandi* (literally, "rise-fall"), because the gambling did not depend on the opium's actually changing hands through buying and selling or on delivery and receipt of the goods (*pakka mal*). Opium merchants, unlike the speculative Marwaris, would themselves speculate on *pakka mal*, and were primarily concerned with getting a good selling price. The opening up of the gambling market led people of the poorest classes to bet as little as one rupee on the hope of earning between five and ten rupees on the one they had played. This daily *satta* was said by the government to "attract the idle riff-raff of the town, the labourer, the servant, and the mill-hand." ⁶⁷

The state may have feared the social problem of idleness if this "riff-raff" were to begin skipping work in order to gamble. Though the government cited numerous Hindu and Muslim texts that held gambling to be a terrible vice, even those most committed to outlawing gambling in India did not want to stop the betting by *baniyas* or English *sahibs*. These elite trading groups, unlike the casual laborer, could afford to lose their money. ⁶⁸

Despite the passage of legal regulations against rain gambling, the specter of gambling on the opium figures still troubled social reformers. In Rewari, opium gambling was said to bring ruin on some of the people who practiced it. ⁶⁹ Yet again the question rose, How could opium gambling be attacked as immoral if betting on horse racing still continued? As one observer reported, "I am unable to see that there is any difference between book-makers giving odds against a particular number being the winning number at a sale of opium and between them giving odds against a particular horse being the winner of a race. But it has never been suggested, I believe, that racing book-makers should be prosecuted." ⁷⁰

In the debate over opium-figure gambling in the United Provinces, similar degrees of ambiguity existed about whether and how opium gambling should be made illegal. The main argument for doing so was the prevalence of the practice, particularly in the way that the lower classes and women had been pulled into its sway. The poor people, it was said, were developing unfavorable habits of idleness and corruption through associating with bad characters and missing work. The gambling agents reportedly even sent small boys out to the women's *zenana* quarters to collect wagers from the secluded *pardanashin* ladies, and therefore brought the evils of gambling into the respectable Indian home. These women were said to steal money from the male members of the household in order to place their bets. ⁷¹

There was also considerable government discussion around the fact that opium, grain, and silver gambling were all connected practices, and any bill

to outlaw one of them might include the other two. Even rain gambling might be written into the act.

So, we might well ask, was the legislation against rain gambling really about rain gambling? Many of the commentaries published in the press protested the Bengal Legislative Council's decision to ban rain gambling and claimed that the real issue at stake was betting and gambling on opium. Opium betting, it was argued, was actually a much more dangerous form of gambling, but one that directly benefited the colonial state. According to one editorial, the government ought to regulate *tejimundi* (opium betting), which involved betting thousands of rupees, and as such was a greater threat to the prosperity of many families. The government feared a strike by opium gamblers, which could cause the government significant financial losses. The writer noted that, "while the rain gambling Marwari will be at the absolute mercy of the police under the proposed Act, his opium gambling brother will be allowed to do a worse thing, and snap his finger at the authorities." ⁷²

Gambling on the price of opium was a geographically dispersed venture, which reflected the pan-Indian nature of gambling networks and local communications. Whereas the centers of opium-figure gambling were said to be located in Agra, Delhi, Jaipur, and Saharanpur, one colonial report noted that, "there is every reason to believe that a syndicate of opium merchants in Calcutta control and finance the whole business." ⁷³ At every regional center where opium figure gambling was found, commission agents working with dealers laid down stakes and accepted them, and sent each other telegrams to keep each other abreast of the latest developments in price. On the actual sale day, especially, the telegrams would "fly to and fro in brisk and unremitting succession." ⁷⁴

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Why were opium speculation and opium-figure gambling so important to the British? The potential health hazards to Marwaris as opium gamblers could not be proven, although the colonial state tried to collect evidence in this regard. By contrast, opium consumption was perceived as highly detrimental to Bengali health. ⁷⁵ As late as 1924 Dr. Sudhindra Bose criticized the colonial government for issuing statements about the physical and morally beneficial aspects of opium. Bose quoted the Inchcape report, which listed opium as a critical source of government revenue. ⁷⁶ There is considerable evidence that by legislating against one particular form of gambling—rain gambling—the government could partially divert potentially critical public attention from the opium trade.

Speculation on opium markets was even older than rain gambling. Existing alongside it, the opium numbers game was played out of the very same

shops. Shutting down rain gambling was a way of pushing people to speculate on the official opium exchange, and not informally, as in rain gambling shops, where the state could not gain any profit. For more than any other form of commodities gambling, the most profitable treasure of the colonial government had for several decades been opium. The official importance of opium speculation dates back at least to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Governor General Auckland wrote that he was "very much embarrassed with our opium transactions. ... The opium market is very much in the hands of native merchants many of them men of capital—many of them desperate gamblers and nearly all habitually speculating beyond their means of doing so with safety." ⁷⁷ Speculators, Auckland explained, bid higher and higher on the market price of opium, not wanting to be ruined by a reduction in price. Yet even after the end of price bidding, when it was time for payment and delivery, thousands of chests of opium lay untouched in the *godown* (storage). Another crop of opium would come into the warehouses in the coming year and would undoubtedly lower the sale price. The best measure that Auckland could take was to legislate for the immediate resale of opium if the transactions were not concluded in a timely fashion. There was a fine line, it appeared, between commercial speculation and gambling. Auckland wrote, "If one customer hesitated to fulfill his engagement another was at hand to take his place, the payment which was not made today could scarcely fail to be assured for tomorrow, and what is now pronounced to be vast and unmeasured gambling secured to be but the common enterprise and competition of commercial speculation." ⁷⁸ This sentiment made opium speculation into a more respectable economic activity, at least among the British.

The debate over rain gambling brought attention to opium wagering in 1911, when a draft bill to ban wagering on opium prices was discussed among government officials. But there was a great deal of uncertainty at the time about how long the opium trade with China would continue. E. M. Cook, home department undersecretary to the government of India, wrote that it would "hardly be worth while, in view of the present uncertain state of the opium trade in India, to undertake legislation to prohibit wagering on the price of opium." ⁷⁹ The opium trade with China was too profitable, too important, and too volatile to take major risks. However, there were occasional reports about arrests of Marwari merchants for placing bets on opium, such as a case in which bail was refused to Biswanath Kshetri and Biseswar Lal Agarwala, Marwari merchants. ⁸⁰ The surprise expressed by the colonial government over why the two Marwari merchants were not given a chance to post bail is indicative of the laxity that prevailed with opium-figure gambling, even after punitive legislation was passed.

The problem of Marwari gambling on opium became pan-Indian. In May 1925, the government of Bengal sent inquiries to the United Provinces and Punjab governments to find out whether or not opium gambling was widespread in other states, and what means the government had found, if

any, to put a stop to it. ⁸¹ The Central Provinces amended the Public Gaming Act in 1926 to include gambling on the digits of a number indicating the price of cotton, opium, and other commodities, as well as on "the occurrence or non-occurrence of rain," with any instruments of such gambling found constituting proof of illegal activity. ⁸² These laws unsurprisingly created a distinction between gambling and "mere betting without gaming," ostensibly in order to make a distinction between native gambling and elite gambling on the racetrack. Whereas the government argued that Indians found *satta* to be a terrible problem, horse-race betting was regarded as "an expensive hobby of a small class that can well afford the cost and can be trusted to protect their own interests." ⁸³ The difference, it appeared, was that one could only place a bet at the turf club on a limited number of days, and that admission to the club was made exclusive by a prohibitively expensive entrance fee. In the case of *satta*, any class of person could gain access to the shop, and there would be "no limit to the number of days" on which bets could be made.

Opium-figure gambling existed alongside cotton-figure gambling. Shops along Chitpur Road in Burabazar took bets on cotton figures from gamblers on any particular figure, from 0 to 9, and the shop laid various odds on each figure. The winning number was the average of the five daily quotations on cotton future and demand sales from America and England, obtained by Reuter. ⁸⁴ The instruments used in cotton figure gambling included a tin board showing the day's cotton figures, either from a newspaper or a telegram, a board showing the name of the firm, a ticket showing the winning number, a board giving the odds of bets on particular numbers, and a box of money—exactly the same items used by bookmakers at the races, which were not made illegal by any law in India. ⁸⁵

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Numbers gambling became tremendously popular. By 1911, when opium figure gambling was under discussion, the cotton figure numbers game had also become a concern for some members of the colonial government, who fretted that the gambling had "nothing in the world to do with cotton" and was mere betting on a number. ⁸⁶ Cotton gambling became the latest scourge of colonial gambling policy by 1912. The colonial government charged that since a minuscule amount of money, even down to one anna, could be bet, cotton figure gambling was accessible to the poor and "even" to women and children, who would no doubt come to ruin from this "deception." Many colonial officials worried about passing legislation focused on a single object of betting, as was the rain gambling act, which ultimately had a limited effect on containing gambling as a whole. Some felt that a general form of legislation should be devised (making an exception for horse racing, of course) that would outlaw all forms of wagering. Others wrote that the government ought to legislate against all forms of betting that were injurious to the public welfare and public morality.

