Natural Order and Wise Synthesis: Sovereignty-Violence-*Varṇa* in the *Arthaśāstra* and Aurobindo

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In its powerful diagnosis of *Dalit* disempowerment, the 'Dalit Panthers Manifesto' emphasises the continuity of Dalits' exploitation and domination by the hierarchical "varna system [and] caste system" from premodernity to the time of its drafting in 1973. According to it, "Untouchability is the most violent form of exploitation on the surface of the earth, which survives the ever-changing forms of the power structure" (Dalit Panthers 142). The violence of *Dalit* oppression has endured political changes from the feudal period through the Moghul and British empires to the anticolonial struggle and the period of India's independence as a sovereign state: "The present Congress rule is essentially a continuation of the old Hindu feudalism which kept the Dalits deprived of power, wealth and status for thousands of years" (141). The Manifesto is evidence that at least some Dalits understood that the violence they faced—*varṇa*—was the product of a durable political system, one ancient yet still present; that, because it was not an accident of one or another period of rule or a contingent feature of one or another type of regime, this system demanded a revolutionary response, for only a revolutionary transformation of Indian society could change this violence *essential* to its politics.

One question only hinted at in the Manifesto is the connection of the enduring violence-*varṇa* system to sovereignty. India's struggle for political independence from Britain "was a struggle under the leadership of national capitalists, landlords, feudals, for their own benefit," the Manifesto notes (143). These elites cemented their internal political sovereignty in the very same move that secured India's status as a sovereign equal internationally vis-à-vis other independent nation-states such as its former colonizer Britain. (I should emphasize *so-called* "internal/domestic" and "external/international," as it is their very co-constitution and reciprocal support, rather than mutual independence that is at stake.) Yet, despite its gesture of solidarity with other Dalits across the world— "the Third Dalit World" (145)—the Manifesto does not pursue its analysis of international sovereignty further. The sense, though, is that caste-based oppression bears some connection to sovereignty as a relation among states.

Dalit political theory would benefit by linking sovereignty—qua interstate relation— explicitly to violence-*varṇa* because in fact the seemingly intuitive separation of internal from international relations actually serves to entrench the system of sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* further by establishing *varṇa* and sovereignty as separate, rather than interdependent, orders. Hence, in what follows, I explore two iterations of the sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* system—one premodern, Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* (circa 50-300 CE), and one anticolonial, Aurobindo Ghose's 'Indian Polity' (1920-1921, revised 1947)—in the interest of cataloguing some contrasts within the continuity of forms that the Dalit Panthers diagnosed.

As Sankaran Krishna has argued in reference to the contemporary period, the *Dalit* struggle for social justice and political change has been hobbled by efforts to shield *Dalit* resistance from an international gaze and transnational comparison and to provincialize their plight as an internal concern. In Durban, South Africa, in 2001, almost three decades after the Dalit Panthers wrote their Manifesto, at the Third United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial

Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, India's official delegation successfully quelled a Dalit campaign to have caste-based oppression recognized as racism. The Government of India "averred that casteism was not racism and that caste was a domestic matter, so any attempts at an international conference to pronounce on it would be tantamount to an infringement on state sovereignty" (140). Krishna traces this particular matter of sovereignty and casteism to the dispute between B.R. Ambedkar and Mohandas Gandhi at the Second Round Table Conference in London in 1930-31. There, Gandhi rejected Ambedkar's proposal for a separate electorate for *Dalit*s and threatened a death fast were it awarded. When it was, Gandhi's fast effectively coerced Ambedkar to concede, and in the Poona Pact Ambedkar's more robust separate electorate was traded for reserved constituencies, which historically have proven quite easily manipulable by the very elites of whom Ambedkar was wary. Rather than, say, calling out Gandhi's moral blackmail, the British were content to recognize the pact as an internal settlement. In the Dalit Panthers' damning judgment, Gandhi "flirted with problems of the Dalits" but only ultimately "to preserve the unity of the Independence struggles" (143).

