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A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE*

SHRUTI KAPILA
Faculty of History, University of Cambridge
E-mail: sk555@cam.ac.uk

This essay revises the common assumption that non-violence has been central to political modernity in India. The "extremist" nationalist B. G. Tilak, through a foundational philosophical reinterpretation of the Bhagavad Gita, created a modern theology of the Indian "political". Tilak did so by directly confronting the question of the possibility of the "event" of war and the ethics of the conversion of kinsmen into enemies. Writing in the aftermath of the Swadeshi movement and from a prison cell in Rangoon, Tilak interpreted action as sacrificial duty that created a vocabulary of violence in which killing was naturalized. Violence, whether conceptual or otherwise, was not directed towards the "outsider" but was of meaning only when directed against the intimate. Unlike the distinction between friend and foe that has been taken as central to the understanding of the political in the twentieth century, it was instead the fraternal–enmity issue that framed the modern political in India. Tilak foregrounded the idea of a de-historicized political subject, whose existence was entirely dependent upon the event of violence itself. This helps to explain both the unprecedented violence that accompanied freedom and partition in 1947 and also the fact that it has remained unmemorialized to the present day.

Life is the Life of Life

B. G. Tilak[1]

The history of India, and specifically of its nationalism and independence, has been portrayed primarily as a triumphal history of non-violence. The iconic figure of Gandhi has become a proper name, a name that stands for this concept, history and practice. European proper names, Kant, for instance, have long come to stand for and announce epochal change. To that extent Gandhi has seized ownership of non-violence and the annunciation of Indian freedom in the twentieth century.

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1 B. G. Tilak, *Srimad Bhagavadgita Rahasya or Karma Yoga Shastra* (1915), trans. B. S. Suthankar (Bombay, 1935), 44; hereafter *Gita-Rahasya*.

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In her reflections on the question of violence, Hannah Arendt argues that Gandhi and non-violence were possible in India because they had a "different enemy" than either Stalin's Russia, Hitler's Germany or even pre-war Japan. Had any of these been the enemy, she conjectures that the "outcome would not have been decolonization but massacre and submission".[2] Even if massacre there was in decolonization, Arendt raises the important question of the relationship between violence and power.[3] Her suggestion is that the British were simply too powerful to mount systemic violence of the kind that Stalin and Hitler had pursued. The rule of and by violence, she claims, becomes possible only where "power is being lost". Moreover, the available choice for the British Empire between decolonization of India and a massacre for submission exposed but the fragility of imperial power. Cromer, the Viceroy of Egypt in the opening years of the twentieth century, had feared the "boomerang effect" of the "government of subject races", but also mainly that the violence in these distant lands would come home and affect government in England and thus had the potential to make the "English the last subject race". For Arendt, Cromer's fears were not meaningless colonial paranoia but instead articulated an important historical problem, namely that violence without the restraint of power is the short road to destruction.[4] In this scenario, the British choice in India for "restraint" was in the end a choice for self-preservation.

Arendt's reflection on violence and power—profound as it remains forty years after it was written—nevertheless assumes that the state is the legitimate, all-powerful author of violence and indeed holds the monopoly on it. So while Arendt rightly puts massacre and decolonization together, she fundamentally mistakes it is as a historical choice and that too for one actor alone, namely the weakened imperial state. As such, the choice of killing and violence is seen to be the prerogative of the state either for action or for restraint. Or, more to the point, Arendt only restates one of the central concerns of the modern state and its theorization, namely its relationship with violence itself, understood either as its rightful monopoly or as the guarantee of its legitimization. From Hobbes to Schmitt this has been a persistent concern.

Yet Indians killed each other in an unprecedented fashion at the same time as they went into the unprecedented business of making a nation state. Violence and power and its role in historical change have been central to the understanding of

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[2] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Orlando, 1969), 53.

[3] Estimates of numbers killed vary from several hundreds of thousands to a million, while those displaced vary from seven to ten million. For a comparative perspective see Mark Mazower, 'Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century,' *American Historical Review* 107/4 (2002), 1158–78.

[4] Arendt, *On Violence*, 54.

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political modernity, at least since the French Revolution. However, rather than approaching the problem of violence as perennial to an imagined or concrete foundational moment of modernity, this essay will situate violence strictly in the context and character of the twentieth century itself.

Tilak, the key nationalist figure prior to the arrival of Gandhi, was, this essay will argue, the central thinker of the political in India. The same year as Gandhi wrote his seminal text *Hind Swaraj* aboard ship from London to South Africa, Tilak produced a comprehensive translation of and commentary on the Bhagavad Gita from a prison cell in Rangoon.[5] The year was 1908. These two seminal texts mark the two critical strands of modern political thought in India. This article will focus exclusively on Tilak's commentary on the Gita while on occasion reflecting on *Hind Swaraj*. This will sharpen the distinction between Gandhi as a pre-eminent ethical thinker and Tilak the arch-theorist of the political in India.[6]

There are three main claims and points of elaboration in this essay. First, violence has been central to the transformation of the meaning and practices of the political in India. Second, the capacities of violence, whether conceptual or real, were not directed towards the "outsider" but instead violence was framed as a matter of sacrifice and kinship. Unlike the distinction between friend and foe that has been taken as central to the understanding of the political in the twentieth century, it was instead the fraternal that equipped the political in India. At its most basic and its most excessive, relations between Hindus and Muslims in India are framed in terms of kinship and are referred to in terms of brotherhood. Finally, the question of fraternal violence is neither perpetual nor spectral. Instead, the article argues, the issue of the "event", understood here as rupture, has been salient for fraternal enmity and for its significance for the political.

