

Abhilash Pillai's *Midnight's Children*: Performing Politics through Optics

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Abhilash Pillai's stage adaptation of Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (2005–6) introduced a new visual language to Indian theatre, conceiving performance between theatre and cinema. Pillai's work presents history as memory, amnesia and re-remembering within the framework of a multisensorial scenography that largely uses the vocabularies of the Bollywood film industry. The politics of the performance lies less in the thematic than in its optical dynamics, different as they are from both scene painting and the aestheticization of the public sphere. The production shows how theatre experience in a media society may primarily build on the perceptual, but without dismissing text or suspending the cognitive altogether. The visual media are used more as an intervention in politico-aesthetic discourse than as mere technology. As I explain the reasons for the long absence of any scholarly study of the production, I also consider its relevance to the current political scene in India.

Abhilash Pillai's¹ stage adaptation of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*,² produced with his final-year students at the National School of Drama, New Delhi, in 2005, introduced a new visual aesthetic to Indian theatre dealing with the political history of a nation. It also featured in the National School of Drama's Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM) 2006 before premiering as the inaugural show at the Biennale Bonn Festival the same year. Though not performed widely or for long, which is common for most theatrical productions with students as actors, the theatrical language of this adaptation influenced many, including some of Pillai's fellow theatre-makers.³ Unfortunately, the production received little scholarly attention in those days. While searching for a full-length critical study of it, one only comes across short reviews or interviews with its director. One reason could be that theatre scholarship in India remained largely limited to analyses of playtexts until recently. While Himanshu Joshi's text, which Pillai used, was never published, the performance, for its remarkably new language, might have long appeared too radical for theatre scholars in India to qualify as theatre. Theatre critic Kavita Nagpal described Pillai's work as an accomplishment of the 'wildly unfeasible' task of capturing a fabulist narrative 'in any visual performing art structure of a few hours' duration',⁴ but she did not engage in any serious study of it beyond her review for a newspaper. It is worth noting that Pillai consulted Rushdie during the making of his play and shared with him material relating to the Delhi productions, and that Rushdie congratulated him on their positive reception in an email of 8 February 2006.⁵ The

fortieth anniversary of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) is a welcome occasion for a theatre scholar in India to revisit Pillai's stage adaptation, albeit long after its last production in 2006. Relating the personal story of the narrator-protagonist, born on the hour of India's independence (1947), the novel becomes a commentary on the history of pre- and post-Partition India with its contradictions, failures and triumphs. The play, in presenting the momentous events primarily through optics, makes that history more sensorily compelling. Revisiting this production after the attack on Rushdie in August 2022 gains another layer of significance. In India, many tacitly referred to the attack by merely citing *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Rushdie's fourth novel, which incurred Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwa against him, but remained silent on the novelist's views on an intolerant India that he had expressed a year before.

There has been significant politico-cultural change in India since 2006, but this rather relates to the play's continuing relevance as well as explains my return to the work at this point. Serial blasts in Mumbai and Delhi between 2006 and 2008, especially the deadly militant attacks on several buildings in Mumbai in 2008; the increasingly strained relationship between India and Pakistan around the Kashmir conflict; the rising inflation in 2009 and scams reaching a new height under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA II) government eventually swung most Indian voters from the Congress Party to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) with Narendra Modi as its poster boy for change. Modi rode on the waves of the Hindu(tva) campaign that culminated in his landslide victory in the 2014 parliamentary elections. Although he began with economic reforms and promises of equal justice and employment, his rule, particularly the second term in office since 2019, has been fraught with divisive domestic politics and communal disharmony.⁶ His leadership is marked by close-fisted treatment of the political opposition, denial of the right to protest, threats to media houses critical of the government, and crony capitalism. While the making of post-colonial India defines the play's core, these contemporary issues broaden the perspectives and modes of its readings.

Confronted with the challenge of staging a political fable, Pillai decided to go beyond, but not dismiss, text-based dramatic theatre by inserting visual media into his performance as 'a strong intervention and ... more as a discourse than as mere technology'.⁷ The story on the stage, like in the book, unfurls through narrator Saleem Sinai's remembering and forgetting of facts. It unfolds in two forms simultaneously: oral narration and scenic *presentation*, the former being different from development of plot exclusively through dialogue and the latter from scenic *representation* of a playtext. The telling, a 'narrative act', and enactment of the story through acting/action are not only accompanied but ultimately overtaken by different forms of visual presentation – especially video material and film footage, although stage design, lighting, objects and choreography are also significant in framing the narrative. Pillai's visual imagination, inspired by the scenic splendour of Parsi theatre as well as by the new media, defines his performance and has its own system of meaning formation through 'optical data' (Lehmann). His theatre develops through a contemporary visual vocabulary rather than visuals merely illustrating the text. The novel is broken down into scenes in Joshi's script that appear as film sequences marked by collage,

cut-and-montage technique, close-ups, episodic structure and kaleidoscopic rather than dialectical presentation. The action seeks no denouement, leading instead to consumption of 'scenes' – one after another – as unfinished products. *Midnight's Children* creates formal patterns often beyond what we usually understand by 'meaning' in the theatre that primarily derives from an engagement with dialogue in a preconceived narrative.

Rushdie's novel is built on the 'visual culture of Indian popular cinema' and produces a debatable idea of post-independence India, eclectically realistic and melodramatic at once.⁸ Ananya Jahanara Kabir looks on 'the popular worlds of Bombay cinema' as 'alternative reservoirs of cultural expression ... that enter the novel as compensations for those worlds lost by an earlier generation through Partition'.⁹ The novelist's growing up in the city that impressed him with its film fiesta, where everyday occurrences were no less stunning than the incredible events in Bombay films, perhaps better explains his choice of the film format for his novel. 'The metropolis of choice' for popular Hindi cinema, as Madhav Prasad observes, 'has always been Bombay'. The 'narrative geography' in most such films 'incorporates "going to Bombay"'. The city in the play, as in those films, figures as a character. We see 'a montage of ... famed tourist spots and other landmarks' as the protagonist enters the city.¹⁰ Both through the narrative and through the visuals Pillai's production also shows self-reflexively that 'the thing called Bollywood' has churned out films 'based on epic structures, puranic themes' and melodrama with little historicity of form.¹¹ It is also important to note that the play is conceived 'in between stage and screen'.¹² While the distinction between cinematic and theatrical art forms remains in place and the performance mode *is* theatre, an amalgamation of the two formal spheres is aimed at exploring the impact of their interaction on spectatorial experience. One medium is built into the other, refusing fusion but interpreting one through the other.¹³