Both the Durban and London/Pune episodes reveal that "sovereignty is asserted against the subaltern and for the dominant castes" (Krishna 152). However, how sovereignty is asserted varies, and understanding the variability of the sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* system and its subtle reconfigurations is crucial to any project of resisting and dismantling it. In the episodes Krishna analyses it took the form of "being constantly 'included out'" (149), as emblematized by Ambedkar himself. Inclusion out meant that *Dalits* were maintained in the national fold but neither democratically empowered nor free to exit, and, moreover, they were prevented from internationalizing their fight.

In the *Arthaśāstra* and "Indian Polity," the parameters for the assertion of sovereignty differ. First, they focus quite explicitly on *varṇa* (as indeed Gandhi had wanted to do [Ambedkar 164-165]), so the subaltern against whom sovereignty is asserted is the *Śūdra* rather than the *Dalit*, although sometimes—and quite revealingly—the texts refer to positions "beneath" *Śūdras*. Moreover, second, as neither *Arthaśāstra* nor "Indian Polity" assumes democratic constitutionalism, much less discusses it as an ideal, they do not therefore refer to popular sovereignty—however much of a sham Ambedkar and the Dalit Panthers believed that to be. Instead, *Arthaśāstra* and 'Indian Polity' derive from a sometimes-tense complementarity among *rāj* and *Brāhmaṇa*, a relationship that Georges Dumézil explored in his comparative study of Indo-European sovereignty. Heirs in certain respects to nineteenth-century Orientalist comparative philology, studies from comparative linguistics and religion can pose dangers to *Dalit* political resistance. The constructs 'Indo-European' and '*Ārya*' have sometimes served politically to approximate upper caste Hindus to white western Europeans and North Americans as having common civilizational roots—even as those very elites have denied (as at Durban in 2001) the inverse symmetrical solidarity between *Dalits* and the Euro-Atlantic world's subalterns. Nevertheless, I draw on Dumézilin illuminating the *Arthaśāstra* and "Indian Polity" precisely in part to develop an immanent critique of sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* for *Dalit* politics (cf. Chatterjee 173-199).

Sketching an (at least quasi-) immanent critique of sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* in two texts before the period of democratic constitutionalism in India, we can see that the assertion of sovereignty through a *rāj-Brāhmaṇa* alliance violates *Śūdras* not by including them out but

through other means. In the *Arthaśāstra* it occurs through what the text calls "right" or "natural order," which operates by a dialectical concentrism that thus contrasts in revealing ways with the serial concentrism of its *maṇḍala* theory of interstate relations. In 'Indian Polity,' it occurs through what Ghose calls 'stable synthesis,' which emphasizes the necessity of the Śūdras in the double sense that they are necessary to the socio-political order even as they are bound by bodily necessity. In both instances, the violences of sovereignty and *varṇa* are interdependent and justified as *dharma*. In the sections that follow, I analyse first Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* and then Ghose's 'Indian Polity' in regard to sovereignty-violence-*varṇa*. I then close with some remarks on the importance of more nuanced analyses of sovereignty and exclusion than have been inspired by Giorgio Agamben. The political theology of the sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* system may resort less to the European technique of the ban and its inclusion/exclusion and more to concentric relations of opposition and complementarity.

Varṇa and *Maṇḍala* Orderings in the *Arthaśāstra*

If the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* owes much to Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* (see McClish 241-262), then perhaps the latter too should be the object of *Dalits*' and *Śūdras*' ire. Kauṭilya's text, in its original recension, not only formed the basis for entire chapters of Manu's but also was later redacted by "a scholar well versed in the Dharmaśāstras" so as to force it "more into line with the mainstream of Brāhmaṇical social ideology" (Olivelle 8). The *Arthaśāstra* as it comes to us now is this *śāstric* redaction. Inspiring Manu and then subsequently subject to a redaction inspired by the Dharmaśāstras, the text is doubly linked to Brāhmaṇical domination. Certainly, the *Arthaśāstra* is less grotesquely cruel toward *Śūdras* and Dalits than the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, which infamously enjoins *Brāhmaṇas* to commit atrocities against them. Nevertheless, if in Ambedkar's words the ancient text of law and politics attributed to Manu "shows that the caste system is a legal system maintained at the point of a bayonet" and that Brāhmaṇical supremacy is "far from natural" (164), then the same judgment should be made of the *Arthaśāstra*. The question, though, is how the violence and the claim to natural order involves relations not just between upper and lower *varṇa*s but also among sovereigns and between the elements of sovereignty.