By 1925, the export of opium had greatly diminished, and the speculative market in opium figures had come to a halt because there was no longer enough fluctuation in the price for bookmakers to profit from taking bets on the daily market price. As a substitute for the price of opium, the bookmakers took bets on the average of several prices of cotton in the American market. These included the futures markets for New York in March and in May, the New Orleans futures markets for March and May, and for the "spot cotton" price. ⁸⁷

The Politics of Cloth and Cloth Speculation in Colonial India

Marwari speculation, hoarding, and commodity adulteration caused a great deal of unrest in colonial Bengal, particularly among Bengali Muslims. The riots that came partially as a response to such gambling were critical arenas in which issues of class, religion, and regional origin came to a breaking point. Even before speculation on cloth became a divisive issue between Marwaris and the Bengali Muslim and Bengali Hindu communities, Marwari trade in foreign cloth became a turning point in British-Marwari relations, inspiring anti-colonial, nationalist sentiment in Marwari public life. After the 1905 plan for the partition of Bengal was announced, there was a widespread boycott of Manchester-made cloth. As a group deeply involved in the cloth trade, Marwaris stood to suffer significant financial losses from this boycott. The *Bengalee* reported that the "keen commercial instinct" of Marwari traders in Manchester piece goods motivated the colonial government to rescind their policy. ⁸⁸ The Marwari Chamber of Commerce sent the Manchester Chamber of Commerce a telegram that appealed to the government to prevent the partition of Bengal. Sales of Manchester goods had practically ceased in Calcutta because of the numerous Bengali public meetings calling for a boycott of British goods. This was a great cause of concern for Marwari merchants, who feared that they would not make their big yearly sales before the *pujas*. ⁸⁹ The colonial government's reply was not sympathetic. It suggested that Bengalis should stop agitating against the partition and drop the boycott. ⁹⁰ Yet the issue over cloth was far from dead. An editorial in the *Forward* on September 12, 1924, argued that the boycott of foreign cloth was the "Marwari Community's duty." The "domiciled" Marwari cloth agents, the writer charged, were "the local agents of foreign exploiters," because they continued to take orders for and trade in foreign Manchester cloth.

The blame for the December 1917 "cloth riots" in Burabazar was placed on the rapidly rising prices of *dhotis* (men's garments) and *saris* (women's garments). The rise in cloth prices was attributed to a type of speculation known as "cornering." ⁹¹ The following month, January 1918, Marwari shops in Burabazar were looted for both cloth and salt, another commodity that was hoarded and speculated upon. The Imperial Legislative Council raised the question of high cloth prices in February 1918, to determine whether

the increase in cloth prices was related to "unavoidable economic causes" or whether speculation or cornering had had a significant effect. Although cornering was blamed, the government did not take any immediate action to stop the speculation, which in turn raised the price of cloth. Newspaper reports claimed that *dhotis* were still being imported from England, and the cloth mills in Bombay were still producing large quantities of cloth, so that there was no reason that the price of cloth should be four to five times its normal price. If there was no shortage of *dhotis* and cotton cloth, where were the high prices coming from? A letter in the *Nayak* claimed that there were sufficient *dhotis* stocked for one year's use, eliminating shortage as the source of high prices. The writer claimed that Marwaris were the ones behind the "mischief," because the government had neglected to appoint a cloth controller to assure a steady supply of the commodity in the bazaar. ⁹² By controlling (and restricting) the flow of cloth from the *godown* (storage facilities) to the shops, Marwaris were seen to have created an artificial scarcity.

Thus, in addition to cotton-figure gambling, which had the effect of raising the cost of both cotton and cloth, cloth hoarding contributed to this perception of widespread public deception. The increase in the price of cloth placed enormous hardships on the working classes, perhaps even more than increases in the price of food. A March 1918 newspaper editorial commenting on the suffering caused in the population by the lack of affordable cloth claimed, "One can pass his days, as is usually the case in this country, in a state of semi-starvation, but not with scanty clothing that has been forced on many by the rigors of the prices of dhotis and saris." ⁹³

The high price of cloth, which affected the price of essential garments like *dhotis* and *saris*, had a devastating effect on Calcutta and most of Bengal. Reports of persons committing suicide out of shame over their nudity were not infrequent.

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The cloth issue became embroiled in the question of the British War Loan Fund. Several Marwaris wrote about their contributions to the war loan fund as evidence of their loyalty as subjects of the British Raj. But others charged that Marwari investment of huge amounts of money for the war loan would only encourage them to raise the price of cloth and *dhotis* in order to recoup their losses. ⁹⁴ The reputed three *crores* (30 million) rupees donated to the war fund needed to be made up for, and there were rumors in the press that the government had actually ordered the Marwari cloth merchants to raise the price of cloth in order to raise money for the fund. ⁹⁵

When cloth prices stayed high after World War I, some claimed that the Marwaris were withholding their stocks of cloth from the shops after any possible wartime scarcity would have ceased. ⁹⁶ The government was blamed for not taking measures to control the spiraling inflation of the price

of cloth. Calls were made for increased production of Indian homespun cloth and a ban on foreign-spun cloth. It was alleged that there was plenty of cloth in the city, and the high prices were attributed to Marwari speculation. ⁹⁷ During the government inventory of the stocks of cloth, it was alleged that the government had been duped and had failed to record the accurate numbers. ⁹⁸ The Marwari Association voted to suspend the purchase of cloth for three months in the autumn of 1918, an action that was seen by others as proof that the community held large enough stocks of cloth to last for the three-month hiatus. ⁹⁹

After the 1917–18 "cloth riots," a war of words raged between the Anglo-Indian newspapers and the pro-Marwari Hindi press. Marwaris needed to defend their loyalty to the Raj, and yet a crisis of leadership seemingly prevented them from asserting their identity as honorable businessmen and political subjects. ¹⁰⁰ A pro-Marwari editorial in the *Bharat Mitra* charged that, "Marwari capital ... has helped the establishment of the European merchant offices in Calcutta. If the Marwaris hold away from the European traders, all these offices and banks will come to a dead stop and the Europeans will feel that sad consequence of it. All these insults, which are being heaped up on the Marwaris, are due to their want of self-respect and to their habit of cringing at the feet of others. The entire trade of Calcutta is in their hands. If they now boldly withdraw from it, the whole business will come to a dead stop. But in the Marwari community, there is no leader and everyone is for himself. There are many self-seekers in it who are mad for Government honors. Will the Marwari community continue to suffer like this and not wake up?" ¹⁰¹

The perception that the colonial gambling laws only served to sanction government raids on native establishments continued well into the 1920s. In the spring of 1920, the police raided the Marwari market in Burabazar on suspicion of "cotton gambling." Tarachand Ghanshamdass and his *munim* (accountant) Jai Narain Poddar were charged with running gambling operations in their courtyards, and police broke into their shops, entered their cash-rooms, and seized many of the merchants' books and papers, documents useful to the colonial state in tax assessment. Ironically, the government had not yet passed any measure outlawing the practice, and could do nothing to convict the traders. This police action was viewed as an uncalled-for assault on a community that had always been faithful to the power of colonial rule and continued to give subscriptions to the war loan fund. The contributions to the fund were portrayed as proof of the honesty of Marwari traders, honesty that supposedly could not have been mustered by those who were gamblers. One editorial, expressing anger that the police would violate the private shops of loyal subjects, charged: "If our brethren are frequently arrested by the police in this manner and are considered gamblers, then it is better to give up residing in British territory and to return to the Native States." ¹⁰² The threat of migration served as a

reminder of the importance of Marwari capital and trade in Eastern India. What would happen to colonial capitalism if they were to leave and pull out their sources of credit and agency systems? Rumors spread of a proposed Marwari protest meeting against the police actions.

In April 1919, communal rioting forcibly shut the shops in Burabazar, yet the Marwaris did not join in a protest meeting against the strike. A letter in the *Bangali* noted that even though the Marwari Association and the Marwari Chamber of Commerce "have taken up a penitent attitude," they still did not protest against shop closings in Burabazar. ¹⁰³ By May 1919, Marwari capitalists were being accused of buying up stocks of rice and speculating on the price. This practice was perceived to be even more immoral than hoarding cloth. While a limited amount of speculation in cloth might be more or less tolerable, some felt that the government was bound to act to stop practices of speculation in food, perceived as a more immediately necessary commodity. ¹⁰⁴ This created a potential emergency situation for Bengalis. Yet the British state continued to benefit.

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Profit was found in the speculation of other commodities as well. Income tax returns for 1918 showed a large increase in the amount of income tax revenue derived from the large profits that Marwari cloth merchants had made on cloth. ¹⁰⁵ In addition to cloth, the price of mustard oil had also increased significantly. Marwari speculation on rice in the outer districts of Bengal was another common complaint. Reports of the looting of shops for rice were frequent around Bengal. One newspaper report charged that Marwari speculation was to blame for inflating rice prices and leading desperate people to loot and riot for food. The advent of the *puja* season, normally a time of increased consumption, would only make the situation more desperate and dangerous. ¹⁰⁶ The stocks of rice were significantly lower than in previous years, raising suspicion that such stocks were being hoarded for higher profit. And as the annual Durga Puja festival approached, there was added concern that the Marwaris might not lower their cloth prices to enable the Bengalis to purchase new clothes. In August 1921, the sharp rise in the price of wheat was blamed on "wheat gambling" rumored to be practiced rampantly in the lanes of Burabazar. Marwari merchants, who purchased vast sums of wheat, up to 10,000 tons each, were blamed for deliberately forcing up the price of this household necessity with no regard for the hardship that this would inflict on the working classes. ¹⁰⁷

Occasionally, the British colonial government took steps to thwart these potentially explosive situations. Sometimes the government interfered in matters of food speculation by forcing Marwaris to leave the countryside *mofussil*, much to the relief of local villagers. One report warmly thanked the district magistrate for expelling "certain Marwaris" from the town of Krishnagar on account of rice speculation, yet

warned that it "also exhorts the Marwaris not thus to ruin the Bengalis on whom they depend for their livelihood. Unless they desist even now, the consequences will not be good." ¹⁰⁸ The complaint against the Marwaris in this case came, in large part, from their portrayal as outsiders who had come to Bengal to exploit the local population. It seems that local forms of exploitation, perpetuated by people perceived as local residents, were somehow not as terrible as those forms of trickery exercised by groups not native to the region. This is part and parcel of the detrimental social constructs that Bengalis have made of Marwaris.