The question now is what politics means in Pillai's theatre or where it can be located. Politics means what it generally does: ideologies and policies that run a country, types and modes of governance, dynamics of power, and the like. More specifically, politics in the play stands for colonial rule and anti-colonial movements, the achievement of freedom and Partition of the Indian subcontinent, India–Pakistan wars, the liberation of Bangladesh, the declaration of national emergency in India and censorship, ethnic clashes and communal riots continuing into the present, and the revival of the Hindutva project especially since the 1990s that currently demonizes Indian Muslims. The Muslim population in India must pay for their faith, despite belonging to the same land as the Hindus, because they are still perceived as descendants of the invaders from Central Asia and the Middle East who converted multitudes of natives to Islam more than a thousand years ago. The play's narrative builds on a series of political events changing the course of history in South Asia over a century, but there is little thematization of these issues in its making. Politics here lies in the aesthetics of performance, in its 'multi-sensorial' scenography and visual dynamics,¹⁴ which should not be confused with the aestheticization of politics. It is visual aesthetics, different as it is from 'scene painting', that constitute the political in Pillai's theatre.

Pillai's *Midnight's Children* is 'theatricalized history' with no claim to objectivity¹⁵ and with no originary point for the narrator himself or for his country.¹⁶ The 'chutnification of history' onstage,¹⁷ the abundant mixing of the tangy elements of history, collapses the past and the present into a palimpsest that shows the need for a performance language that is not based on linearity or causal logic. The performance comments on the political, but by treating historical reality as an open-ended discourse-in-performance. It uses signs that are largely non-mimetic, that are institutionally radical (theatre is an institution), and that function across a broad spectrum of sense and sensibility, acquiring a new politico-aesthetic status. The stage is structured after Escher's geometric grid of stairways to produce a 2D–3D effect of video images, footage and moving live bodies. Rothko's paintings are projected all over the stage, especially during the fading out of lights, to facilitate the transition of space in an abstract expressionistic manner. Painting, architecture, cinematic framing of action and video work combine to create multiple ways of *seeing* a historical narrative through time and space. The use of the bioscope outside the auditorium before the play begins and its transposition indoors on the double-storeyed stage, whose uppermost part resembles a large television set or silver screen, constitute the basis for Saleem's *showing* (*telling*) that is more important as a process than the *shown* (*told*). While the stage wings, inspired by large-size curtains of Parsi theatre, and the costumes are printed all over with the word 'chronicle' and fragments of news headlines and film footage floods the screen, Saleem's manner of telling the story frustrates any expectation of arriving at an authentic history.

The story comes to the audience mediated in various ways, but with an abiding sense of presence produced and maintained at the level of 'formal reflexivity' (Boenisch). The making of an independent India – visuals competing with text, sound and movement in forming the 'imagined community' (Anderson) – is predicated on the sundering of the whole subcontinent, dislocation and disintegration of families, fragmentation of experience, and discontinuous memories. The fractured chronicling is conveyed mainly in forms of film footage of historical events, video clips of places and people, and action projected on-screen like passing images on celluloid. India on the cusp of the anti-colonial movement and 'post-colonial modernity' is performed also by visibilizing the personal, the incoherent and the accidental that the writing of official history elides as excesses.¹⁸ The narrator's private story and the nation's political history that run parallel to each other are both shown as accidents in a tragicomic vein: Saleem was switched with Shiva at birth and the arbitrary Radcliffe Line brought about the bloody birth of the two new nation-states of India and Pakistan.¹⁹

Bioscope of past and present

The play begins on a note of great expectations about a new future, ensuing from the political independence of India at midnight. The portable-bioscope man sings and dances in the open, inviting the assembled spectators to watch a plethora of 'scenes' in his box. He mentions various places across the country worth 'visiting' in his

machine for their historical and cultural value as the drumming goes along. The bioscope as a kind of mobile theatre was a marvel to children and adults alike in India until a few decades ago, bringing the images of India to the doorstep in villages and small towns before the arrival of television. Santanu Bose correctly writes, 'the element of [the] bioscope, combining the idea of childhood, voyeurism and sectional representation of history of the novel ... got elaborated in the production'.²⁰ To build the whole play on this metaphor, Pillai used three projectors – one for the full white stage space, another from the top for the lower stage and a third for the upper part of the stage. The gap between the separate spaces for Saleem and Padma – Pillai splits their common space – also serves as a 35 mm film screen on which some of the visuals are projected.

The bioscope team enter the theatre, keeping the box on the stage and continuing with their folk song and dance, dropping hints in a trailer-like fashion at what is going to be shown on the stage, the big 'screen'. The bioscope man projects his pictures indoors – images of people celebrating the nation's liberation from two hundred years of British rule, places of faith and scientific research, scenic landscapes, and cultural-nationalist symbols such as the Tricolour, the *charka*, peacock's feathers, Mother India (referenced as Bharat-Mata in the novel) and so on. 'Bharatmata ki jai' (Long live Mother India) has become a revived slogan in Prime Minister Modi's 'Nayi Bharat' (New India) that now ironically aids exclusionary politics, mixing history with myth. In the film *Mother India* (1957), however, Bharatmata is a symbol for the integration of a multi-ethnic and multilingual nation despite the abundance of allusions to Hindu myths it contains. Even in its making, it reflected the pluralistic fabric of Indian society and art: from screenwriting, to directing, to acting (except for three male actors), to music, to producing, it was incidentally a work of Indian Muslims, and the artist's religion was never looked into as it often is these days. The lyric beginning 'aadhi raatka bachche' ('midnight's children') becomes the play's theme song, the first line returning at regular intervals like a refrain. The song sung to a folk tune describes the prosperity of individuals and of the nation, counterbalanced by nightmares, dislocation and loss due to Partition. Modi advises the nation to remember the horrors of Partition, but the remembrances today are mostly lopsided – Muslims killing Hindus (and Sikhs), putting the onus for the bloody event squarely on the people of a particular faith.