The Self/Other dichotomy, both in India's past and in more recent writings that have framed the Hindu/Muslim distinction, is owed to liberal, colonial and Hindutva traditions. On the contrary, the vision of the relationship of Hindu to Muslim as fraternal is what mattered to Gandhi as much as to Tilak. As Gandhi wrote, "Any two Indians are one as no two Englishmen are."[7] Significantly and precisely, the fact that Hindus and Muslims were not merely relational, but were essentially the same, posed the most potent conceptual and political problem regarding violence and sacrifice. Gandhi transformed this fraternal relationship into one of "neighbourliness", whereby Hindus and Muslims could coexist with

5 First published in Marathi in 1915, other vernacular editions in Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Telugu and Tamil soon followed. By 1925, Hindi and Marathi editions were in their sixth print runs, in the tens of thousands.

6 Implicit here is an engagement primarily with Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* (1932), trans. George Schwab (Chicago, 1996); and Derrida's critique of Schmitt.

7 M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (1909), ed. Anthony J. Parel (Cambridge, 2005), 49.

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their differences held intact.[8] Nevertheless, even as it broke with liberal ideas of public neutrality towards religion, neighbourliness offered walls as a means of protecting differences. Tilak, on the other hand, focused on the fraternal itself and therefore the nature of the political for him was premised in terms of brothers within a house. Thus the spectre of fratricide that the Gita addressed was central since it overtly posed the problem of the conversion of kinsmen into enemies.

Balgangadhar Tilak, or Tilak for short, is received in commentaries and historiography as "extremist" nationalist, litigious agitator, nativist–chauvinist, and so on. Tilak is set in contrast to the opposing tradition of "moderate" nationalists, constitutional men and polite petitioners who until then had led the story of the Indian National Congress.[9] This contradiction between the agitators and the petitioners that led to the split of the Congress in the opening decade of the twentieth century is resolved in crass Hegelian fashion with the arrival of Gandhi in the national arena. This teleological triptych has formed the common sense of the history and politics of modern India. Far from transcending and superseding Tilak, however, Gandhi's ethical politics were forced to subsist with their alternative and, if anything, were superseded by it.

If there is a teleological pole to consider here then it would have to be the year 1947. The violence of partition in particular showed that Gandhi did not sublimate Tilak but that the latter outlasted any synthesis. To be sure, Tilak's thought did not in any simple manner cause partition and therefore the two states of India and Pakistan. But it did make violence possible, plausible and conceivable. Significantly, this violence was ingested or sutured remarkably quickly in the twentieth century. It is a striking historical fact that there have to date been neither commissions about nor memorials to the violence of partition. Rather than inciting victims of violence to confession, we need to ask instead how this violence not only appeared but was absorbed. There was no call for a "reckoning with the past" in the style of the Nuremberg trials, and even recently the very Gandhian invocations of "truth and reconciliation" elsewhere have remained absent in India. Neither the Holocaust nor postwar genocides offer adequate interpretive rubrics for the violence of the political in India. For the former and for other "totalitarian" practices, violence was the instrument of the state, and the latter have primarily been "sub-national" struggles. They were bids to

8 On neighbourliness as a Gandhian idea see Ajay Skaria, 'Gandhi's Politics: Liberalism and the Question of the Ashram', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101/4 (2002), 955–86.

9 Stanley Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the making of Modern India* (Berkeley, 1962).

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change a given equation among the established entitlements of groups, however erroneously fabricated, as separate blood communities.[10]

Gandhi's figure and ideals are not forgotten but commemorated in postcolonial India. As a non-violent father of the nation, Gandhi is particularly invoked after the event of bloody riots or a pogrom. As an anti-capitalist thinker, it is his face that adorns the Indian rupee. Gandhi serves as an ethical reminder of and a necessary corrective to the violence of the political. If, on the other hand, Tilak is identified as the political unconscious of twentieth-century India (as he will be here), then it is in his conceptual prison house that the Indian political has been held hostage. Needless to say, this is not to write in the vein of "India-the-siege-within".[11] On the contrary, the aim is to uncover and explain how such a significant ideological innovator as Tilak addressed the foundational question of violence and the political.

Thus this essay does not take the genealogical approach in viewing Gandhi as a revolutionary legatee of an earlier extremist nationalist violent world view. In other words, it is not through genealogy or even the law of subtraction that Gandhi becomes the philosopher that he is. It is certainly plausible that Gandhi usurps the earlier tradition at the same time as he subtracts violence out of it. However, my own inclination is to view Gandhi as a philosopher strictly in the way Gilles Deleuze identifies a philosopher: that is, he announces new concepts.[12] Tilak, on the other hand, was instrumental in creating a new normative language of the political. For Gandhi, as I have argued elsewhere, truth rather than non-violence per se was the oppositional arm to the violence of the political, and that has defied institutionalization.[13] Tilak, on the other hand, foregrounded a dehistoricized political subject, whose existence was entirely dependent upon the event of violence, and this view of the political has proven to be potent in postcolonial India. As such, being formative of a political norm, Tilak has no single legatee. Further, fixing the triumvirate of Hindutva ideologues—Vinayak Savarkar, K. B. Hedgewar and M. S. Golwalkar—as genealogical successors to Tilak misconstrues both Tilak and Hindutva ideology. The latter is forged on the premise of the Hindu as a separate and "pure" blood/religious community and

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[10] On genocide see especially Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Oxford, 2001).

[11] The sociologically robust but theoretically underexplained accounts in various now standard texts in the disciplines of history, anthropology and politics are more sure-footed on causes of violence and memory rather than on the conditions of the possibility and the subsequent absorption and acceptance of violence.

[12] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* (New York, 1996).

[13] Shruti Kapila, "Gandhi before Mahatma: The Foundations of Political Truth", special journal issue on *Hind Swaraj, Public Culture*, forthcoming.

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is deeply enmeshed in evolutionist ideas of race as nation. But it was fraternity—as opposed to blood community—that forged the political and its violence in twentieth-century India.