Because Marwaris were starting to settle permanently in Bengal with their families during this period, their presence had an even more oppressive and burdensome effect on the price of land. Marwaris had begun investing their profits by buying land at elevated prices. It was alleged that Marwari capitalists were buying up *zamindari* (estates) from landowners who had suffered great debts. This was the last straw for Bengalis, who felt that such land grabbing violated the sanctity of the Permanent Settlement, which held that the money made in Bengal ought to be kept within its boundaries. The *Nayak* commented that, "legislation is necessary for excluding all Marwaris and other people from outside Bengal, from holding landed property in Bengal, except for strictly residential purposes." ¹⁰⁹

The various forms of Marwari unscrupulousness in commodity speculation and hoarding were met with violent resistance on the part of the local Bengali Hindu and Muslim populations. In addition to the anti-Marwari riots of 1910, both 1918 and 1926 saw similar disturbances. ¹¹⁰ Unlike the 1910 riots, however, in which only people who were identified as "Marwaris" were looted and beaten, the 1918 riots targeted other Hindus who, like Marwaris, were also attacked and killed. According to the *Nayak*, "the Moslems at first were out against the Marwaris and the police, but now they seem to be angry with all up-country Hindus... Some Moslems anticipated this outbreak which has a political rather than religious tinge about it—they are the outcome of racial hatred and indignation." ¹¹¹ Reports in the local press were quick to emphasize that these riots differed from those in the past because they were the result of political and economic causes, and not religious ones. ¹¹² These riots were thus ironically seen as a form of political progress by which politics, instead of religion, formed the basis of public action in India. The *Dainik Basumati* argued: "A new spirit, a new strength, a new aspiration, apparently has come to animate Moslems. Riots, due to political causes, which are common in Europe, are unknown in India." ¹¹³ The newspapers described many reasons for the riots, including protests relating to the internment of Muslims, the "cloth question," and Muslim rights for representation under the Reform Scheme.

The rioters generally did not target Bengalis. The riots appeared to

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single out Marwaris as their targets for two reasons. The first was the rapid and uncontrolled rise in cloth prices. The Marwaris were accused of deliberately raising the price of cloth. The *Dainik Basumati* of September 12, 1918, claimed: "We find that Musalmans have a great grudge against Marwaris... The high prices of dhotis for which the Marwari dealer is responsible and which are preventing Musalmans from buying new cloths on the occasion of the Bakr-Id festival." 115 The *Nayak* reported that poor Hindus and Muslims were driven to rioting because they were being denied the pleasure of buying new clothes for their sons and daughters on the festival days, while the cloth dealers were becoming increasingly wealthy. 116 By this point, social relations between Marwaris and Bengali Muslims were at a particularly low ebb. Marwaris were being accused of buying out *bustees* (slum lands) for real estate development, thus rendering landless the hapless residents. They were also accused of refusing to hire Muslim tradesmen and coachmen. 117 Another reason for the riots was the alleged adulteration of ghee with "stuff obnoxious both to Hindus and Moslems," namely, beef and pork fat. 118

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Finally, wartime hoarding brought about a serious silver shortage. Even the purchase of silver ornaments was seen as a threat to this nationalist resource, as it would encourage the practice of melting silver coins into molten metal. Then the government would be forced to purchase silver at inflated prices in foreign countries. 119 The early years of World War I saw an unprecedented surge in the hoarding of silver coins. Marwaris profited from the war by taking large amounts of gold with them when some fled Calcutta during the war bombing and returned to their homes in Rajasthan. 120 The press reported that silver rupees were virtually unobtainable from banks, and that the market rate for a silver rupee was now seventeen annas, instead of the usual sixteen. 121 The *Nayak* charged that police seizure of molten gold from Marwaris in Burabazar had caused a panic, with rumors flying that the government would soon stop converting notes into silver due to the scarcity of precious metals, as had happened in Allahabad, Lucknow, and Bombay. 122

By pursuing certain types of antigambling legislation, the colonial government itself promoted harmful speculation, particularly in government-controlled commodities such as opium and Manchester cloth. These speculative activities, combined with other communal tensions arising from Marwari involvement with activities such as cow protection and joining with the Arya Samaj in playing music before mosques, were part of the impetus for violent riots between Marwaris and Muslims in 1910, 1918, 1926 and 1946. 123 The Marwaris were not very successful in negotiating creative public solutions to the hoarding and speculation crisis. Today, local people are aware that money that went into Marwari charity and

philanthropy, including temple building, sometimes came from crisis-inducing activities that were potentially harmful to local populations. Because of this kind of popular memory, middle-class Bengali populations are not at all placated that Marwaris are now really giving something back to the community. Marwari voluntary associations developed techniques to manage public moral discourses about their sometimes unscrupulous involvement in the economy. As will be seen, the Marwari management of the "moral economy" of ghee adulteration through a unique collusion of religion and civil society was multifaceted in its understanding of colonial capitalism.

The Politics of Ghee Adulteration and its Public Resolutions in Calcutta

In August 1917, an unusual public scandal developed in response to rumors and evidence that Marwari merchants had adulterated *ghee* (clarified butter). The question of ghee adulteration had arisen before—in 1885, when a dozen or so people were punished for selling very poor quality ghee, and again in 1907. ¹²⁴ The modes in which the 1917 scandal was publicly reconciled signify complex cultural understandings about the public and moral management of market commodities. As one travel writer quipped, adulterated ghee "in this land means something between a criminal act and a cultural disaster." ¹²⁵ I am specifically interested in how the Marwari Association negotiated two different and incommensurable understandings of capitalism in their attempts to find a public solution to the ghee adulteration crisis. An analysis of the event and the two ways that the Marwaris attempted to solve it—first through chemical testing of ghee, assessment of fines, and appeals to government, and second, by orchestrating a spectacular public display of Brahmin priests—I will demonstrate the coexistence of multiple cultural understandings of the colonial capitalist process.

The problem of commodity adulteration was not unique to ghee, but ghee is not perceived as being an ordinary commodity. Far from being a culturally neutral substance, it is a culturally marked commodity having very particular cultural and religious associations for Hindus. Ghee is an excellent example of the process by which some products move in and out of the "commodity" category. ¹²⁶ Watts' *Dictionary of the Economic Products of India* asserts that ghee is "universally employed for domestic cooking ... and forms an important article of trade." ¹²⁷ Watts notes that while the cow is the most desirable source of milk used to produce ghee, milks from buffalo, sheep, and goats are also employed because they are cheaper and more fatty than the more delicate cow's milk. In fact, Watts points out that the chief adulterants in ghee are vegetable oils, animal fats (especially mutton), and starches. ¹²⁸ Clearly, the adulteration of ghee was not new; rather, what was new was the manner in which the adulteration of ghee could be judged and made into public knowledge, necessitating new forms of crisis

resolution.

The treatment of ghee in colonial housekeeping manuals and cookbooks draws upon orientalist discourses to give it special attention as a pure food commodity essential to Indian cuisine. The renowned dictionary of colloquial Anglo-Indian words, *Hobson-Jobson*, quotes colonial historian James Mill as saying, "the great luxury of the Hindu is butter, prepared in a manner peculiar to himself, and called by him ghee." *Hobson-Jobson* defines ghee as: "Boiled butter: the universal medium of cookery throughout India; supplying the place occupied by oil in Southern Europe, and more... The word is Hindi *ghi*, Sanskrit *ghrita*." ¹²⁹ Since ancient times ghee has been described in textual accounts as being a commodity of enormous cultural prestige. It is said that in ancient days, Aryans only used ghee for frying, whereas the general population used vegetable oils. ¹³⁰ Ghee was exported to Rome to be used by the wealthy classes in cooking and making sacrifices. ¹³¹

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In the field of anthropology, much has been written about the qualities and cultural rankings of food and food transactions in South Asia. Khare has defined cooking as cultural steps taken to produce edible foods. The central theme of Hindu cooking, says Khare, is to produce a culturally meaningful parity between food and its eater. ¹³² Within the ethnosociological system of food classification in India (which admittedly suffers from a serious lack of historical contextualization that will not be elaborated upon here), ghee is among the highest-ranked inclusive foods. The use of ghee, as opposed to oil, constitutes a superior ritual act. Ghee is considered to be a fully cooked food, and its presence confers ritual purity on a dish. ¹³³ Used as a topping, such as being drizzled over *kitcheri*, a casserole of rice and lentils, ghee turns exclusive food into auspicious food. When used as a medium of cooking, fire does not alter the cultural value of ghee. Because ghee comes from the cow, ritually the most sacred animal, it is claimed to have great curative properties. ¹³⁴

Khare notes that, "*Ghee*, as indicated, is a restrictive concept, differentiated from *tel* (oils), although both are cooking fats. The former ranks higher than the latter. However, under modernization, appearance rather than substance has come to determine what is *ghee* and what is not, because, for example, hydrogenated oils, which only look like *ghee*, have come to mean *ghee* for the orthodox." ¹³⁵ Khare warns us against imposing a modern and scientific concept onto practices of production and consumption that at least partially predate modern ideologies. Clearly there were factors other than purity that made the adulteration of ghee into a cultural crisis for Bengali Hindus in 1917.