Pillai's theatre, like Rushdie's fiction, builds on multiple images. Scripting an autobiography or the nation's biography is likened to cooking/pickle-making, which requires numerous ingredients for a broad range of tastes. The mix-and-match approach to scripting alternates with the metaphor of a peephole that fails to provide a panoramic view of things but offers glimpses and traces of the past that need to be stitched together for the stage. The 'perforated sheet' in the novel is made to toy with a perforated chapatti through which Saleem looks at the history of a newborn nation as well as its colonial past, thus complicating the issue of perspective. The chapatti (also called 'roti' in several Indian states) acquires an additional significance in that it is staple food to most Indians, and also minimalistically metaphoric of the food required for one's mere subsistence. *Roti, Kapda aur Makaan* is not only the title of a

1974 Hindi film, showing an ordinary person's struggle to secure the bare necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter) that persists for millions even seventy-five years after independence, but became the Congress Party's slogan ahead of the 1967 general elections. The (perforated) chapatti entwines with the bioscope's peep-through to connect the viewing of film footage to the spectating of events on the stage as on a giant-size television or movie screen. Saleem is 'a narrator from the TV and cinema age, offering soap-opera style hints of what's to come', says Bidisha about the novel. Rushdie's presentation of his narrative simulates the 'experience of sitting far enough back at the cinema for the image onscreen to be clearest'.²¹ But, for Pillai, ensuring the clarity of the spectacle simultaneously for the audience at the back of the theatre and for those sitting in the front was a different challenge. He met it by arranging a constant shuffling of sequences between live figures on the stage and images on the screen.

The narrative goes back to the Kashmir of Saleem's physician grandfather Aadam Aziz's time (the early twentieth century), which is again mixed with other times and places of emotional and historical value to the narrator. The past is presented in fragments either as visuals or in optical metaphors. Aziz fell in love with a female patient in Srinagar (visuals of the famous Dal Lake and its surroundings come on the screen with a mythical aura about them) whom he could examine only through a perforated curtain. The woman's father, Ghani the landowner's blindness, together with the holes in the chapatti and the curtain, problematize sighting and with it the role of memory in representation and the writing of history. There is no teleological narration; there are abrupt cuts in the narrative, as there are in film, or arbitrary switches from one scene or sequence to another. Kashmir at that point in time (1915) is shown as 'paradise on earth', as described by India's Persian-language poet Amir Khushrow, free of heavy military presence. If the imaginary/fictitious film *The Lovers of Kashmir*, directed by Saleem's uncle Hanif, was the novelist's device to comment on the 'indirect kiss' in Bombay movies of the past, the film Pillai shoots for his play, under the title *Kashmir-ke-Ashik*, additionally depicts the choice in those days of the Kashmir valley as an ideal locale for Bollywood love stories (Fig. 1). The dystopian world of Kashmir – especially after the onset of mass stone-pelting on Indian security forces in 2010 following the indiscriminate killings of Kashmiri youths, the counterattack on the stone-pelters by the armed forces with pellets and bullets that continued into 2018, the promotion of terrorism by Pakistan, and finally the arguably undemocratic abrogation of Article 377 in 2019 – come to mind in contrast to the pre-Partition and pre-insurgency valley that the play presents.

With Padma's interruption of the narrative, it abruptly shifts to the scene of massacre in Jallianwala Bagh, Punjab, in April 1919: the firing ordered by General Dyer on a large crowd of non-violent protesters and the general public who had gathered at the fairground on the Baishakhi (the Sikh New Year's Day) left more than a thousand killed. The poignant event is documented through the footage of bodies scattered on the ground. The sound of guns and the cries of the wounded and the dying rend the air. Word, which once used to be the dominant element of theatre, now finds itself in a more democratic and interactive space with other performance



FIG. 1 *Midnight's Children*, directed by Abhilash Pillai, National School of Drama (Delhi), 2006, photograph credit: S. Thyagarajan.

languages, visual and auditive dramaturgy in particular. As the projected images fall on the live bodies of the performers, so are the shadows of those bodies cast on the images on-screen. Such showing radicalizes the relationship between theatrical and external reality, between the stage and the audience, creating a new 'dramaturgy of the real'.²² The events thus presented are in line with the fluid movement of Saleem's mind and his cinematic 'reconstruction' of truth.

Pillai writes in his doctoral thesis that he sought to make of Rushdie's novel a 'presentational piece' in theatre.²³ The story in the novel is told mostly in a 'once-upon-a-time', bizarre and carnivalesque manner that finds suitable semiology in Pillai's scenography. He combines 'stagecraft' with 'screen craft', scenography with cinematography, thus inaugurating an 'optical modernity' in Indian theatre.²⁴ Events otherwise momentous are shorn of their gravity and mixed with ludicrous personal details. The play *shows* after Rushdie (1991) an India that is a land of myths and prophecies interwoven with historical realities within a cinematic frame. The astrologer's frenzied dance with a broom in hand, against the backdrop of a large video image of the Mahatma with his associates, is a serio-comic demonstration of his magical powers to forecast the future of Amina's unborn child as well as of India as a nation fighting for its independence. The grotesque-looking man with his melodramatic histrionics and Gandhi exuding an aura of 'the father of the nation' coexist in a single frame that hybridizes (read: chutnifies) the irrational and the rational, the farcical and the serious. In retrospect, the serious and the farcical change

places in the public psyche, thanks to the ongoing vilification of Gandhi, who is portrayed as begging for freedom from the British, as well as to the faith that ministers today repose in their astrologers' predictions about their political fortune, especially on the eve of elections. The scene attests to Pillai's novelty of presentation: it is no representation of history or translation of an episode from the novel. The scene finds a new language close to its own time of production, the simultaneous use of corporeal movement and video play, in chronicling the political events of the subcontinent interlaced with personal and family stories.

The bioscope as the central metaphor continues to theatricalize Saleem's telling. Places and structures projected on-screen play a vital role in producing an image of India as an eclectic and palimpsestic space. As Ahmad and Amina arrive in Delhi, images appear of historical buildings and roads of the national capital – the Qutab Minar (which is currently claimed by a section of Hindus to be originally a temple, turned into a minaret in 1193 by Qutab-ud-din Aibak), Parliament (constructed by British architects between 1921 and 1927), Rajpath (formerly Kingsway), and so on. The direct screening of such images showcases the multi-layered, pluralistic and also troubled narrative of the nation beyond Saleem's fractured life story and unreliable memories, interrogating indirectly the far right's projection of India as a homogeneous people that blocks the historical-material-cultural understanding of the present. Rashtriya Sayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagawat's seemingly moderate message in July 2021 that being 'Indian' is following a 'Hindu way of life' that does not discriminate against the Muslims actually camouflages cultural hegemony.²⁵ As the Sinais arrive in Bombay, images are projected of the iconic Gateway of India and the Taj Mahal palace by the Arabian Sea (the latter evoking today the traumatic memories of the Pakistan-handled terrorist attack on it in November 2008). The theatricality of happenings onstage is in tandem with the screening of high-resolution, close-up video images that provide an 'intimacy of watching' the city.²⁶ Padma's vigorous dance, and the loud music accompanying the screening, index Bombay as a gorgeous, pulsating film city. With the dance coming to an end, Padma, short of breath, quickly summarizes for the audience (the way previous episodes of a television serial are summed up before the present one begins) what happened before Saleem's parents relocated to Bombay and insists that the narrator now advance his story.