As its name suggests, the *Arthaśāstra* is a text about success, *artha*. Consequently, the sovereignty it describes is not characterized by stasis, by the position of political supremacy—as in, for example, Jean Bodin's canonical definition: "the highest power of command.... not limited either in power, or in function, or in length of time" (1, 3). Even Carl Schmitt's attempt to formulate sovereignty as decisionism is positional: "sovereign is he who" is in the position to "decid[e] on the exception" (5). By contrast, sovereignty in the *Arthaśāstra* entails energetic activity (Kauṭilya1.19.1-5, cf., 6.2.1-5, 7.1.20-29). Energetic action oriented to *artha* involves two clusters of activity: affixing people to their *varṇa* positions through punishment of transgressions of natural order as defined by *dharma*; and conquering new positions in the *maṇḍala* through outwitting (*atisaṃdhi* [Olivelle 50]) rivals as defined by good policy. The first mode of governance addresses itself to positions that are qualitatively unequal, viz., the hierarchical *varṇas*; the second to positions that are qualitatively equivalent though quantitatively available to measurable difference, viz., sovereignties that are declining, stable or prospering.

The major danger of the first mode of governance is intermixture, especially of *varṇas*, *varṇasaṃkara*. After defining the *dharma* of each *varṇa* (as well as of the four orders of life,

āśramas), the text declares, "The Law specific to someone leads him to heaven and eternal bliss. When it is violated, people are destroyed through the intermixture" (1.3.14-15). Governing through punishment, the king prevents such violations and insures each *varṇa's* devotion to its *dharma* (1.5.16), thus assuring prosperity for the people as a whole (1.3.17). The king's sovereignty depends on *appropriate* punishment: "'one who punishes severely terrifies the people, and one who punishes lightly is treated with contempt, whereas one who dispenses appropriate punishment is treated with respect,'" Kauṭilya says (1.5.7-10).

In a political society oriented by the *varṇas*, equal treatment of all would always provoke terror among some and contempt among others. Hence, against this, the *Arthaśāstra* recommends graduated punishment. Transgressions of *dharma* that violate purity tend to call for harsher punishment for the inferior *varṇas*, whereas transgressions that violate uprightness tend to call for harsher punishment for the superior *varṇas*. Insults are less grave if made by superiors to inferiors than vice versa; therefore, fines for verbal abuse reach their maximum when an outcaste insults a *Brāhmaṇa* and their minimum when a *Brāhmaṇa* insults an outcaste (3.18.7). By contrast, expectations of women's conjugal duty grow as one ascends in *varṇa* and diminish as one descends (3.4.24). If a *Brāhmaṇa* were fined for insulting a *Śūdra* to the same degree that a *Śūdra* were punished for insulting a *Brāhmaṇa*, she would be terrified by a severity inappropriate to her superiority. Conversely, if an inferior were punished to the same degree for physically assaulting a superior that a superior was for physically assaulting an inferior, she would feel contempt at the inappropriate laxity (3.19.1-4). Indeed, in either case, equal punishment among non-equals would destroy *varṇa*, which cannot reproduce itself without differential distributions and valuations of violence.