It is necessary to take a step outside of the ethnosociological folk taxonomies of foods in Hindu thought to consider how historical factors came into play in creating the ghee crisis. Jennifer Alexander points out that the market is itself a cultural construct, in the same way that kinship and religion have been conceived. The advantage of her approach is that it allows us to see the market as "a structured flow of information, showing how traders make their living by acquiring information and concealing it from others." ¹³⁶ In the case of the ghee scandal of 1917, changes in the methods of producing knowledge about commodities—in this case, through the application of scientific chemical analysis of ghee—changed the way that people thought about the commodity and also the way they perceived their economic and social relationships with Marwari traders.

But knowledge and information played a second significant role in signifying the dangers of adulterated ghee. Rumors of the adulteration of ghee went hand in hand with the circulation of other colonial discourses on both the physical decline of the Bengali people (labeled as "race" or "nation" in contemporary terms) and images of the effeminate Bengali. John Roselli's work on the colonial theory of Bengali effeminate demonstrates how the Bengali elite "made the stereotype its own." ¹³⁷ As Mrinilini Sinha has recently argued, the simultaneous production of discourses of "manly Englishmen" and "effeminate Bengalis" became a crucial element in the gender politics of justifying British colonial rule in India. ¹³⁸ This mutual cross-cultural construction of Bengali manhood became even more pronounced as Bengalis lost ground to Marwari traders and middlemen in the economic sphere. Orientalist constructions entered into colonial discourse on the subject as well. Lord Zetland, for instance, wrote in his memoirs that the controversy centered "around rumours that Calcutta had become a market for the production and sale of adulterated ghee (clarified butter) which as a product of the sacred animal, the cow, and the normal adjunct of the cooking, played a paramount part not only in the diet, but also in the religious practices of all orthodox Hindus. Here then was a shocking scandal touching the religious life of millions, dragged into the open light of day." ¹³⁹

It is in this historical and cultural context that rumors of Marwari adulteration of ghee produced such an uproarious turmoil. It was feared that the adulteration of food by the Marwaris could potentially threaten the very survival of the Bengali people. One sensationalist report stated that, "unless the practice of adulteration is put a stop to at an early date, the Bengali race will become extinct." ¹⁴⁰ The decline of the Bengali race became a common narrative in the press, reflecting two separate but equally distressing concerns. First, Marwaris and other "up-country" Hindus were perceived as replacing the Bengalis in trading and shopkeeping; the production of sweets was now perceived to lie in Marwari hands. Even the more menial

occupations of washermen and artisans were being "taken over" by outsiders, prompting resentful feelings about migration and job displacement. ¹⁴¹ The second concern related not only to the escalating price of essential articles of food, but also to widely circulating rumors of these foods having been intentionally adulterated.

The Adulteration of Ghee

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The Calcutta Corporation had a law that adulteration was allowed only if it did not destroy the food value of the item. According to this law, it was the duty of the seller to inform his customer that there may be additives present, but this was rarely done. In 1886 the government of Bengal first passed legislation preventing the sale of some types of adulterated ghee in Calcutta. But by the year 1890, health officials felt that the enforcement of this legislation had become so lax that it was ineffectual in preventing adulteration. Dr. Simpson, who served as the city of Calcutta's health officer in 1890, expressed his concern that the government was not adequately prosecuting cases of contamination. In his opinion, the sale of adulterated food products ought to be banned in Calcutta. According to Simpson, the word "ghee" by itself had implications of being pure. The government, however, at the time contended that this was not the true purpose and intent of the original legislation and claimed that a mixture known by the name of the predominant substance did not necessarily imply purity. ¹⁴²

C. J. Lyall, home department officiating secretary to the government of India, pointed out that the 1886 legislation actually differentiated between two kinds of adulteration. First, there was adulteration that made the food unwholesome and hence could actually destroy the food. Second, there was adulteration that did not make food unwholesome and would be allowable as long as the purchaser understood that the product was not pure. As Lyall pointed out, some buyers would be happy to purchase ghee that was adulterated but not harmful to health, and "it would be unjust to give the Inspector power to destroy the vendor's entire stock because he had represented it to be pure." ¹⁴³ The only way that a vendor could be prosecuted under the 1886 law, therefore, would be if a customer had asked for pure ghee and been given something spurious in its place.

Despite the flexibility in the law, Lyall quoted the following statistics as proof that the average amounts of the fines had actually gone up, even though the total amount decreased: ¹⁴⁴

| Year | # of Prosecutions | Total amount of Fines in Rs. | Average fine in Rs. |
|------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
|------|-------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|

| | | | |
|------|----|-------|-------|
| 1887 | 49 | 1,044 | 21.3 |
| 1888 | 53 | 1171 | 22.1 |
| 1889 | 38 | 907 | 23.87 |

The increase in average fines was taken as proof of the efficacy of the law. Up to this point, the colonial state did not feel that there was any reason to legislate further on the matter. This was, however, about to change.

Marwari adulteration of Ghee in 1917

The Marwari Association was itself concerned about ghee adulteration and, according to the biography of Ramdev Chokhany (a founding member of the Marwari Association), between 1912 and 1917 the association petitioned the Bengal government and municipal officers to punish those sellers who adulterated food articles, but the government did not respond. The Marwari Association contended that the adulteration of ghee with animal fat, a cheaper substance, was not only against the Hindu religion but was also unhealthy. By the middle of July 1917, complaints over the adulteration of ghee had reached a fever pitch. The Marwari Association convened a meeting in Calcutta on July 22 to examine the charges of adulteration that were being leveled against Marwari merchants. The merchants denied any wrongdoing, but at a meeting of the association a few days later it was decided to test samples of ghee. The founders of the Marwari Association, Ranglal Podder, Ramdev Chokhany, and others, conducted a surprise inspection in which they collected two or three tins of ghee from the storage *godowns* (crawlspaces) of every ghee businessman. After sending those dozens of tins to an outside laboratory for chemical testing, the result was that nearly every single tin contained animal fat mixed with the ghee. Out of sixty-seven samples of ghee analyzed by Smith Stanistreet & Co., only seven were found to be pure ghee. The amount of ghee in the samples varied considerably. One sample contained no ghee at all, and was found to be entirely composed of animal fat. The adulterated ghee was being sold at Rs. 40–52 per *maund*, compared to its wholesale price of Rs. 14–22. ¹⁴⁵ Even though the Marwari Association declared it would fine the merchants for the offense of adulteration, this action did not satisfy religious elite. ¹⁴⁶

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The news of this adulteration had created a storm of outrage, especially among North Indians, Rajasthanis, and Brahmins. Thousands of Brahmins gathered on the banks of the Ganges River, locally called the Hughli, and began fasting to death in order to punish the businessmen who had adulterated ghee. Responsibility for the death of a Brahmin was regarded as a curse. Lord Zetland wrote:

At this point the Brahmins, as befitted the priestly caste, stepped

in and summoned learned priests from Benaras to advise them on the action to be taken. The priests came and deliberated for two days before pronouncing judgment on those who had been defiled by the use of the adulterated article. They must repair to the banks of the holy river and there purify themselves by performing the ceremony known as Homun [sic], consisting of the burning of ghee and various spices, while they repeated mantras from prescribed volumes of the holy books, the ceremony to extend over four or five days during which a rigid fast must be observed.

According to Zetland, over three thousand Brahmins gathered on the banks of the Hughli River. More and more Brahmins joined in, and by August 19 there were between four and five thousand people undergoing purification on the chance that they had consumed adulterated ghee. [147](#)

On the morning of August 19, the Marwari Association again met to discuss punishment for the offenders. How the ensuing investigation should be conducted became a problem, according to Chokhany, because enmity had spread throughout the society, and the early nineteenth century Bari Panchayat (early caste guild) had practically been destroyed. The Marwari Association organized a *panchayat* (council) of one hundred people, with representatives from villages and from Calcutta. The proceedings of the *panchayat* were held in the Shri Vishudhanarda Saraswati Marwari Vidyalaya school. The *panchayat* agreed that: harm should not come to religion, conduct, or custom; innocent people should not be punished; the punishment should be tolerable by society, and; whatever punishment agreed upon should be meted out to all of the accused. The *panchayat* examined every businessman and found that nearly all of them had mixed animal fat with ghee. [148](#)

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The Marwari merchants accused of adulterating the ghee were punished by the *panchayat*. The *panchayat* heavily fined the businessmen, and boycotted the ones that refused to pay for periods ranging from one year to life. In all, Rs. 75,000 were collected, and the money was used to purchase pasture land at the pilgrimage site of Vrindawan (Brindaban, Krishna's birthplace), where pure ghee could be produced. After the news of the punishment reached the Brahmins on the river banks, they decided to conclude their ceremonies and rituals by the following morning. [149](#) Zetland wrote: "These various decisions were communicated to the Brahmins on the river banks, who declared themselves satisfied and brought their ceremonies to a close."