Video footage and onstage acting within the frame of a magic show mix mediums to create what Cooke would call 'a new kind of perceptual sense'.²⁷ A relatively new theatrical language in India, this changes our notions of immediacy and onstage presence by inserting the spectator into the 'pictorial space' of video images that yield an experience of experimental cinema²⁸ and, at the same time, by taking them out into live action that offers a different image scheme with body movement, dialogue, music and set design. The scene of the births of Saleem and Shiva is a synesthesia, not synthesis, of word, sound (with its own materiality), silence and choreography. The swapping of the two babies, born to Amina and Saleem's biological mother, is presented as a magic show – magic characterizing an exotic India in the European/colonial imaginary and also popularized by several Bombay films in post-

independence India. The swapping, presented as a transformation of one object into another at an optical level, is immediately followed by the footage of the lowering and raising of the Union Jack and the Indian Tricolour respectively. The film images that immediately follow include India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's address to the nation in the historic hall of parliament (although Nehru is an unjustly discredited figure in Modi's India), the Preamble to the Constitution of India beginning 'We, the People of India' (which has recently been read aloud in public places many times by activists and artists to protest against repeated violations of constitutional principles and polarized politics), a glimpse of the face of B. R. Ambedkar, its architect, the swelling crowd of jubilant people, Nehru's visit to sites of scientific and strategic interest, and air force jets flying across Indian skies. It is important to note that all these visuals, from the black-and-white to the colour ones denoting the passage of time, are projected against the auditory backdrop of Nehru's famous 'Our tryst with destiny' speech. The use of technology or visual media combines with live movement that now resembles action on the reel. Lehmann notes,

While, on the one hand, theatricality is comprehended as an artistic dimension independent of the dramatic text, on the other, through the contrast with the technically produced 'image movement' (Deleuze), one simultaneously begins to realize the live process (as opposed to the reproduced or reproducible appearances) as a *differentia specifica* of the theatre.²⁹

This '*differentia specifica*' has, however, lost much of its status in contemporary performances, where the live is often accentuated by the reproduced/virtual, and the reproduced/virtual derives from the live (Auslander), forming a new pattern of reciprocity.

'Videation': political fiction and historical reality

The digital and the physical often counterbalance each other in Pillai's *Midnight's Children* in commenting on politics. He conceived a remarkable choreography to celebrate the birth of Saleem: the midnight child holds a crescent-shaped object across his shoulders (he is compared to a *badal-dhanush* (rainbow)) and enters the stage dancing to Amina's song, mainly swaying sideways as if he is in a cradle rocked by her. The dance is continued, later by Mary, mixing several kinds of improvised movement, accompanied by band music and the recorded sound of the rough Arabian Sea along the iconic Marine Drive in Bombay. Mary's robust dance is matched by the strong waves on-screen jumping the sea wall. It has the appearance of an outdoor scene shot indoors as used to be done for Bollywood movies due to their shoestring budgets. The scene by the seaside is cut abruptly for a transition to another location and story – to be precise – to a scene from the imaginary film *Kashmir-ke-Ashik* (The Lovers of Kashmir). This is a film within the play-as-film, which, for reasons of artistic economy, contains a handful of shots – namely the mandatory certification by the Central Board of Film Censors, the cast, a glimpse of the valley, and a love scene where amorous intimacy is symbolized by two roses

gently pulled by an invisible hand towards each other. Of these, the film censors' board has always had an inglorious history of banning movies on grounds of nudity, religion and ethnicity. The current political establishment recommended amendments to the Cinematograph Act of 1952 by moving the new bill of 2021 that would empower the Centre even to order recertification of already certified films on receipt of public complaints. The love scene in Pillai's film is typical of conservative Bollywood love scenes up to the mid-twentieth century – a sequence in *Johar-Mehmood in Goa* (a 1965 comedy) being an example, where the heroine (Simi Garewal) is singing for her lover who remains invisible but whose presence she feels in a rose that comes close to her dancing in the air.

Another cut, followed by another transition. The screening of the fictitious film is stopped as a man suddenly enters the auditorium and delivers the news of Gandhi's assassination – a critical moment in modern Indian history. Sacrifice, bigotry, riot and killing during and after the freedom struggle are compressed into the present scene in this intermedial theatre. Newspaper clips carrying the story of Gandhi's death and his pictures flash across the screen, while the news broadcast by different radio channels blares out. A plethora of clips from the national film archive builds a repository of knowledge about the Mahatma: a larger-than-life-size image of Gandhi at his *charka* that multiplies into a sea of spinning wheels manoeuvred by his female followers, footage of Gandhi during the satyagraha movements that include the historic Dandi March, and finally his tombstone with 'Hey Ram' etched on it (his last words as he fell to Hindutva zealot Nathuram Godse's bullets). Godse was recently glorified as a 'patriot' by BJP MP Praghya Thakur in parliament, although her remarks were eventually expunged from the proceedings of the session. Godse called Gandhi the 'Father of Pakistan' and held him responsible for Partition as the latter (respected in India as the 'Father of the Nation') was allegedly too soft towards the Muslims of undivided India. Thakur apologized subsequently for her remarks, but the BJP leadership distanced itself from her on the issue. However, her praise for Godse forms part of a pattern: in 2015, BJP MP Sakshi Maharaj described Godse as a 'patriot'; in 2017, the Hindu Mahasabha installed a bust of Godse in their Gwalior office; in 2019, 'Godse was "worshipped" by Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha leader Rajyashri Choudhary', a grandniece of Subhas Chandra Bose, who was later arrested.³⁰ The epitaph and the *bhajan* 'Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram' sung at Rajghat on the anniversary of Gandhi's death are used deftly in the play to contrast Gandhi's utopia of Ramrajya (symbolizing arguably the land of justice) with the far right's veritable war cry 'Jai Shri Ram' for a Hindu *rashtra* (nation). The carnage in Gujarat (2002),³¹ Gandhi's own place, then governed by Narendra Modi as chief minister, comes to mind as an absent presence. Switches between one medium and another – sound, optics and movement – are abrupt in Pillai's work, as required by a fast-moving film.