FREEDOM AND THE END OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The question of violence and the political has a specific historical trajectory in the Indian context. Sheldon Pollock has argued that sometime in the seventeenth century political thought died in India, signalling a divergence from Europe. Pollock explains this death in a number of provocative ways, notably including that of the death of the language of the learned, Sanskrit. The most challenging and productive dimension of Pollock's claim is that India had arrived at a "civilizational equilibrium" consisting in the comparative absence of religious wars and the "control of conflict"—unlike the situation in contemporary Europe, marked as it was by the "peculiarly violent wreckage of premodernity that produced its modernity".[14] The control of conflict in premodern India was "total" and significantly this control curtailed reflection on ideas of freedom. This was not because repression was total, but rather, as Pollock suggests, because the polity was marked by a remarkable degree of freedom. Therefore the lack of political theory and the absence of a vocabulary of freedom are the civilizational hallmarks of precolonial and premodern India. Pointing to the connections between moral theory and political thought, Pollock points to the significant loss of centrality of the pre-eminent text of politics (*rajniti*), Kautilya's *Artha Shastra* (Science of Power), which fell into obscurity after the twelfth century.

While this view of precolonial South Asia may be open to debate, it is nevertheless striking that the departures of the nineteenth century reflect precisely the mirror images of the absences that Pollock has delineated, in the specific philosophical concepts and practices of the modern subject or self. To be brief, conflict and freedom are the two fundamental concepts that inform selfhood in the Indian context from the nineteenth century onwards. There is, then, a deep recognition and confrontation with the lack of freedom in colonial modernity. While moral thought may have been narrow in its scope and highlighted the actions of the individual, the ethical domain was seen to be broad in its scope, outlining the collective conditions necessary for the freedom of the self and individual action. Though the *Artha Shastra* would remain obscure, it is striking that the Bhagavad Gita became the pre-eminent text in late colonial Indian ideologies, precisely for allowing for the ethical and political under colonial rule to be conceptualized.

[14] Sheldon Pollock, *The Ends of Man at the End of Premodernity*, Gonda Lecture (Amsterdam, 2005).

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For some decades prior to the opening of the twentieth century, Indian ideologues of various hues, both high-minded and popular, thematized the relationship between the subject, self or human agent and the necessity for ethical and political change. This imperative of renewal in the face of necessity can be called the problem of the Indian national subject. The Indian problem as understood in the late nineteenth century was not that human agency and subjectivity were imprisoned by the structures of industrialized society, or more specifically that they were alienated through the hierarchy of caste, class or rank. Rather, the imperative for renewal turned on the perception that agency dissolved into deep passivity, for which the insidious but pervasive power of colonialism was blamed. The purposive logic of the renovation and equipment of selfhood was directed towards freedom.

The sourcing of the freedom of the self took two distinct and oppositional directions: in one, the aspect of self-freedom was articulated as a common sensibility in which Vedanta became the primary source of inspiration. Vedanta was set out as a vision and norm in which the self was a historicized agent of action and change. We can associate this with Vivekananda and much of the Indian liberal tradition. A second stream of thinkers overtly reclaimed the vocabulary of abandonment, rejection and renunciation. This form of thinking took the material world and circumstance as an inadequate context for freedom and selfhood. This is the trajectory that Gandhi, Aurobindo, Tagore and the revolutionary terrorists would pursue. Underlying both these trajectories was the nature of human agency that was perceived in terms of a lack, or as under-determined and thus focused on a will-to-power as a will-to-selfhood.[15]

As several commentators and historians have noted, Indian modernity has been first and foremost political in nature and only then economic. The invention of the political subject or the constitution of the modern and national subject was the key concern of *fin de siècle* colonial India. The main issue related to the question of freedom: that of the self and of the nation. It is striking that the nationalist term for self-rule and the term for the mastery and freedom of the self are one and the same, namely *swaraj*. To be sure, though, the modern and national subject were by no means synonymous.[16]

Through the latter half of the nineteenth century, historicist and dialectical understandings of the relations between the subject and collective conditions, with the firm goal of freedom, despite variations on this theme, held sway. Whether it was the materialists or the idealists or an Aurobindo or a Bankim,

[15] Shruti Kapila, *Governments of the Mind: The Self and Its Sciences in Modern India* (Cambridge University Press, MS under review).

[16] Shruti Kapila, "Self, Spencer and *Swaraj*: Nationalist Thought and Critiques of Liberalism, 1890–1920", *Modern Intellectual History* 4:1 (2007), 109–27.

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there was recognition that nation, society and religion had set off in different and incompatible directions. The Swadeshi movement (1905–8) put the idea of a renewed subject to the test and its related politics and techniques set out to reconcile and connect these incommensurable domains. Swadeshi politics gave rise to sporadic violence in the face of the proposed partition of Bengal in 1905, which they opposed. Yet, less than fifty years later, the violent acceptance of partition would define the birth of the nation states on the Indian subcontinent.

EVENT AND THE SUBJECT OF ACTION

B. G. Tilak (1856–1920) was a key public figure and propagandist through the latter half of the nineteenth century who was associated with radical and controversial positions on issues ranging from religion and education to Sanskrit scholarship and law. Tilak emerged as one the central ideologues of the Swadeshi movement and was given the sobriquet "Lokmanya" or "will of the people". Beyond India and in the opening years of the twentieth century, Vladimir Lenin declared Tilak the revolutionary figurehead of Asia.[17] Lenin was not off the mark in apprehending that, although no communist, Tilak was a thinker of the revolution. The failure of the Swadeshi and its and consequences made visible the limits of possibility and the inadequacy of existing technologies of the political. Swadeshi then not merely marked a closure in the public lives of many of its leaders (whether Aurobindo or Tagore) but rather its failure made the colonial state and its repressive capacities all too evident. It was within this context that the political had to be imperatively thought anew. Far from being exiled from public life, the failure of the Swadeshi movement and his own internment in Rangoon forced Tilak to reconfigure the relations between agent and action.