It is highly likely that the Marwari Association itself staged the public spectacle of bringing protesting Brahmins to the river. None of the sources that I consulted, including Modi, Chokhany, or Zetland, offered details about

who had orchestrated, and indeed paid, the upcountry Brahmins to produce such a public spectacle. The numerous links between Marwaris and Brahmins in other social contexts leads me to suggest that the Marwaris themselves were the ones to stage this event as a public solution to the ghee crisis. Internal politics and rivalries between various Marwari groups helped the Marwari Panchayat prove its worth when they showed that they could solve the dispute.. The staging of this performance of starvation and ablution was a way of negotiating with the public, the colonial state, and other rival Marwari organizations in a competition for social legitimacy. ¹⁵⁰ The strong business, social, and religious connections between Marwaris in Bengal and in the "upcountry" of northern India enabled them to bring in Benaras Brahmins as religious experts who could officiate over the religious aspects of the ghee adulteration. This kind of socio-religious solution to the problem went hand in hand with the levying of fines and social boycotts (ostracism or excommunication), combining various modes of dealing with the public. ¹⁵¹

The adulteration of food products, known in Bangla as *bhejal*, arguably took on a new cultural status under the British. ¹⁵² The use of modern scientific methods to demonstrate the inner substance of the ghee created new cultural problems. The scientific tests, in short, made visible the intrinsic qualities of ghee and exposed any adulterants, and as such introduced a new type of knowledge about the relative purity or impurity of commodities. Laws regulating the purity of commodity substances could then institutionalize the new knowledge documenting contamination of commodities.

The Marwari resolution to the ghee crisis depended upon European and scientific understandings of chemical composition, yet combined them with local religious ideas about ghee adulteration that only culturally empowered religious specialists (the Brahmins), and not the colonial state, could address. The reputation of Marwari *baniyas* as corrupt and untrustworthy businessmen, combined with the scientific proof of their adulteration, had to be publicly addressed. This did not mean, however, that the public river display necessarily satisfied a disgruntled and religiously sensitive public. The colonial state decided to change their previously *laissez-faire* approach to commodity adulteration.

Legislation and Its Role in Making Adulteration Visible

Zetland wrote that the displays on the river were merely "socio-religious eddies" that would eventually die down. Legislation, he noted, was necessary in handling this crisis, and an emergency bill to amend the Calcutta Municipal Act was quickly brought before the Council. ¹⁵³ The adulteration of ghee was recognized as a problem outside of Calcutta as well, so at the end of August the Marwari Association held a joint meeting with the British India Association, the Bengal Land Holders Association, the Bengal Mahajan

(moneylender) Assembly, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce, and the Rajput Association, calling for government legislation banning the adulteration of ghee. ¹⁵⁴ The Bengal Legislative Council held a session to discuss the "alleged adulteration of ghee" on September 4, 1917. The Honorable Babu Surendra Nath Ray queried the Council on the problems associated with the adulteration of ghee. He pointed to such concerns as ghee's being adulterated with animal fat and groundnut oil, thereby desecrating the ghee for use in Hindu religious ceremonies, and to the Council's failure to follow the recommendations of the Calcutta Corporation in passing an act that would prevent the adulteration of food. In his response, the Honorable Mr. Donald contended that only 114 out of 457 samples of ghee tested in 1916—17 were found to be adulterated. ¹⁵⁵ On July 3, 1919, the Bengal Food Adulteration Bill was passed. This Bill was meant as a supplement to the Calcutta Municipal Act of 1917, which forbade the adulteration of edibles. In its "statement of objects and reasons" the Bengal Legislative Department explained the purpose of the bill: "The adulteration of food, particularly of articles of common consumption, such as milk, ghee, mustard-oil, etc., is extremely prevalent, and the existing law has entirely failed to check the evil. The present Bill has been framed for the purpose of remedying the defects in the law, which make this practice possible, and of ensuring the purity of the staple articles of food which are most liable to adulteration." ¹⁵⁶

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In addition to inflating prices and adulterating ghee, Marwari merchants were accused of adulterating mustard oil and selling a spurious substance known as "paka oil," or ripe oil. Marwari merchants had reputedly brought on the mustard oil crisis by cornering the market on mustard seeds. ¹⁵⁷ An article in the *Moslem Hitashi* noted: "A selfish and wicked class like the Marwaris is to be found in no other place of the world. It is they who are at the bottom of all these high prices and they are also responsible for adulterating mustard oil. Cannot the authorities put them down? Or do they mean to support their nefarious deeds? In that case Hindus and Mussalmans should combine and devise means to drive them out of the country." ¹⁵⁸ Again we read the threat of expulsion of the evil outsider. Reports came in from outlying areas about the adulteration of all kinds of foodstuffs. The Marwaris were accused of adulterating flour with the fruit of *babul* plants as far south as Kharagapur. ¹⁵⁹

The foods most at risk for adulteration, as named by the bill, included milk, butter, ghee, wheat flour, and mustard oil, though the bill made provision for any other articles of food that the local government might deem pertinent. The Bengal Food Adulteration Bill approached the problem of adulterated food in two ways. First, it prohibited the manufacture and sale of any food that was mixed with another substance if the mixing altered its quality, substance, or nature. The adulteration of ghee would have been prevented by a stipulation in the bill that ghee must contain only those

substances "which are derived exclusively from the milk of cows or of buffaloes." ¹⁶⁰ Second, the bill forbade the addition of any substance to a product that would serve to increase the bulk weight or measure of any product. This was particularly a concern with wheat flour. Merchants were accused of mixing substances such as pebbles or sand with the wheat, increasing its weight and apparent bulk to insure a more profitable sale. The bill went so far as to state that no materials that could be used for adulteration were to be allowed at the site of manufacture. The stipulated penalty for manufacturing or selling either adulterated food or food that was not of the "prescribed quality" was a fine of two hundred rupees for the first offense and one thousand rupees for any further offense. ¹⁶¹

Through the month of May 1918, there were reports that adulterated ghee was still being sold in the market and that the government was doing nothing to stop it. ¹⁶² One paper reported cynically: "Considering that the ghee being sold now is not purer than before, while it is dearer, it looks as if the whole Marwari agitation against adulterated ghee last year was a got-up affair, a mere trick to raise prices ... our youths should try to get control of the trade, ousting the Marwari, who has no objection to selling adulterated ghee if there is a demand for it, though he himself would not buy it." ¹⁶³ Perhaps comparable to the adulterants in the ghee itself, the Marwari was perceived as *bhejal*, a noxious adulterant in the state of Bengal.

In the early months of 1920, after the passage of the bill, the price of ghee rose, partly as a result of the export policies of Marwari merchants. ¹⁶⁴ Newspaper reports as late as 1924 spread rumors of an artificial foreign ghee being sold on the Calcutta markets, adulterated with pig and cow fat. ¹⁶⁵ Under the provisions of the 1919 Bengal Food Adulteration Act, there was no way to protect consumers from the use of adulterated ghee in sweets. It was alleged that Marwari merchants were able to get around the technicalities of the antiadulteration law and to sell substandard grades and qualities of ghee that would pass the frequent but random inspections. Long after 1919, scientists struggled to find laboratory techniques for a quick and accurate method to detect the adulteration of ghee. They developed tests based on the solubility of ghee in mixtures of acetic ether at various temperatures, in which the more fatty acids of animal fat would be insoluble and thus easy to detect. ¹⁶⁶

In the years immediately following Partition, the potential adulteration of ghee was seen as a veritable threat to the longevity and strength of the Indian nation. As Dr. Santosh Kumar Mukherji noted in his appeal, *Cow-Keeping: For Building a Healthy Nation*: "To preserve the newly won freedom and prepare ourselves for the fullest attainment of our nationhood we require able-bodied healthy young men who can defend their motherland

and work for her reconstruction." ¹⁶⁷ Dr. Mukherji noted that the practice of adulterating bazar milk was very common, and several "clever persons" had found a way of circumventing the Food Act, which stipulated that milk must be the "normal clean secretion obtained by milking of the healthy cow." Because the Municipality did not enforce this rule and only ensured that the milk fat levels were up to the legal standards, Mukherji asserted, milk was sometimes adulterated and diluted up to the legal standard of "fat" violating the provisions of the law. Consumers were still faced with ghee adulteration and relatively high prices for pure ghee. According to Dr. Mukherji's report, the high price of ghee—at Rs. 4 to Rs. 8 per *seer*—made the purchase of "real" ghee prohibitively expensive. Occasionally, ghee would be made from the milk of buffalo, yet passed off and sold as the "real" ghee made from cow's milk. Alternatively, a substance called Vanaspati, prepared from groundnut or cottonseed oil, was advertised as "vegetable ghee."