Richard Schechner once spoke about the 'postdramatic theatre of happenings', as Lehmann recalls in his *Postdramatic Theatre*, in which 'game' takes the place of 'story' and becomes the 'generative matrix' for performance. It also shows how the political can be presented in the aesthetics of form, in visual aesthetics in this case, changing

our long-standing notion of political theatre. In Pillai's *Midnight's Children*, the "dramatic" structure of stage fiction and situation' does not totally go away but finds itself radically challenged in many places by non-dramatic elements that include a media-based performance design (or scenography) and activities rather than acting in the conventional sense.³² Saleem plays an interesting role in Commander Sabarmati's murder of Homi Catrack, with whom the commander's wife had a scandalous affair. Saleem wants this simultaneously to be a lesson to his mother, an 'infidel' wife. The whole episode is presented visually using media technology. Saleem highlights and clips out letters from newspaper headlines that, once put in order on a strip of paper, read 'Commander Sabarmati Why Does Your Wife Go to Colaba Causeway on Sunday Morning?' and then hides the note in the commander's coat pocket to provoke him enough to kill his wife's lover. The whole act is conceived as a video game that adds an element of playfulness to the 'political fiction' that Pillai's production is. Saleem as narrator-protagonist stands before the screen on the stage and raises his hands in the manner of a magician, and a newspaper page appears on-screen. The close-ups of the page show the headlines distinctly. To form the word 'commander' the syllable 'com' is highlighted in the word 'committee' in the headline 'Goan Liberation Committee Launches Satyagraha Campaign' and subsequently clipped. Then the syllable 'man' in the word 'maniac' in 'Speaker of E-Pak Assembly Declared *Maniac*'. Lastly, 'der' in the word 'considers' is highlighted in 'Nehru Considers Resignation at Congress Assembly'. The other words also form in a similar way: 'why' is highlighted in 'Why Is Indira Gandhi Congress President'; 'your' in the advertisement line 'Does *your* chewing gum lose its flavor'; 'Sunday' in 'Sunday Blitz'; 'morning' in the headline 'Furniture Hurling Slays Deputy ... Speaker: *Mourning* [the 'u' deleted] Period Declared'; the question mark in 'After Nehru Who?'; and so on (my italics) (Fig. 2). Individual words formed from the extracted syllables now appear in order to form the full sentence on the screen, which Saleem reads aloud. The dramaturgy employed in this scene merits closer examination because it demonstrates that the visual language in contemporary theatre is not built on political indifference, as is often alleged by those against the use of technology in performance, but cleverly brings politics onto the stage by destabilizing the ordering logic of dramatic theatre.

Some of the headlines Saleem chooses for his target sentence for Commander Sabarmati form the theatrical apparatus of Pillai (who strictly follows Rushdie here) to bring in the relatively minor but interesting political and cultural details about post-independence India. India officially gained freedom in 1947, but Goa (in 'Goan liberation') was annexed in a military operation in 1961. The third headline refers to Nehru's reading of a formal letter at the Congress Parliamentary Party meeting in 1958 expressing his desire to resign as prime minister. His threats to resign when he was at loggerheads with his party colleagues over contentious issues were common, but this letter – after it silenced all present for a while – was historically met with loud shouts of 'No, no.' Saleem, however, does not restrict his references to politics in choosing the headlines for his ultimate purpose: he goes to a US chewing gum advert for the word 'your', which in turn draws on the opening line of a popular novelty song by Lonnie Donegan in 1959. The narrator also picks one of his headlines from

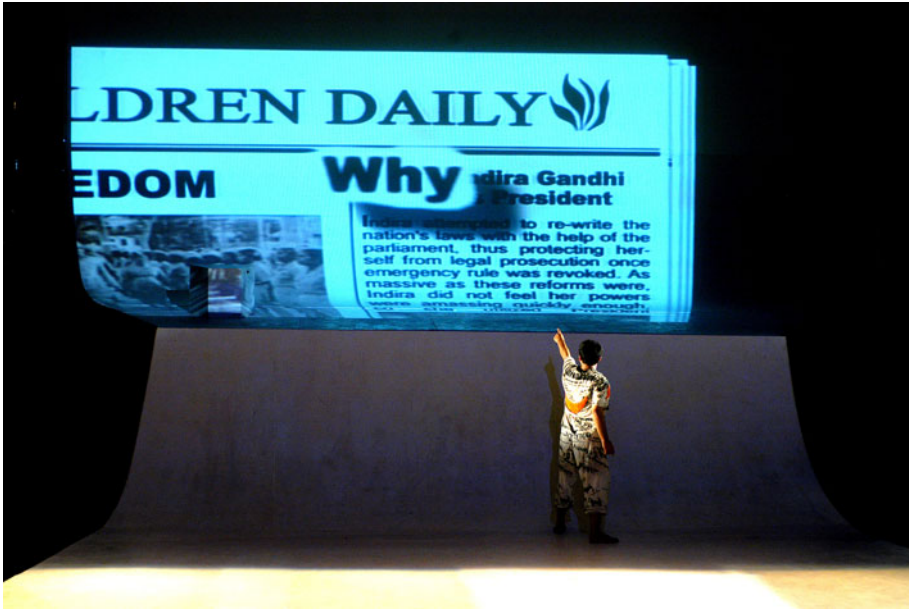


FIG. 2 *Midnight's Children*, directed by Abhilash Pillai, National School of Drama (Delhi), 2006, photograph credit: S. Thyagarajan.

the sports page of a newspaper, 'Mohan Bagan Centre-Forward Takes His Wife', for the last word there. Pillai's production, which still remains an adaptation of Rushdie's novel, thus adds a postdramatic twist ('cool fun' in Lehmann's words) to the form and meaning of stage action. The digitally operated scenography, which mixes visual dramaturgy with an irreverent use of the logos, takes on the form of a game, leaving meaning in the interstices of personal and national (hi)story. The headlines chosen are also pointers to the convoluted course and paradoxical character of India's postcolonial present, showcased in a frivolous and non-structured manner. Scenography here works by way of 'a union between technological and political display',³³ exposing the colonial exercise of power by a postcolonial state and illustrating the manner in which the political economy of a country is promoted by mass marketing of global products (chewing gum).

The narrative abruptly returns to the 1965 war between India and Pakistan over the possession of the Kashmir valley, the second after the 1947 war that forced Maharaja Hari Singh, then the Hindu ruler of Muslim-majority Kashmir, to sign the Instrument of Accession with India in October of the same year for military assistance from New Delhi. The accession never became a matter of the past but instead put the valley on the boil forever, jeopardizing the lives of Kashmiris caught up in the crossfire between the two countries, with their heavy artillery, and between the separatists (polarized as 'freedom fighters' and 'terrorists') on the eastern side of the Line of Control and Indian security forces. The presentation of the 1965 war in Pillai's theatre is along the

lines of the narrative in Rushdie: 'Nothing was real; nothing certain'.³⁴ The warring sides have diametrically opposite positions on who initiated the war, who has the legitimate claim to the (disputed) land, who politicized religion to build the nation, which explosions were real, and so on. Belonging to both countries, Saleem sees the war as a two-way conspiracy to eliminate his family and divest him of all memory – an irony that is theatrically realized in terms of setting and movement, as discussed below. Like Saleem's, hundreds of thousands of families then living in India or in present-day Pakistan, but psychologically in both countries simultaneously, were devastated during Partition. People living in border areas continue to lose their lives and property because of firing across the Line of Control in repeated violations of the first ceasefire agreement of 1949 and its subsequent reviews.