Swadeshi failure pointed to the limits of the idea of transformation as a dialectical outcome of preparation and confrontation, commonly associated with Hegelian approaches. In historicist approaches an event—whether revolutionary or liberationist—is primarily expressive of all that was understood as suppressed, as opposed to the event as an opening of a new historical sequence. In other words, confrontation was an outcome of antinomies that were intended to be conclusive of a historical sequence. For example, events or protests surrounding the Swadeshi movement were a confrontation in search of a conclusion between the antithetical politics of empire and nation. Swadeshi politics, or the "dress rehearsal" for the Bolshevik Revolution, like the 1905 Revolution in Russia, emanated from this expressive–historicist perspective on the nature of agent, action and event.

[17] V. I. Lenin, *The National Liberation Movement in the East*, trans. M. Levin (Moscow, 1962) 14–15.

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Swadeshi politics, especially those of the "extremist" or of Tilak's brand, had made anti-statism its main doctrinal plank. More recent rethinking on the political, notably by Alain Badiou, has persuasively argued that the event by definition lies, and happens, beyond the boundaries of the state. This is because through law, policing and the army, the modern state categorically defines the limits of political ruptures. Equally, the modern state, while claiming a monopoly on violence, pushes violence to the boundaries of the state, quite literally through the deployment of armies at its frontiers.[18] Recent perspectives on the political have turned attention to the issue of the rupture as an event. In the light of these perspectives, it is striking that Tilak's commentary on the Gita set out to rethink precisely this task of the political. Tilak's commentary, while engaging with nineteenth-century preoccupations, including that of historicism, was ultimately a break with those forms of thinking. Instead, the theme of the subject as contingent on the event became the focus of his project.

For Tilak, and as his commentary on the Gita asserted, the fundamental problem in the Indian context was with the available understandings of the subject and freedom itself. Categorically, he claimed, renunciation was mistaken for, and overlapped with, freedom. Equally, detachment was upheld as a virtue and a matter of disposition. As such, the agent or subject seeking freedom, whether individually or collectively, was idealized because it stood apart from the worldly. Tilak intervened within these existing precepts by specifying detachment not as an ideal disposition but as one that was parochial to action. This form of detached action then was neither endless nor everyday but was to be marshalled as sacrifice, and that was what marked out the event from the normal unfolding of time.[19]

Alain Badiou's recent interpretation in *The Century* strikingly recaptures the situation Tilak faced. According to Badiou, this fundamental delineation of the event as neither historical nor quotidian resonates with the twentieth century more generally in that the century itself is seen to be in a confrontation with history. The twentieth century was, indeed, the Nietzschean century, in which the past had to be confronted and annihilated for a new beginning. The radical commencement of the future by necessity had to be taken to be discontinuous with the inherited past. The subject in the twentieth century has been constituted through a confrontation between necessity and will, predicated on the event thus causing a rupture in the nature of historical time itself. This has further been explained in terms of the salience and significance of war for the century.[20] In this view, rather than providing a historical conclusion, the event is the opening up

[18] Paul W. Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place* (Princeton, 2005).

[19] Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, especially chap. 12 on worldly and timely action.

[20] Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Cambridge, 2007).

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of new possibilities. It is this perspective on the event that will be borne in mind in my subsequent discussion of Tilak's Gita and the radical nature of violence that was premised upon a de-historicist subject. It is this that marks Tilak out as a thinker of a (conservative) revolution.

Stringently and stridently, Tilak was opposed to all existing understandings of the Gita that had privileged knowledge (*gyan*) or devotion (*bhakti*) as paths to self-realization and freedom. As part of this conceptual clearing exercise, Tilak argued that both knowledge and devotion were ultimately similar in that both these rival and dominant schools were a consensual privileging of the idea of renunciation as the final goal of self-realization. Shankracharya's method of knowledge and Ramanjua's devotional practices took the idea of desireless action (*nishphal-karma*) as a technique towards freedom (*moksha*), rather than a an end in itself. To be sure, Tilak took issue with every given doctrinal interpretation and philosophical argument, from monists to qualified monists, dualists, Vedantists and Mimansa philosophers on the Gita.[21] At the outset he accepted that there was a fundamental difficulty given the multiplicity of interpretations, but he cautions that the "Gita is not such a pot of jugglery, that any one can extract any meaning he likes out of it".[22] And his critique of both *gyan* and *bhakti* and of the elevation of *karma* (duty/action) surely emerged as the entry into his intervention through the Gita of the twentieth-century political.

Following the rules of argumentation laid down in the Mimansa tradition, Tilak departed from other commentaries by focusing on the event. Making explicit that all commentators had neglected the beginning (*upkrama*) and conclusion (*phala*) of the Gita, Tilak argued that this neglect had allowed for the multiplicity of interpretations and had therefore led to their "cultic" and doctrinal effects and readings. Existing commentaries had then focused on the question of love for the union with God as a form of detachment from material and conjugal attachment. Equally, the pursuit of knowledge/*gyan* had focused on the rigours of discipline as a form of self-emancipation. This focus on the technologies of love and knowledge in the pursuit of ultimate freedom in the form of detachment from the material realm of the world had made "desireless action" or *nishphal-karma* a didactic but an unexplained injunction. In short, pursuing desireless action as an ethical end would amount to, as he put it, "treating the owner [self] of the house as a guest".[23]

According to Tilak, then, the earnest pursuit of love/devotion and discipline/yoga, while worthwhile on its own terms, had left the central dilemma of the Gita

[21] Tilak also discusses seriously the canonical political theorists from Hobbes to Kant to British liberals and idealists and on to Nietzsche, and endorses only Nietzsche.

[22] Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 28.

[23] Ibid., 37.

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intact, and unexplained.[24] This dilemma or the event or the beginning referred, then, to Arjun's dilemma in the middle of the battlefield: to kill or not to kill one's kinsmen. It is striking that the commentary of thousand-odd pages was focused on this event alone and the dilemma that it posed.