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In September 1950, an All India Anti-Vanaspati Sammelan was held in Nasik. Sri Purushothamdas Tandon, who presided over the conference, urged people not to buy Vanaspati. In the process of manufacturing Vanaspati, a catalytic agent was used that could potentially react dangerously with impurities in the oil and cause the product to become rancid. In a government experiment, rats were fed a diet of Vanaspati, rice, and protein, and it was found that after three generations of such a diet the entire population of rats had gone blind. Yet the government did not seem to take much interest in placing a ban on Vanaspati. It was reported that the health minister of Bombay, Dr. Gilder, claimed that the rats had gone blind simply from feeding them the typical—and inadequate—Bengali diet, and that it had nothing to do with the Vanaspati. Dr. Gilder's claim was ridiculed by Dr. Mukherji, who contended that if this explanation were true, the entire population of Bengal, having eaten rice for centuries, would have certainly gone blind as well. ¹⁶⁸ It seemed to Bengalis that the Marwaris' commodity adulteration actually threatened the very survival of the Bengali people.

Conclusions

There are many other areas of Marwari economic history that I have not considered in this chapter. More research needs to be done on how Marwari firms developed *vis-à-vis* speculative practices, and what role such practices may have played in both nationalist and Hindu-Muslim communal politics. We also need to ask how conceptions of gambling and commodity adulteration changed from the Mughal to the colonial period, so that the logics of British colonialism are not seen as being inscribed onto a blank page of static Indian "culture." Yet within the time frame considered here, it suffices to say that activities of speculation and gambling, as made visible under the gaze of the colonial state, were crucial to the formation of public Marwari community identity, which could itself operate as a political force in Indian public culture. Rather than destroying community, colonial capitalism actually created Marwaris as a political unit.

Marwaris' defense of gambling as essential to their character was a performance to establish an interiority that could then be mobilized in the demand for political rights. The public "monster protest meeting" demonstrates the way that Marwaris, connected to each other through gambling networks and speculation alliances, created a space in which they could represent their community interests to the state.

This is not to say that the process of identity formation has been without social costs. In making unscrupulous economic activity visible, the state reinforced the social image of the Marwaris as outsiders and dubious businessmen. This reputation contributed to rioting over speculative activities such as hoarding of cloth and food. Because the massive accumulation of local wealth through speculation was a clear threat to British economic domination, it altered the way that the state treated Marwaris as political subjects. Marwaris, after all, had much closer commercial alliances with the Europeans than did the Bengalis, who stereotypically sought government help in securing employment postings. ¹⁶⁹ Though the British relied on local sources of credit to finance their empire, they did not want such groups to profit from numbers games on commodity figures and rain gambling. Because the colonial state was unable to regulate and thereby unable to tax the proceeds made from Marwari rain gambling, it had little to gain from allowing it to continue.

Ironically, despite competing metropolitan discourses of moral conscience, the colonial state promoted certain practices of speculation, especially on opium, that served the economic interests of the British. Far from constituting "resistance" to the operations of the colonial government, gambling on certain commodities markets, and on opium in particular, actually played into the hands of the most deliberate colonial economic policy. As has been extensively documented, the opium trade with China was part of the most profitable as well as one of the most morally criticized aspects of British trade in colonial Asia. ¹⁷⁰ Though immensely profitable for the British colonial government, the opium trade was characterized by high degrees of uncertainty. Whether the trade would remain in place—and how profitable the trade would ultimately be each year—depended on a large number of political factors in China that were often well beyond the control of the British. The speculative activities of betting and gambling on the price of opium could be at least covertly encouraged, providing one way for the British to help control the unpredictable opium market, especially in the face of often inhospitable relations with China.

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Concerns about Marwari practices of hoarding, speculating, adulterating, and creating artificial scarcity of essential commodities continue to the present. In the 1990s, Assam has witnessed an anti-Marwari movement on the part of ULFA, the United Liberation Front of Assam, who have extorted money

and even killed the president of the Kamrup Chamber of Commerce, which has sparked an exodus of Marwaris from the area. [171](#) After anti-Marwari agitation in Orissa in the early 1980s, many Marwari families from Orissa, Assam, and Bihar migrated to Raipur in the Chhattisgarh region of eastern Madhya Pradesh. These migrants were aided by Marwari families who had been living there for generations, although locals complained about rising costs of housing due to the Marwari influx. [172](#) And during the early months of 1999, a national crisis over the shortage and soaring costs of onions and other vegetables prompted much protest and an all-India strike, along with rumors that the Congress Party had relied upon its traditional Marwari stronghold to cause a crisis to weaken the ruling BJP.

Notes:

Note 1: The address 67 Cotton Street is mentioned in West Bengal State Archives. Judicial Proceedings, March 1897. No 31-42 (A). [Back.](#)

Note 2: *Introduction into the Bengal Legislative Council of a Bill for the suppression of rain gambling in Bengal.* WBSA. Judicial Proceedings, March 1897. No. 31-42 (A). [Back.](#)

Note 3: "Rain gambling in Calcutta: A Visit to the Gamblers," *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 2 October 1896. [Back.](#)

Note 4: Jnanendra Nath Kumar, *The Genealogical History of India, Part IV* (Calcutta: Ahi Bhusan Ghosh, 1934-45), 64. [Back.](#)

Note 5: *Shri Ramdev Chokhany*, Radhakrishna Nevtiya, ed. (Calcutta: Akhil Bharatvarshiya Marwari Sammelan, 1950): 174-175. Chokhany wrote that instead of indulging in speculation, businessmen needed to train in modern commercial banking and exchange. A word on what speculation refers to is pertinent here. In commodities speculation, there is no actual transfer of goods. These types of transactions, known as "forward" and "futures" trading, have been worldwide phenomena. Unlike bargaining in the market, in which a price is fixed for a commodity at hand, forward trading is a potentially unlimited circulation of capital based on the mere play of figures, without any movement at all of the commodity. Futures trading refers to the same process on a stock exchange. Forward contracts are as old as exchange itself, and have nothing to do with exchange on a formalized share market. They work in two ways. The first method is hedging, by which the buyer pays in advance for the commodity so that when the actual future sale is held, he or she is not affected by variation in the price. The second method is using forwards for the purpose of speculation. In this case, the seller of a forward contract predicts that the price of the commodity will be below the futures price (at the settlement day). If this happens, the seller gains by buying the asset and then selling it to the buyer of the futures contract at a higher price (the futures price). If the futures price is

above the market price, the buyer of the futures contract could pay an agreed price (the futures price) for the commodity, and sell it at the higher market price, thus making a profit. Options differ only slightly from futures in that they do not make the sale compulsory. They simply give the buyer the right to sell or buy.[Back.](#)

Note 6: Timberg, *The Marwaris*, 165; Kudaisya, *The Public Career of G. D. Birla*, 37, 46; Modi, *Desh ke Itihas Mein Marwari Jati ka Sthan*, 628-629. [Back.](#)

Note 7: Interestingly, many family histories, though outwardly denying any explicit connection with gambling, acknowledge that the men's first experience learning a bit of English came when they began sending telegrams.[Back.](#)

Note 8: Rakesh and Lewis, *Shekhawati: Rajasthan's Painted Homes*, 42-43.[Back.](#)

Note 9: Bhimsen Kedia, *Bharat Mein Marwari Samaj* (Calcutta: National Publications, 1947): 252.[Back.](#)

Note 10: Timberg, *The Marwaris*, 39.[Back.](#)

Note 11: WBSA. Poll. Police. *Gambling on Opium Figures*. P 4G/2. 1925.[Back.](#)

Note 12: Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction," *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) has been one point of departure here.[Back.](#)

Note 13: Reuven Brenner, *Gambling and Speculation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).[Back.](#)

Note 14: Mark Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter: Popular Gambling and English Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 2.[Back.](#)

Note 15: W. Douglass Mackenzie, *The Ethics of Gambling* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1896), 7.[Back.](#)

Note 16: Ibid., 8-12.[Back.](#)

Note 17: Quoted in Brenner, *Gambling and Speculation*, 90.[Back.](#)

Note 18: James Harold Romain, *Gambling: Or Fortuna, her Temple and Shrine, The True Philosophy and Ethics of Gambling* (Chicago: The Craig Press, 1891), 23. [Back.](#)

Note 19: Ross McKibbin, "Working Class Gambling in Britain 1880-1939," *Past and Present*, No. 82, 1979: 147-178. [Back.](#)

Note 20: Mackenzie, *The Ethics of Gambling*, 21. [Back.](#)

Note 21: I thank David J. Libby for this point. [Back.](#)

Note 22: Brenner, *Gambling and Speculation*, 61.[Back.](#)

Note 23: See for instance Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982). [Back.](#)

Note 24: Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 412-454.[Back.](#)

Note 25: Don Handelmann and David Shulman, eds., *God Inside Out: Siva's Game of Dice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)[Back.](#)

Note 26: John D. Rogers, "Cultural and Social Resistance: Gambling in Colonial Sri Lanka" in *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, ed. Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 179. [Back.](#)

Note 27: Rogers himself admits that his short case study cannot take a comprehensive look at gambling in Sri Lanka because it narrowly restricts its focus and ignores elite forms of gambling. An attempt to overcome this omission, I believe, would tend to contradict Roger's argument that even modern forms of gambling have generally constituted resistance to the state.[Back.](#)

Note 28: Ellen Oxfeld, *Blood, Sweat, and Mahjong: Family and Enterprise in an Overseas Chinese Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).[Back.](#)

Note 29: Ibid., 99. [Back.](#)