The killing of Saleem's family during an air raid is presented simultaneously through live performance and video footage of the war. The video material usually 'disturbs the traditional Aristotelian structure [of drama], denies illusion, and deconstructs ... the basic premises of traditional theatre language'.³⁵ Since Pillai rarely attempts representational realism, his 'videation' (Tasić) complements his non-realistic theatrical action. As the bricks and stones of the house fly about (not shown on the stage) following the dropping of the bomb, Ahmad and Amina slide down to the lower level of the stage from the upper. The air bombing and the destruction it leaves in its wake are presented with some deviation from Rushdie's narrative for reasons of theatrical necessity: the silver spittoon slips off Saleem's hand and falls on the level below, where he is standing with his sister Jamila. The sound of its fall coincides with the hurling of bombs (in the footage), and it is that spittoon which saves Saleem's life but takes away his memory by hitting him hard on the head. While General Zulfikar and Saleem survive the war, the footage shows mourning for dead soldiers, the laying of wreaths in their memory, and the fluttering of the Tricolour on the Indian side. Theatre, traditionally, has its own language that is different from that of television and film. But by combining onstage action with technologically reproduced reality, Pillai raises questions about theatre's antagonistic relationship with technology and, more importantly, about the superiority of live action over simulated/documented images. The combination of both forms of presentation creates a different perceptual register and problematizes the production of 'truth' as we have known it through dramatic theatre, inviting the spectator to participate more actively in making sense of how things happen in the performance space.

The narrative now shifts to the Liberation War of Bangladesh (1971), presented in multiple performance forms. It is here that Pillai depends as much on movement, including choreography, as on optics, including spatial design, although they are always interconnected. Saleem narrates the story of the war orally to Padma, who is cooking (real-time action) in one corner of the extended stage, separated from the narrator's space. The visuals of the war roll through on the upper part of the stage and Parvati shows her magic to Saleem at the centre of the lower level, the former documenting and the latter suggesting the arbitrary, incredible turn of events in the subcontinent since 1947. The magic show, a leitmotif in the play, is quickly cut and followed by Indira Gandhi's announcement of national emergency, signalling a spatio-temporal shift from the creation of Bangladesh to the 1975 India of political

ensorship and repression. One may compare those emergency years with the current BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government's flagrant violation of democratic institutions without declaring emergency measures officially. They have insidiously curbed freedom of speech as well as of the press and the media, mandated obtaining permission from the union government for holding seminars and symposia on topics involving India's 'internal matters', and conflated any kind of protest against, or criticism of, the government with terrorism punishable under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). The apex court of the country had to intervene in recent times to distinguish protest from treason, dissent from sedition.

Demolitions

In *Midnight's Children*, Shiva storms into the scene with an order from Sam (Sanjay Gandhi, Indira's younger son) to bulldoze the slums in the Jama Masjid, Turkman Gate and Karolbag areas for the beautification of Delhi. People who protested were either arrested or killed by Congress goons (Fig. 3). This also calls to mind the recent demolition drive by the South and North Delhi Municipal Corporations, bulldozing houses and shops without serving the essential show-cause notice to the occupants in question. The Supreme Court stayed the demolition for a period, asking the government not to take any coercive measures against the poor. The court would never rule against legal eviction, but it may be remembered that a 'five-judge bench of the Supreme Court



FIG. 3 *Midnight's Children*, directed by Abhilash Pillai, National School of Drama (Delhi), 2006, photograph credit: S. Thyagarajan.

had ruled decades ago that the right to shelter was part of the right to life and no one should be evicted without adequate compensation or rehabilitation'. The reality, however, is that the ruling has been violated by successive governments at the centre as well as in states,³⁶ and demolition of private property belonging to dissidents and protesters has currently become a tool to punish them. From declaring such property illegal occupation, to passing administrative orders for action, to executing the order has taken less than twenty-four hours in certain cases. Shiva is also charged with the task of catching people, especially men, for forced sterilization, which cost Indira Gandhi the 1977 general elections. He does a *tandva-nritya* on the upper level of the stage,³⁷ which culminates in Saleem's slow-motion surrender to him in a stylized manner on the lower level. The act of surrender is shown choreographically: two women hold a long piece of cloth behind Saleem, stretching it from one end of the stage to the other, and Saleem is gradually wrapped in it and led supposedly into the operation theatre of a prison for a vasectomy. The way Saleem is caught is similar to the choreography for an evil character in a traditional Kathakali 'curtain look' scene (*tirnokku*).³⁸ When such a character transgresses the limit, it is restrained by a long curtain held before it by two performers at either end of the stage. The play of power is theatricalized in Pillai's adaptation in a performative rather than dialogic manner. The costume (especially Shiva's dhoti, printed with motifs of miniature paintings, his gorgeous jacket and the colourful sari used to catch him), the choreography and light changes compose a spectacle that performs the episode with no words at all.

Chutnification

The play ends with Saleem comparing his project of scripting history to Marie's project of making *chutni*. The chapters of a nation's biography as well as of his autobiography resemble the large jars of pickle in Padma's kitchen and Marie's factory that function as a mnemonic device. Saleem's history is a tangled mass of memories – of dates and events – with no originary notion of truth or its veracity. To quote Rushdie, 'Truth is what it is instructed to be; reality quite literally ceases to exist'.³⁹ I would argue that in the play it is in the first place the currency of truth, as Foucault would call it, which 'depends on the types of discourse which [each society] accepts and makes function as true' through 'techniques and procedures accorded value' at a historical point in time.⁴⁰ Further, in Pillai's presentation of reality, truth is not only a product of the mechanics of power but also a problematic category through its everyday dissolution in hyperreality, a saturation of electronic images as signs no longer stably connected to the referent. Guy Debord's 'society of the spectacle' may not be irrelevant here, but the performance shows that it has later entered new realms of experience following the emergence of digital technology. It is due to the absence of determinate reality in the media society that *Midnight's Children* focuses more on presentational aesthetics than on representational fidelity, more on the stage–audience relationship than on the world–stage correspondence. The play does not totally separate the stage from the world or emphasize the exclusivity of stage reality. But it certainly employs a new

visual language, showing its situatedness in its own time and using the mode of communication that currently operates offstage. Again, because the act of showing is 'an act of pickling, and pickling is mixing ingredients in the way one's memory can order them or the way one perceives the truth',⁴¹ the play builds on the 'politics of perception' that leaves 'meaning' to the dynamics of theatre's sign usage, in the space between representation and represented.⁴²