By focusing on action, Tilak construed the self as neither natural nor historical but requiring a decision to become a subject through an event. To put it in terms of the Gita, as Krishna exhorts Arjun to war, he foretells the event and outcome of war. Yet the conundrum was not whether the war would take place but rather whether Arjun (the warrior) would remain Arjun (the subject) if he did not go to war. In short, the subject (Arjun) was cohered by the event itself. By making the event central, Tilak's comprehensive commentary took the epistemological and metaphysical approaches in both Western and Indic traditions together. The foundational aim and intervention was in the end a critique of the ethical and its subordination to the political.

AHIMSA/*SATYA* OR KILLING/LIFE

But life in this world, which is full of villains, is difficult.

Tilak[25]

At the outset, Tilak accepted that all religious and ethical ideas were about the categorical imperative of *ahimsa* or non-violence. Citing the epic of Mahabharata that had occasioned the Gita in the context of war, the epic had nevertheless enshrined the doctrine of *ahimsa paramo dharma* (Ahimsa is the highest religion) as much as the foundational Jewish and Christian commandment had privileged "thou shalt not kill". Non-violence was further recognized as the condition of truth. In other words, truth and non-violence were the universal pillars of ethics and religion. Tilak aimed to interrupt the foundational issue of truth's relationship with non-violence by focusing on exceptions to this rule.

For Tilak, the law of truth was not an act of speech. Let us remind ourselves here of the truth-dilemma that beset Arjun's older brother, that embodiment of truth, Yudhishther. Yudhishther had killed his preceptor on the battlefield by uttering a half-truth or through the suspension of truth. For Tilak this issue posed little problem in the sense of an ethical dilemma on the question of the utterance of truth or lies, whether in combat or in ordinary life. For Tilak, Truth instead was predicated on promises and vows. That is to say, truth was a matter of

[24] This position is in direct contrast to that analogously theorized by Foucault which posits labour (*oekesis*) and love (*eros*) as techniques for the will-to-selfhood. Michel Foucault, *Hermeneutics of the Subject*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York, 2005).

[25] Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 46.

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"performing one's vows".[26] As such, promises made or vows taken even in dream states had a higher import than the speech act of truth or non-truth per se.

Truth or *satya* was neither the obstacle nor the imperative. Both law and ethics for Tilak had dealt with this problem, thus allowing for exceptions and subtle distinctions between truth and falsehood.[27] Having accepted the virtue of truth, he constantly reminds the reader that the central actor of the Gita is Arjun, the ace warrior, rather than Yudhisther the ideal and truth-seeking king. Further, Tilak was less interested in the Gandhian—or what one might term the Foucauldian—theme of techniques and their constitution of the subject. In a move typical of the systematic thinker/philosopher, such issues of techniques of truth, for instance, were relegated and bracketed with aspects of conduct. In short, conduct, for Tilak, was a subset or a detail of ethics.[28]

More to the point, Tilak understood truth as part of nature: even if it was relegated to conduct, truth was not a matter of cultivation. For Tilak, commandments and moral injunctions, whether about non-violence/harmlessness or about truth, were problematic in that they were merely injunctions which then demanded only a non-reflexive obedience. Thus ethical commandments could only be a question of fidelity to a certain precept. In other words, such commandments did not possess any reflexive importance in terms of discrimination or judgement.[29] Tilak writes, "the root meaning of the word *satya* is 'which exists', that is, 'which never ceases to exist', or which is not touched by the past, present or the future".[30] All religions, including Vedic literature, had thus extolled truth. What is striking is that truth was not a virtue, but a passive value that "dignified" not humanity, but, as he put it, "the Earth".

Tilak did not relate the structural salience of truth for non-violence that he acknowledged but instead jeopardized this relationship by introducing the fundamental metaphor of theft and the figure of the thief. The issue was not the opposition of truth versus non-truth for Tilak; rather he endeavours to show that non-truth was a dimension of truth itself. Gandhi, too, often had recourse to the figure of the thief. Theft had been a common metaphor for colonialism. As Gandhi asks in *Hind Swaraj*, "what if the thief is your father?" Truth and the kin

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[26] Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 52.

[27] Here he takes the example of the truth-seeking Harischandra and the figure of St Paul.

[28] Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 15–39.

[29] This is why this interpretation is an act of political theory/philosophy despite being steeped in a theological exegesis, and why no pundit in Benares or even Poona recognized it as part of a *shastric* interpretation or textual tradition. All the contemporary reviews point to this. Conversely, this is one of the most popular texts of twentieth-century India and indeed now is received as the dominant reading of the message of the Gita.

[30] Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 45.

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or the fraternal were directly related to each other and mutually constitutive for Gandhi, and as such non-violence created the context for truth.

Tilak, on the other hand, argues that "If there is so much difference of opinion with reference to Harmlessness (*ahimsa*) and veracity (*satya*) [in law and ethics] then why should one be surprised if the same line of reasoning is applied to the third common law, namely of not-stealing (*asteya*)?" The question of truth was evacuated from the ethical compass through an epistemological clearing-house exercise. Theft was the exception that for Tilak made truth if not redundant, then a concept that opened the space or the conditions for the possibility of violence. In this vein, Tilak gave various examples that pitched marauders against innocent men or posed dilemmas about the possibility of speaking the truth to thieves or simply investigated the state of truth under conditions of violence. Just the way theft created the conditions of exception for the law of truth, fraternity or the figure of the brother was foundational to the question of violence. In short, for Tilak the law of non-violence/*ahimsa* was disrupted through the law of fraternity. Tilak thus broke the salience of truth for non-violence by positing theft as a condition of exception for truth. Equally and more potently he disrupted the injunction of non-violence through the figure of the brother.

KILLING THE BROTHER OR THE POLITICAL CONTRA THE ETHICAL

No: no life, no natural power, can be beyond Good and Evil. We should say, rather, that every life, including that of the human animal is *beneath* Good and Evil.