Note 30: Ibid., 109.[Back.](#)

Note 31: RNNB *Bande Mataram*, 20 August 1923.[Back.](#)

Note 32: RNNB. *Bande Mataram*, 8 December 1923.[Back.](#)

Note 33: See M. K. Gandhi, *Drink, Drugs & Gambling* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1952).[Back.](#)

Note 34: Badrul Hassan, *The Drink and Drug Evil of India* (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922), 103.[Back.](#)

Note 35: *Extract from the Proceedings of the Council of the Governor of Bombay, assembled for the purpose of making Laws and Regulations under the provisions of the "The Indian Councils Act, 1861,"* 16 July 1887. NAI. Home Judicial. January 1888. Proceedings 43-46.[Back.](#)

Note 36: WBSA. Poll/Police. *Gambling on Opium Figures*. P 4G/2. 1925.[Back.](#)

Note 37: *Queen-Empress v. Narattamdas' Moriram and Another*. Indian Law Reports. Bombay Series, Appellate Criminal, Vol XIII. (Bombay: Government Book Depot, 1889) IOL V/22/165. Even though the Marwaris included both

Hindus and Jains, the law reports mentioned "Hindu law" and did not indicate that "Jain" law would come to bear on these discussions.[Back.](#)

Note 38: *Bill to amend the Prevention of Gambling Act (Bombay IV of 1887)*. NAI. Home Judicial. October 1889. Proceedings 170-178.[Back.](#)

Note 39: Ibid.[Back.](#)

Note 40: WBSA. Home Judicial. March 1897. No 31-42 (A). [Back.](#)

Note 41: In the archival records of the West Bengal State Government, there exist hundreds of pages of discussion of the question of rain gambling and its effects.[Back.](#)

Note 42: *The Englishman* 22 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 43: *Indian Daily News*, 26 March 1897. Quoted in WBSA. Judicial Dept. Judicial Branch. B Proceedings, April 1900. No. 1-2. File No. J 2G/1. "Subject: Memorial for the Repeal of the Rain Gambling Act."[Back.](#)

Note 44: "Rain Gambling in Calcutta: A Marwaree Meeting" *The Statesman*. (Calcutta) 26 March 1897. RNNB. The press's spatial ascription of Marwari identity as the "element" from Burabazar is an example of the localization of identity and the way in which communities are bounded and located by outside forces, as noted in chapter two.[Back.](#)

Note 45: CRNPB. *Bharat Mitra* 25 February 1897.[Back.](#)

Note 46: "How they Manufacture Law," *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), 24 March 1897; [Back.](#)

Note 47: "Rain Gambling in Calcutta: A Marwaree Meeting," *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 26 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 48: Ibid.[Back.](#)

Note 49: NAI. Home Judicial. May 1897. Proceedings 297-308B. [Back.](#)

Note 50: RNNB. *Hitavadi* (Calcutta), 23 April 1920. [Back.](#)

Note 51: RNNB. *Dainik O Samachar Chandrika*, 8 April 1897.[Back.](#)

Note 52: "It appears that since the passing of Act III of 1897 systematic rain gambling which was formerly carried on in Calcutta at houses maintained for the purpose has completely disappeared." *Question of amending Act III of 1867 so as to include within its provisions the suppression of rain gambling and opium-gambling*. NAI. Home Judicial. 1901. February 1-2A. [Back.](#)

Note 53: RNNB. *Hindustan* (Calcutta), 21 February 1922.[Back.](#)

Note 54: Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishman' and*

the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 33-68. [Back.](#)

Note 55: RNNB. *Sulabh Dainik* 26 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 56: RNNB. *Mihir-O-Sudhakar* 13 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 57: RNNB. *Bangavasi* 3 April 1897; *Dainik-O-Samachar Chandrika* 23 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 58: Letter to editor, signed by "Abandoned Cows, Hacks, and Poor Doggies," *Indian Daily News* (Author: City?), 20 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 59: *Jota Sowda* referred to a form of gambling that later came into prominence in the second decade of the twentieth century that involved placing bets on outstanding *sowdas* (transactions) of the prices of jute. Statement of Baboo Bungshi Dhur, *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 26 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 60: *Capital* (Calcutta), 24 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 61: Reported in Letter to editor, *Indian Daily News* (Calcutta), 20 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 62: *Memorial Addressed to the Honourable Sir John Woodburn, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal.* Government of Bengal. Judicial Dept., Judicial Branch. B Proceedings, April 1900, No. 1-2. Section Number 4. [Back.](#)

Note 63: *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 23 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 64: Ibid. [Back.](#)

Note 65: Baboo Sheonath Chowdry, *The Statesman* (Calcutta), 26 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 66: Home Judicial. February, 1901. A Proceedings 1-2. [Back.](#)

Note 67: WBSA. Poll. Police. *Gambling on Opium Figures.* P 4G/2. 1925. [Back.](#)

Note 68: WBSA. Poll. Police. *Gambling on Opium Figures.* P 4G/2. 1925. [Back.](#)

Note 69: Ibid. Hafiz Anwar, Additional District Judge, Rewari. [Back.](#)

Note 70: W.F. Wells, CS, Judge, Agra, in No. 128 of Criminal Appeal Sessions Court, 18 June 1898. In NAI. Home Judicial 1901. Feb. 1-2 A. [Back.](#)

Note 71: *Draft Bill to Prohibit Wagering on the Price of Opium in The United Provinces.* NAI. Home Judicial. June 1911. No. 43. [Back.](#)

Note 72: "Morality by Legislation," *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (Calcutta), 25 March 1897. [Back.](#)

Note 73: WBSA. Poll. Police. *Gambling on Opium Figures*. P 4G/2. 1925.[Back.](#)

Note 74: WBSA. Poll. Police. *Gambling on Opium Figures*. P 4G/2. 1925.[Back.](#)

Note 75: There is ample evidence in the 1893 report of the Royal Commission on Opium that Marwaris were avid consumers of the narcotic. A representative of the Marwari community, Rai Sheo Bur Bogla Bahadur, reported to the Commission that many Marwari men took up the habit of opium eating in their 40s. Two physicians, Dr. Kailas Chunder Bose and Dr. Hiralal Ghosh, testified that Marwaris were noted for opium eating but that it did not negatively affect their health, intelligence or longevity as much as it affected Bengalis. They commented that this opium habit did "not deteriorate the intellect of the habitual consumers; on the contrary ... it acts as a stimulant to their brains. The Marwaris, who are noted for opium eating, are the most intelligent class of merchants in India," and actually lived longer than Bengalis. *Minutes and Evidence taken before the Royal Commission on Opium between 18th November and 29th December 1893; with Appendices*, Vol. II. (Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1894). Evidence of Dr. Kailas Chunder Bose, 28 November 1893; Dr. Hiralal Ghose. 28 November 1893.[Back.](#)

Note 76: RNNB. *Modern Review* (Calcutta), August 1924.[Back.](#)

Note 77: Auckland to J.C. Melville, 6 August 1837. Auckland Private Letterbook, Vol. III, No. II. British Museum, Additional Manuscripts 37691. [Back.](#)

Note 78: Minute by Governor General Auckland. "Opium Question" July 29, 1837. Auckland Minute Books, Vol II. British Museum, Additional Manuscripts 37, 710.[Back.](#)

Note 79: *Draft Bill to prohibit the practice of wagering on the price of opium in the United Provinces*. Home Judicial. A. October 1911. No. 165[Back.](#)

Note 80: WBSA. Police. Aug. 1925. P 2P-38. Proc. 65-67. [Back.](#)

Note 81: WBSA. Police. May 1925. P 2P-38. Proc. 389-392.[Back.](#)

Note 82: *The Public Gambling (CP Amendment) Bill. Extracts from the CP Legislative Council*. NAI. Home Police. File 24/16/1926. [Back.](#)

Note 83: WBSA. Poll. Police. *Gambling on Opium Figures*. P 4G/2. 1925.[Back.](#)

Note 84: Letter from C. J. Stevenson-Moore, CVO Chief Secretary, to Government of Bengal, Political Department, to Secretary of the Government of India, Home Dept. "Proposed legislation for the suppression of "Cotton Gambling" in Bengal." Home Police A. April 1912. 116-118. (Author: please clarify citation)[Back.](#)

Note 85: *Bengal Cotton Gambling Ordinance*, 1912. NAI. Home/Home. July 1913. Pro NO 25. [Back.](#)