The history of India as a nation is 'already bound to failure'. Saleem 'feels compelled to rectify it, but in doing so, he recognizes his own inability to attain absolute truth'.⁴³ Like pickling, the scripting/showing of history is also a process of reconciling oneself to the absence of pure truth, to 'inevitable distortions' in its representation.⁴⁴ *Midnight's Children* is a performance with a self-awareness of its incapacity to 'faithfully' represent external reality. A 'poetics of failure', to use the phrase from S. J. Bailes, determines the play's aesthetics.⁴⁵ What it achieves, therefore, is for the most part obliquely or fragmentarily referential, if not self-referential, and has the power to influence the spectatorial perspective and thus change the way we look at the world. The visuals of the pickle jars are followed by a series of discrete still pictures on the screen, not only reinforcing a disconnected and incomplete history of India as a nation state but also drawing up a world of signs and symbols that are only symptomatic of offstage reality: buildings and structures replete with colonial and post-colonial markers, Nehru delivering the historic speech at midnight, fighter jets flying across Indian skies, the living and assassinated Indira Gandhi, the Golden Temple, the parade of the Indian Army at the Wagah–Attari border,⁴⁶ the demolished Babri Masjid, India's first nuclear weapon tests in Pokhran (1998), the Tricolour and, finally, the rising sun infusing an absurd hope into a disintegrating world. The sun as a symbol may be read in contrast to Rushdie's words on hope in a 2020 interview:

When I wrote *Midnight's Children* I had in mind an arc of history moving from the hope – the bloodied hope, but still the hope – of independence to the betrayal of that hope in the so-called Emergency, followed by the birth of a new hope. India today, to someone of my mind, has entered an even darker phase than the Emergency years.⁴⁷

The play is a kaleidoscope of visuals and narratives that at best tells a story only partially known. The impressions of a collage (alternatively, of a montage) block the perception of dramatic logic.⁴⁸ Pillai moves beyond this dramatic logic of progression and keeps issues indexical and vestigial that speak to the audience primarily through optics.

There has been some controversy of late about the propriety and relevance of the new visual language in Indian theatre. I remember an incident from the World Theatre Forum seminar as part of the National School of Drama's (NSD) Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM) 2019, which was incidentally coordinated by Abhilash Pillai and included me as a speaker. A day before the opening of the event four veteran (male) theatre-makers, whose contribution to post-independence Indian theatre is recognized as highly significant, circulated a handout with their names printed on it. They critiqued the hierarchization (termed 'partialization' by them) of theatre forms

in contemporary India and the celebration of the kind which, according to them, marginalized the play text or narrative, used technology, and turned 'theatre practice' into 'performance-making' by imitating the West. Such allegations, however, have little relevance in our times. If theatre borrows from performance, as Atay Citron and colleagues observe, then performance at large 'borrows the theatrical metaphor'. Theatre and performance have increasingly come closer to each other in contemporary India – traditional Indian theatre is performance-oriented but in a different way – building new bridges between aesthetics and politics, and between aesthetic–performative methodologies. *Midnight's Children* includes '[e]xtra-textual and extra-theatrical components' and produces a spectatorial experience much beyond dramatic representation.⁴⁹ Shiva's dance on stilts is inspired by a type of martial dance popular in several regions of India; the dance and music, performed by the bioscope man and his team, come from rural India's folk traditions; the curtain used to catch Saleem is from Kathakali theatre. However, none of such performance styles are used in Pillai's work to rebuild a 'national theatre' by essentializing what should be considered native. Contemporary theatre in India redeploys, as Pillai's work does, political narratives in a way that makes allowances for a discourse in a mixed-performance format, reflecting as much on the very nature of the discourse as on its 'multi-modal expression'.⁵⁰ The twenty-first-century world, riven as it is with ethnic conflicts and refugee crises, recession and unemployment, hypernationalism and exclusionary politics, has forced theatre to expand its *form* beyond text and scenic representation in performing the political and providing the spectator with a greater autonomy of interpretation. Experimental productions like Pillai's have gradually created an audience base for the new language in Indian theatre despite initial reservations about it. Nevertheless, in a vast country like India, a potpourri of cultural and aesthetic forms, traditional and realist–naturalist theatres continue to have their run alongside new experimentation.

NOTES

- 1 Alumnus of the School of Drama, Calicut University; the National School of Drama (NSD), New Delhi; and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA), London; Abhilash Pillai is a noted Indian theatre-maker, pedagogue and, currently, director at the Thrissur School of Drama and Fine Arts, Kerala. During his decades-long stint at NSD as professor of acting and direction, he directed many plays in various Indian and European languages. Recognized as one of the pioneers of digital theatre in India, his works draw on a wide array of materials ranging from the traditional and classical to the modern, but their treatment is predominantly modernistic. He connected NSD with the Grand Circus, Kerala, which resulted in a production he directed, *Clowns & Clouds*. He has also served as executive director, Asia Theatre Education Centre (ATEC), Central Academy of Drama, in Beijing. Pillai has been honoured with the Sanskriti Award 2002–3, the National School of Drama's Manohar Singh Smriti Puraskar Award 2009 and the Kerala Sangeet Natak Award 2012 for his achievements in the field of theatre and performance.
- 2 The playscript was developed in Hindi by Himanshu B. Joshi.
- 3 The Royal Shakespeare Company adapted *Midnight's Children* in 2003, but Pillai had not watched it.
- 4 Kavita Nagpal, 'Midnight's Children on Stage', *Sahara Times*, 26 November, 2005, p. 34.
- 5 Pillai shared the email with the author on 27 June 2021.