Alain Badiou[31]

The problem of the law of truth lay in its specific relationship with the law of fraternity. If for Schmitt the friend and the enemy and the possible but existential death of the enemy are central to the political, then the argument for Tilak is premised upon and about those very Gandhian and ethical concepts of truth/*satya* and non-violence/*ahimsa*. If for Gandhi the fraternal was the friend—or rather, the conjoined fraternal friend was what constituted the relationship with the "other"—it only follows that for Gandhi the "other" is both outside the self and categorically relational in character.[32]

Yet for Tilak the fraternal was a given relationship. The choice of friendship could not claim the fraternal, nor could the conjugation of blood make

[31] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London, 2002), 59. Original emphasis.

[32] On Gandhi and friendship see Faisal Devji, "A Practice of Prejudice: Gandhi's Politics of Friendship", in *Subaltern Studies XXII* (Delhi, 2005), 78–98.

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brotherhood an absolute relationship. Though inherently natural, the fraternal (unlike truth) matters, but not because it is permanent. Instead, for Tilak the fraternal was the only relationship open to the real possibility of conversion and mutation into enmity. The spectre of "O friends, no friend - to - O enemies, and no enemy" haunts the Schmittian political.[33] For Tilak, then, the political referred strictly to the conversion of kinsmen into enemies and the existential destruction of the brother. Neither the "stranger" nor "friend", the central categories that have informed writings on political ethics in the twentieth century, are prefigured in his commentary. Equally, enmity did not inhere in difference; instead it acquired the dimension of enmity in an event of brothers in conflict. This was because relationships such as those with preceptors, parents and kinsmen marked the paradigm of ordinary circumstance—the ordinary according to Tilak was seen to be an ethical state (dharma). It was only the mutation of kinship on the eve of war that had the capacity to disrupt the ethical and the ordinary.

Thus for Tilak the indeterminacy of the fraternal—at once natural but not permanent—is what demands ethical clarity. But it was only in the state of exception or in the context of the extraordinary that these relations were strained to their very limits, open to mutation, and that the ethical was put to the test and into potential jeopardy. A comparison with Gandhi makes the radicalism of this conception plain.

For Gandhi, arguably, evil was self-evident in as much as it was purely civilizational and included the extractive principle of capitalism. Gandhi's humanity was not so much lodged in the inhuman (contra Nietzsche) but instead lay in the dissolution of the human for the life of the brother.[34] A thin and vanishing notion of life for Gandhi nourished the abundant potential of human-ness. Fraternity/enmity for Gandhi, then, was not so much a relationship of virtue, whether of equality or of love, but only of self-sacrifice. In a passage on his views on cow protection he says,

> A man is just as useful as a cow, no matter whether he be a Mahomedan or a Hindu. Am I, then, to fight with or kill a Mahomedan in order to save a cow? In doing so I will become an enemy as well as of the cow as of the Mahomedan . . . If I were overfull of pity for the cow, I should sacrifice my life to save her, but not take my brother's.[35]

In comparison to Gandhi, Tilak writes only through the concreteness of metaphors as opposed to the concreteness of naming. In the instance

[33] Derrida exposes that underlying the desperately concrete idea of friend–enemy in Schmitt is indeed the figure of the brother. Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London, 1997), 138–70.

[34] Though at its limits *Hind Swaraj* can be read as anti-human.

[35] Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 54.

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of the fraternal, Gandhi undertakes the candid naming of Hindus–Muslims and the totemic cow.[36] This naming, to my mind, sharpens the distinction between Gandhi the ethical philosopher and Tilak the political philosopher. If we accept that to "force the naming of the un-nameable [particularly a collective/community] is the principle of disaster", the question arises as to why Tilak chooses not to name his politics or indeed identify Hindus, Muslims, or others.[37] This was, after all, the stuff with which his ordinary political life was replete.[38] His insistence on the event explains his preference for deploying metaphors rather than names.

If the perspective from the event that Tilak so assiduously follows is the foundational lesson of the Gita, does it not follow, then, that this deliberate namelessness was simply fidelity to it?[39] If fidelity for Tilak could not be an act of (ethical) obedience, it demanded discrimination. Even so, the killing of the fraternal was, Tilak decreed, to be undertaken for the protection of life. This killing or sacrifice, according to Tilak, was in consonance with the restoration of dharma (moral order), even if hostility could confer meaning on this principle of protection of life, which was understood as duty.

DUTY AND DISCRIMINATION OR THE EVENT AS EXCEPTION

From among the sacrifices, I am the sacrifice in the shape of a prayer.

Forgiveness in all cases or war-likeness in all cases is not the proper thing.

Tilak[40]

If Arjun is the central character of the Gita then Tilak expended significant effort on the negative example—not, as one would expect on the brother-to-be-killed, Duroyodhan, but instead on Prahladh. A virtuous figure in the epic tradition, Prahladh was also a follower of desireless action, who had conquered all spheres and had been involved in patricide. As in the story of Abraham, sacrifice

[36] It does indeed make more sense to read Gandhi via Levinas (cf. Ajay Skaria) since naming/other/difference/ethics are the conceptual repertoire. As opposed to action/event/subject/namelessness/political that cohere Tilak and are more open to the anti-ethical writings of Alain Badiou. Tilak is no communist in the making.

[37] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London, 2001), 80–87.

[38] The not-naming is specific to the translation and the commentary of the Gita.

[39] All the more striking, in that after the Swadeshi era and through the long-winded trial against the imperial state when the *Gita-Rahasaya* was written Tilak stubbornly refused any naming of his politics. When pushed, he did say that the only politics he had been involved with were "Indian".

[40] Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 407 and 45.

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of kin was central as proof of loyalty to the gods, as well as for the preservation of the kingdom. For Tilak, though, the example of Prahladh highlighted the central dilemma of discrimination or the ability to recognize the moment of sacrifice. While Prahladh had been dutiful and had sacrificed kin, he had misrecognized the moment or the event of sacrifice since (as the story goes) the sacrifice had been demanded in a dream. In the case of Prahladh, patricide resulted in dejection and the renunciation of the worldly. And though abundant in virtue, but not discrimination, Prahladh could only renounce.