- Note 86:** Home Police. April 1912. 116-8 (A)., 1-8.[Back.](#)
- Note 87:** WBSA. Poll. Police. *Gambling on Opium Figures*. P 4G/2. 1925. [Back.](#)
- Note 88:** *Bengalee* (Calcutta), 6 September 1905.[Back.](#)
- Note 89:** Ibid.[Back.](#)
- Note 90:** Ibid.[Back.](#)
- Note 91:** RNNB. *Bengalee* (Calcutta), 15 December 1917.[Back.](#)
- Note 92:** RNNB. *Nayak* (Calcutta), 21 May 1918. [Back.](#)
- Note 93:** RNNB. *Bengalee* (Calcutta), 1 March 1918.[Back.](#)
- Note 94:** RNNB. *Barisal Hitashi* (Bansal), 27 May 1918.[Back.](#)
- Note 95:** RNNB. *Bangali* (Calcutta), 19 June 1918.[Back.](#)
- Note 96:** RNNB. *Jyoti* (Chittagong), 2 January 1919, and *Bangali* (Calcutta) Jan. 9, 1919.[Back.](#)
- Note 97:** RNNB. *Nayak* (Calcutta), 22 August 1918.[Back.](#)
- Note 98:** RNNB. *Nayak* (Calcutta), 4 September 1918.[Back.](#)
- Note 99:** RNNB. *Bangavasi* (Calcutta), 23 November 1918.[Back.](#)
- Note 100:** See chapter five for a fuller discussion of the leadership crisis.[Back.](#)
- Note 101:** RNNB. *Dainik Bharat Mitra* 17 April 1919.[Back.](#)
- Note 102:** RNNB. *Samyavadi* (Calcutta), 7 May 1920.[Back.](#)
- Note 103:** RNNB. *Bangali* (Calcutta), 19 April 1919.[Back.](#)
- Note 104:** RNNB. *Bangali* (Calcutta), 14 May 1919.[Back.](#)
- Note 105:** RNNB. *Dainik Basumati* (Calcutta), 23 August 1919.[Back.](#)
- Note 106:** RNNB. *Nayak* 10 September 1919.[Back.](#)
- Note 107:** RNNB. *Dainik Basumati* (Calcutta), 17 August 1921; 23 August 1921.[Back.](#)
- Note 108:** RNNB. *Bangali* (Calcutta), 30 August 1919.[Back.](#)
- Note 109:** RNNB. *Nayak* (Calcutta), 2 September 1919.[Back.](#)
- Note 110:** RNNB. *Mohammadi* 13 September 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 111: RNNB. *Nayak* (Calcutta), 11 September 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 112: Ibid. Some, however, felt that the riots were an echo of the Shahabad cow-killing riots of the previous year. These so-called "*korboni*" (sacrifice) riots had reputedly spread from the United Provinces and Bihar into Calcutta.

[Back.](#)

Note 113: RNNB. *Dainik Basumati* (Calcutta), 11 September 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 114: RNNB. *Nayak* (Calcutta), 11 September 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 115: RNNB. *Dainik Basumati* (Calcutta), 12 September 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 116: RNNB. *Nayak* (Calcutta), 16 September 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 117: RNNB. *Dainik Basumati* (Calcutta), 12 September 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 118: RNNB. *Nayak* (Calcutta), 11 September 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 119: General Department. Misc. Branch. File No. 3W/12. B October 1918. No. 66-68.[Back.](#)

Note 120: RNNB. *Dainik Basumati* (Calcutta), 8 July 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 121: RNNB. *Bangali* (Calcutta), 7 May 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 122: RNNB. *Nayak* (Calcutta), 30 May 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 123: The 1918 riots were partly explained in the colonial archives by the Marwaris evicting Muslims from property purchased from the Calcutta Improvement Trust. (Home Poll. Nov. 1918. 164-201A: 5) On the 1926 riots, see *Representation of the Marwari Association on communal question arising out of the Calcutta riots*. (Home Poll. Dept. Poll. Branch. 1926. File No. 220 SI 1-2) The Honorary Secretary of the Marwari Association wrote that Muslims were solely responsible for the riots, and desecrated many Jain and Hindu temples. The petition asked the government to give Marwaris licenses for firearms so they could remain in the Burabazar area adjoining Muslim neighborhoods. Also see Home Poll. 11/VII/1926 and Home Political 1926 F 205:8-14 for more on the Marwari Associations comments on the riots.[Back.](#)

Note 124: Modi, *Desh ke Itihas Mein Marwari Jati ka Sthan*, 694.[Back.](#)

Note 125: Geoffrey Moorhouse. *Calcutta: The City Revealed* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 171.[Back.](#)

Note 126: Arjun Appadurai. "Introduction," *Social Life of Things*, [Back.](#)

Note 127: George Watts, "Ghee," in *Dictionary of the Economic Products of*

India (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1972): 491—498.[Back.](#)

Note 128: Ibid., 494.[Back.](#)

Note 129: Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 370.[Back.](#)

Note 130: K. T. Achaya, *Indian Food: A Historical Companion* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 37.[Back.](#)

Note 131: Ibid., 47.[Back.](#)

Note 132: R. S. Khare, *Culture and Reality: Essays on the Hindu System of Managing Foods* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1976), 12. According to Khare, Hindus don't have a Levi-Straussian opposition between the raw and the cooked. This ethnosociology of food concerns both the relative ranking of individuals and groups who handle certain foods, as well as the intrinsic qualities of foods in relation to other foods (19). There is no one moral order for handling and distributing food within society, because food transactions are conducted in relation to individuals. Instead, multiple hierarchical situations exist. A good example of this would be the case of *prasad* food for the deity, which could not be on the same transacting level as for humans. The basic binary opposition is between *kacca* and *pakka*. *Kacca* refers to unprepared food in an immature physical state (such as raw rice or lentils), and is considered to be kin exclusive food. Untouchables can bring *kacca* to Brahmins without any problem. *Pakka*, on the other hand, refers to fully cooked and "inclusive" food.[Back.](#)

Note 133: Achaya, *Indian Food*, 65.[Back.](#)

Note 134: Ibid., 84.[Back.](#)

Note 135: Khare, *Culture and Reality*, 21 n. 8.[Back.](#)

Note 136: Jennifer Alexander, *Trade, Traders, and Trading in Rural Java* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1-2.[Back.](#)

Note 137: John Roselli, "The Self-Image of Effeteness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal," *Past and Present*. 86 (Feb. 1980): 121—148.[Back.](#)

Note 138: Sinha writes, "In this colonial ordering of masculinity, the politically self-conscious Indian intellectuals occupied a unique place: they represented an 'unnatural' or 'perverted' form of masculinity. Hence this group of Indians, the most typical representatives of which at the time were middle-class Bengali Hindus, became the quintessential referents for that odious category designated as 'effeminate *babus*.'" *Colonial Masculinity*, 2. [Back.](#)

Note 139: Lord Zetland, *'Essayez' The Memoirs of Lawrence, Second Marquess of Zetland* (London: John Murray, 1956), 80-81.[Back.](#)

Note 140: RNNB. *Hitavadi* (Calcutta), 19 September 1919.[Back.](#)

Note 141: RNNB. *Bangali* (Calcutta), 12 September 1919.[Back.](#)

Note 142: WBSA. Municipal/Municipal. Dec. 1890. M 20A/5. No 9-10, 321.[Back.](#)

Note 143: WBSA. Municipal/Municipal. Sept. 1890. File M (20-A)/5 5) [Back.](#)

Note 144: WBSA. Municipal/Municipal. Sept. 1890. File M (20-A)/5 5.[Back.](#)

Note 145: A *maund* is a weight measurement, deriving from a unit of measure in the ancient world, and under colonialism was also used by the British. A *maund* can be divided into 40 *seers*, which in the early 20th century eventually became standardized into 82 pounds.[Back.](#)

Note 146: September 8, 1917, Zetland Papers, 77-80, Nehru Memorial Museum & Library.[Back.](#)

Note 147: Ibid.[Back.](#)

Note 148: Modi, *Desh ke Itihas Mein Marwari Jati ka Stan*, 695-697.[Back.](#)

Note 149: Zetland Papers, 77-80.[Back.](#)

Note 150: Shri Gangaprasad Bhotika, "Marwari Samajkay Andolan aur Basantlal" [Basatlal and Movements of Marwari community] in *Basantlal Murarka Smrtigranth*, 82- 84.[Back.](#)

Note 151: More research remains to be done on the complicated nexus of relationships between Marwari businessmen and the Brahmin priestly community in this scandal and in other contexts, such as the Rani Sati temple discussed in chapter six.[Back.](#)

Note 152: *Bhejal* is defined as "to mix with bad ingredients, not pure, artificial, or to mix with inferior things."[Back.](#)

Note 153: Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings. 4 September 1917. Q and As., 672-3. IOL. V/9/1201.[Back.](#)

Note 154: The preceding two paragraphs draw from *Shri Ramdev Chokhany.*, 108-126.[Back.](#)

Note 155: Bengal Legislative Council Proceedings, 4 September 1917, 672-3.[Back.](#)

Note 156: *The Bengal Food Adulteration Bill, 1919*. NAI. Legislative Department, August 1919, No. 11-13. Quoted from "Statement of Objects and Reasons," 33. [Back.](#)

Note 157: RNNB. *Dainik Basumati* (Calcutta), 23 August 1919.[Back.](#)

Note 158: RNNB. *Moslem Hitashi* (Calcutta), 26 August 1919.[Back.](#)

Note 159: RNNB. *Midnapore Hitashi*, 1 September 1919.[Back.](#)

Note 160: *The Bengal Food Adulteration Bill, 1919*. NAI. Legislative Department, August 1919, No. 11-13. Chapter II. General Provisions - Clause 6, 11. [Back.](#)

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Note 162: RNNB. *Hitavadi* (Calcutta), 31 May 1918.[Back.](#)

Note 163: RNNB. *Darsak* (Calcutta), 30 August 1919.[Back.](#)

Note 164: RNNB. *Dainik Basumati* (Calcutta), 26 February 1920.[Back.](#)

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Note 171: "Ulfa forces exodus of Marwaris," *Telegraph* (Calcutta), 25 January 1990.[Back.](#)

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