- 6 People still remember that Narendra Modi was the chief minister of Gujarat when the post-Godhra pogrom took place in 2002, killing thousands of Muslims in the state.
- 7 Abhilash Pillai, 'Drama through the Lens', 18 February, 2007, at www.financialexpress.com/archive/drama-through-the-lens/192210 (accessed 8 July 2017).
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ananya Jahanara Kabir, "'Handcuffed to History": Partition and the Indian Novel in English', in Ulka Anjara, ed., *A History of the Indian Novel in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 119–32, here p. 127.
- 10 Madhav Prasad, 2007, at www.academia.edu/485968/Realism_and_fantasy_in_representations_of_metropolitan_life_in_Indian_cinema (accessed 27 June 2022).
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Markos Hadjioannou and George Rodosthenous, 'In between Stage and Screen: The Intermedial in Katie Mitchell's ... Some Trace of Her', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 7, 1 (2011), pp. 43–59, here p. 43.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 43–5.
- 14 Joslin McKinney and Scott Palmer, 'Introducing "Expanded" Scenography', in McKinney and Palmer, eds., *Scenography Expanded* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 1–19, here p. 5.
- 15 Mateusz Borowski and Malgorzata Sugiera, 'Political Fictions and Fictionalisations: History as Material for Postdramatic Theatre', in Karen Jürs-Munby, Jerome Carroll and Steve Giles, eds., *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political* (London: Bloomsbury), pp. 67–86, here p. 82.
- 16 Todd Giles, 'Writing and Chutnification in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*', *The Explicator*, 65, 3 (2007), pp. 182–5, here p. 182.
- 17 Drawing on Rushdie's use of the word 'chutnification', Ralph J. Crane titled a chapter of his book *Inventing India* (1992), 'The Chutnification of History'.
- 18 Florian Standtler, "'Nobody from Bombay Should Be without a Basic Film Vocabulary": *Midnight's Children* and the Visual Culture of Indian Popular Cinema', in Ana Cristina Mendes, ed., *Salman Rushdie and Visual Culture: Celebrating Impurity, Disturbing Borders* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 123–37, here p. 123.
- 19 The Radcliffe Line was hastily and arbitrarily drawn by barrister Cyril Radcliffe in 1947 to partition the Punjab Province and the Bengal Presidency of British India, primarily on the basis of 'contiguous majority areas of Muslims and non-Muslims'.
- 20 Santanu Bose, 'National Identity and Religion', *The Hindu*, 10 April 2014, at www.thehindu.com/features/friday-review/theatre/national-identity-and-religion/articles5894710.ece (accessed 7 August 2018).
- 21 Bidisha, 'An Introduction to *Midnight's Children*', 26 May 2016, at <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/an-introduction-to-midnights-children> (accessed 8 September 2016).
- 22 Carol Martin, ed., *Dramaturgy of the Real on the World Stage* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
- 23 Abhilash Pillai, 'The Space through Visual Language in Indian Theatre', PhD dissertation, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2012, p. 311, at <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/117728> (accessed 15 May 2017).
- 24 Jonathan Schroeder, Anna Westerstahl Stenport and Eszter Szalczar, eds., *August Strindberg and Visual Culture: The Emergence of Optical Modernity in Image, Text and Theatre* (New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019).
- 25 While defining 'Hindu' as all the inhabitants of 'Hindustan', thus subsuming other ethno-religious differences, the champions of the Hindutva ideology continue to pit the 'bad' Muslim minority against the 'good' Hindu majority.
- 26 Ana Tasić, 'Live Video Relay in Postdramatic Theatre', in Ivan Medenica, ed., *Dramatic and Postdramatic Theatre Ten Years After* (Belgrade: Faculty of Dramatic Arts, 2011), pp. 119–28, here p. 122.
- 27 Grayson Cooke, 'Start Making Sense: Live Audio-Visual Media Performance', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 6, 2 (2010), pp. 193–208, here p. 193.

- 28 Ibid., p. 197.
- 29 Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, trans. Karen Jürs-Munby (London: Routledge), p. 50.
- 30 Mehr Gill, 'Explained: The "Philosophy" of Nathuram Godse, and His Admirers over the Years', 2019, at <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-the-philosophy-of-nathuram-godse-and-his-admirers-over-the-years-6141588> (accessed 7 July 2021).
- 31 Fifty-nine passengers aboard the Sabarmati Express died in a sudden fire in one of its coaches in February 2002. Those killed in the fire were claimed to be pious Hindu volunteers (*kar sevaks*) returning from a pilgrimage to Ayodhya and burnt alive by the Muslims in retaliation for the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. The pogrom that ensued killed thousands of Muslims in Gujarat and continued for weeks and even months on end, making the ground situation more horrific and the truth more elusive. The post-Godhra carnage may be taken as the second major campaign of the far right for India as a Hindu nation that found full sail with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) coming to power at the centre in 2014 and reinforced itself with the party's re-election to parliament with an absolute majority in 2019.
- 32 All citations in this paragraph, up to this point, are from Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 26.
- 33 McKinney and Palmer, 'Introducing "Expanded" Scenography', p. 14.
- 34 Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Penguin, 1991), p. 473.
- 35 Ana Tasić, 'Live Video Relay in Postdramatic Theatre', p. 120.
- 36 Hasan Zeb, 'Amidst the Spate of Demolition', at <https://thewire.in/law/demolition-anti-encroachment-drives-what-does-the-law-say> (accessed 27 June 2022).
- 37 *Tandva-nritya*: the dance of destruction that Lord Shiva did to annihilate the universe in order to create it anew.
- 38 For details see Philip Zarrilly, *The Kathakali Complex: Actor, Performance & Structure* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1984).
- 39 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 373.
- 40 Michel Foucault, 'Truth and Power', in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 109–33, here p. 131.
- 41 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, p. 372.
- 42 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, pp. 184–5.
- 43 Todd Giles, 'Writing and Chutnification in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*', p. 183.
- 44 Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, pp. 530–1.
- 45 Quoted in Liz Tomlin, *Acts and Apparitions: Discourses on the Real in Performance Practice and Theory, 1990–2010* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 47.
- 46 This parade is a popular attraction for tourists from all over the world because of its spectacularity. The evening 'Beating Retreat' features two soldiers, one soldier each from the two countries, who take down their respective national flags through a drill that mutually performs more jingoism and hatred than love and cooperation, especially marked by their raising of one leg as high as possible towards each other.
- 47 Salman Rushdie, 'Bollywood or Bust: Salman Rushdie on the World of *Midnight's Children*, Forty Years Later', 14 April 2021, at <https://lithub.com/bollywood-or-bust-salman-rushdie-on-the-world-of-midnight-children-forty-years-later-2/#:~:text=When%20I%20wrote%20Midnight's%20Children,birth%20of%20a%20new%20hope> (accessed 7 July 2021).
- 48 Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, p. 114.
- 49 Atay Citron, Sharon Aronson-Lehavi and David Zerbib, eds., 'Introduction', in Citron, Aronson-Lehavi and Zerbib, eds., *Performance Studies in Motion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 1–14, here p. 4.
- 50 Geoffrey Edwards and Marie Bourbeau, 'Image Schemata: A Guiding Principle for Multi-modal Expression in Performance Design', *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*, 1, 3 (2005), pp. 189–206, here p. 189.

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