Thus discrimination was essential to the question of sacrifice. As such, on the few occasions that Tilak mentions the anti-hero Duroyodhan, it is to signify his abject failure to sacrifice his self-interest which had then made war possible. In fact, sacrifice and duty were central to Tilak's conceptual repertoire. Singling out the key distinction between Western political theory and Indian thought that desirelessness rather than happiness sustained the possibility of life in the collective, sacrifice rather than self-interest was paramount. As Tilak argued, "For protecting a family, one person may be abandoned; for protecting a town, a family may be abandoned, and for the protection of the Atman [soul], even the earth may be abandoned."[41]

Theorists in the West, Tilak contended, had erroneously focused on happiness rather than on duty as the principle of life (collective and individual). As such, their insights into the political could only refer to the role of interest and reason to the exclusion of will. Yet Tilak did recognize that sacrifice had indeed been central to Western political thought. The problem for Tilak was that the sacrifice was conceptualized according to a calculus of interest, and, just as significantly, in Western political thought sacrifice was premised on the notion of historical time. Thus Tilak criticized Hobbes, arguing that for the English philosopher sacrifice for the sake of another person's interest was merely a "long-sighted variety of selfishness".[42]

Yet as he saw it, Indian traditions offered the alternative of renunciation as the creation of a subject prone to inaction, as the highest form of virtue. It was most of all this connection he aimed to disrupt.[43] For example, killing in anger would not constitute a discriminate act of war, and would therefore automatically preclude the possibility of an opening or event. Disassociating action from its "fruits" or detached action (*nishphal-karma*) therefore became the central aspect of Tilak's project. We should keep in mind, however, that this new subjectivity would not be predicated on utilitarianism, vitalism or intentionalism. Instead, Tilak's politics and his concept of the subject were based on a system of discrimination of action,

41 Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 558.

42 Ibid., 113.

43 Shruti Kapila, "Self, Spencer and *Swaraj*".

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namely action as sacrifice (*yagya*), as duty (*kartavya*) and as desireless (*karma*).[44] Within this system, desireless action was suborned to action as sacrifice—a matter of disposition—and indeed even duty—discrimination was in fact the only duty. The subject—in his influential terms, *stithiprajna*—would be constituted as it is via desireless action, a type of action isolated from its own consequences and therefore immutable through historical motion.

Stithiprajna, as a detached subject or an identity that is immutable thanks to its immunity to attachment, thus comes to the fore in Tilak's reading. If desirelessness constitutes action, this subjectivity derived its immutability from emotionlessness; that is, an unwillingness to "move out" (literally *ex-movere*) of oneself. Yet the *stithiprajna* was not the celibate monk but rather the householder who was surrounded by pleasures. Detachment here has to be understood as a category of the world, a form of engagement with it.

Discrimination, for Tilak, was about knowing what is doable and what is not, being able to tell apart the normal time of ethics from the moment of the exception. While the former called for a submission to the prevalent ethics—the normative framework—of everyday life, the latter entailed the suspension of these norms in the context of macro-disruptive events, such as famine or war. The ethical in everyday life consists in the perpetuation of life; during crises, such as famine, duty becomes the protection of the good life (*bios* or valuable life), for the sake of which action that violates quotidian and ethical principles is justified by its feasibility. His repeated example in this context is the breaking of taboos and of the Brahman eating rotting flesh during times of famine.

Tilak makes a related claim about the taking of life. We know that for Gandhi the "true warrior" befriends or domesticates death rather than taking possession or control of the killing of the Other. For Tilak, however, the *stithiprajna* is exhorted, through the example of Arjun, to kill in order to restore the moral order; that is, in order to protect the perpetuation of good life from the irruption of evil. To be sure, the question remained how to understand the exact nature of evil. One answer that is suggested by Tilak is that nature itself is unnatural inasmuch it is sustained by killing. Evil for Tilak was naturalized, and lies beyond the boundaries of the human. From that we can deduce that evil is not imperatively linked to morality. The other answer that Tilak gives is that the modern epoch we inhabit is itself immoral (*Kaliyug*). This means that non-violence (*ahimsa*)—recognized as the highest form of religion—is suspended. Does this imply that *Kaliyug* is the perpetual state of exception?

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[44] Tilak's system hints at a pragmatic paradigm inasmuch as it hinges on the categories of self-knowledge and recognition/discrimination of the doable and the non-doable, or the possible and the impossible, which in turn are related not to historical time but in to the ordinary/everyday (*nitya*) and the purposive (*kamya*). Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 70–85.

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Either way, however, not all killing partakes in the realm of the political, in Tilak's view. Instead, Tilak constantly locates killing in its connection to the event and especially to war. *Yudh* (war), as the exception within the exception of *Kaliyug*, becomes the focus of attention. This is precisely why Tilak's Gita is an exhortation to recognize and declare a state of exception.[45] Tilak's subject, in that light, has to be equipped with the will to act on his discriminatory knowledge, which entails, essentially, the lucidity to identify one's brother as the enemy, the quintessential political act.

Tilak's proposed insight is the inadequacy and insufficiency of the ethical. Where the ethical could only issue injunctions to obedience ("keep going" is all it could ask), an eternal principle such as truth required discrimination in as much as ethics had to be rendered complete by the idea of duty. "Life is the life of life": killing and life were considered as co-constitutive. It followed that duty was an act of discrimination and protection of this principle.[46] Harmlessness (*ahimsa*) was suborned by the "necessity of discrimination of duty and non-duty". "The antithesis of the political", as Derrida reminds us, "dwells within and politicizes the political".[47] For Tilak, the antithesis of the political was indeed the ethical, or, in other words, the political was to be found at the margins of the ethical. And the reinterpretation of the Gita by Tilak was intended to invert this relationship completely.

The transformation of kinsman into enemy was a matter of judgement and existed only in and during the event, and was categorically not a perpetual–spectral enemy of the Schmittan variety. To exemplify briefly here, Tilak's commentary at the end of the Gita, on the *Shantiparv* or the time of peace, discusses the salience of closure, when precisely those who had killed their kinsmen had to then perform the death duties of their elders, brothers and preceptors. This, then, was the declaration of the end of the event, the resumption of the ordinary course of dharma or the moral order, as enemies were reconverted back into kinsmen.

The political, which dwells in the event, was therefore neither the culmination nor the expression of suppressed desires. Instead, since the event is by definition exogenous, no preparation was possible in facing it. Thus for Tilak the political was mainly about the opening up of the possibility of war. In short, Tilak's Gita was concerned with the awakening or recognition of the political, rather than with the naming of it.

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45 The "state of exception" here is not the same as Giorgio Agamben's in a literal sense because Tilak is not interested in the sovereign power of distinction between bare life (*zoe*) and the good life (*bios*). It is simply *apdharm*, or the suspension of quotidian norms.

46 Tilak, *Gita-Rahasya*, 41–9.

47 Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, 138.

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CONCLUSION: 1947, EVENT AND HISTORY

The political, for Tilak, in the ordinary, the quotidian or normal times, was understood to be a passive state. For Tilak and his times, the quotidian belonged to the British. The mundane world of employment, education, food, clothing—all latterly came to be identified as colonialism—were in effect deeply British conditions in India. Rejection, which had become the hallmark of Tilak's political actions, was thus not really a boycott of the state. Instead it was a suspension, rejection and boycott of the quotidian.

Unlike Savarkar, Tilak cut no deal with the British despite several offers of a self-imposed exile. In Savarkar's case, this compromise produced a secret though potent politics, and ultimately a conspiratorial one. The heirs of this conspiratorial politics have since been anxious to write and recast history in terms of the purity of blood and as entitlement to sole ownership of land. It is striking, however, that for Tilak the one intervention he makes on the "origins" of Hindus places these origins far away from the land known as India, and instead locates them at the outer peripheries of the Arctic.[48] Arguably, Savarkar and Hindutva ideology belong to the nineteenth century's liberal–evolutionist view, with the twentieth-century element of racial purity added on as a true claim to the state of the nation.

In this instance, it is precisely because the twentieth century's political life has been constituted through rupture that it has held several historical projects within itself, including historicist projects of the nineteenth century. As such, Hindutva and Gandhian non-violence became each other's twins with the potential of conversion from one to the other. In an analagous move, imperial liberalism and Nehru's liberal socialism were mutually constitutive and around the moment of independence the former was transformed into the latter.

The casting out of Two (or One plus One), or the problem of mutually defining pairs—Hindus and Muslims, men and women, British and Indian—is potent but not because of inherent and categorical difference. For, on closer inspection of each of the pairs, their apparently opposed terms are fundamentally the same or related. The twentieth century's answer to the appearance of difference has been to cast it in the frame of war (be it in India or elsewhere) as the existential destruction of the enemy allows the overcoming of division. Tilak deserves reconsideration precisely as a cautionary reminder of this foundational issue of violence as a condition of the political.

Gandhi's politics were premised on the fundamental idea of self-sacrifice for the sake of the "other". Tilak, on the other hand, made central a subject premised on action and event whereby sacrifice was a matter of kinship and fraternity

[48] B. G. Tilak, *Arctic Home of the Vedas* (Poona, 1903).

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and not otherness. Inspite of Lenin's appropriative reference, Tilak was not a communist in any way. But Tilak's philosophy shares one foundational element with the contemporary rethinking of communism, for it views the political in a purely singular fashion.[49] This is to say that it seeks the political perspective from that of the subject itself.

We are accustomed to viewing the story of India's independent moment from the perspective of the nineteenth century, seeking originary points either further back, or further forward from the Archimedean point of 1857. Yet the nineteenth century, as Tilak apprehended, had a view of the subject that had to be historicized, prepared, indoctrinated and equipped with adequate techniques. The purpose of such a subject was that, when ready, it could be sacrificed for a greater historical cause, whether revolution, war or freedom. Swadeshi-era politics had suggested as much—an excessive expression of such a subject—no matter whether examples ranging from radical terrorists to the humanist Tagore are considered. The failure of Swadeshi, then, pointed to the failure of such a subject itself. The nineteenth-century subject was one that was created out of a combination of historical necessity and will. Swadeshi marked out its limitations.

In response, Tilak broke away by positing the immutable and non-historical subject (*sthithiprajna*) that exists only through the event, and which then both founds and concludes the political. For beyond and outside the event such a detached subject can only be an ideal—but a necessary one that then creates the conditions for the acceptance of the event. It is in this sense that the figure of Arjun becomes an ideal. If the unprecedented violence around partition is viewed as a fratricide and as an event, instead of the expression of millennial or primordial hatred, it could be sutured rather than memorialized. The radical but non-revolutionary potential of violence needs to be appended and understood within this context that has imbued and informed the political anew in the twentieth century.[50] It is precisely in this context that violence—towards one's own—alone provided the conditions of freedom.

Tilak's silence on the naming of a collective Hindu or Muslim betrayed an imperative quality of truth, the quality that truth is invisible. The event, then, is an opening that points to new possibilities as much as it produces consequences. The year 1947 as the event produced the nation state as a consequence and as a pure fact. Truth can only appear as visible, or rather be apprehended, managed and retold, through the state. In this sense the state constitutes history. Since partition violence and fratricide lay beyond the state, as opposed to freedom that the state annexed, this violence remains unmemorialized.

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49 Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics* (London, 2005).

50 On Hindutva and sacrifice see P. Ghassem-Fachandi's forthcoming work.

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On midnight of 15 August 1947 we know that Nehru declared India's independence as a matter of a "tryst with its destiny". This misspells or misnames the moment. In one sense Nehru betrays his unflinching fidelity to the liberal historicism in which 1947 marked out the rightful but inevitable placing of India into a free state. According to this logic, it was fated (though fought for) for India to be a free nation state. Nehru misrecognized it, first as a sequential moment in historical time and second as a matter of destiny. In fact, it was a rupture, an opening and an event that inaugurated history itself.

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