Varṇa is literally reproduced by gendered differentials too. At each ascending *varṇa* position, men enjoy greater permission and women suffer greater restrictions on their sexual comportment; at each descending position, men suffer greater restrictions and women enjoy greater permission (3.7.20-30). In other words, the widest opportunity for exogamic sexual relations is available to *Brāhmaṇa* men and *Śūdra* women: they may produce children with members of any other *varṇa* without violating "natural order" (3.7.25). Contrarily, no opportunity for exogamic sexual relations is permitted to *Brāhmaṇa* women nor to *Śūdra* men: any exogamy by them produces children "in the inverse order" (3.7.30). Indeed, when these two partners who face the greatest sexual prohibitions mate with each other, they produce a *Caṇḍāla*, who becomes a metonymy for outcastes generally throughout the *Arthaśāstra*. In between the extremes, *Ksatriya* and *Vaisya* men and women in exogamic sexual relations produce some natural-order, some inverse-order offspring.

'Natural order', then, depends on both *varṇa* and gender differentials simultaneously. *Varṇasamkara* does not mean, consequently, that *any* intermixture whatsoever is dangerous. Rather, only particular unions invert the natural order. Children of such unions "are born in the inverse order on account of the king transgressing the Law specific to him" (3.7.30). They prove his failure to govern by appropriate punishment, to maintain the natural order of gendered *varṇa*. In short, they are products of his abdication of the sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* that is his *dharma*. Natural ordering involves another act of fixing, one whose rules reveal important relations. The *Arthaśāstra* directs the king literally to affix the four *varṇas* in space by dividing the fort city into residential quarters: *Brāhmaṇas* in the north, *Ksatriyas* in the east, *Vaisyas* in the south, and *Śūdras*

in the west (2.4.9-15). Marking their abject status, *Caṇḍālas* must reside outside the city at the cemetery's edge (2.4.23). For the egress of corpses, the cardinal directions shift: the *Brāhmaṇa* dead must exit the east gate, *Ksatriya* the north, *Vaisya* the south, and *Śūdra* the west. In other words, for dead bodies, the *Brahamana* and *Ksatriya* switch the cardinal positions of the quarters assigned to their living bodies, as do the *Vaisya* and *Śūdra*. The king is enjoined to fine those who do not evacuate their dead through the assigned gates (2.4.21-22 and 2.4.21n), for he must uphold the natural order as much for death as for life.

This ritual trading of positions between life and death hints at a special alliance that underwrites sovereignty-violence-*varṇa*: that between *Brāhmaṇas* and *Ksatriyas*, including the king. Yet their directions, north and east, are linked several other times as well. The treatise recommends that politically significant buildings face either east or north: the king's palace (2.4.7), the customs house (2.21.1), and the registry, which contains all the records of the kingdom and, moreover, all edicts about caste (2.7.1). Furthermore, corporal punishment for two oral offenses—reviling the king or licking a *Brāhmaṇa's* cooking utensils—is identical: ripping out the offender's tongue (4.11.21). Sexual violation of an unguarded *Brāhmaṇa* woman and a wife of the king call for similarly extreme punishment (4.13.32-33). These punishments implicitly link *Brāhmaṇa* and *rāj*, but the *Arthaśāstra* makes the alliance explicit and also stakes the very success, *artha*, of sovereignty on it: "Royal power (*kṣatra*) set ablaze by the *Brāhmaṇa*, consecrated by mantras consisting of the counsel (*mantra*) of the counselor (*mantrin*), and protected by the weapon (*śastra*) consisting of following the treatise (*śāstra*) conquers without ever being conquered" (1.10.11).

For a king to conquer while being unconquerable is surely one of the highest measures of *artha*, thus one of the highest achievements of sovereignty, and it depends on a *rāj-Brāhmaṇa* alliance and, more generally, accord between *Brāhmaṇas* and *Ksatriyas*. These special felicities of natural order underwrite sovereignty, which in turn upholds natural order, but successful sovereignty also depends on good policy: "When . . . he possesses the exemplary qualities of the self... and knows good policies, he is sure to conquer the entire earth and is never laid low, even if he rules over a small territory" (6.1.18).

This comment precedes a sketch of the basic schema of the *maṇḍala*, the surrounding circles of kings. The *maṇḍala* generates another natural order—of enemies and allies—and good policy involves the appropriate combination of security and enterprise by the "seeker after conquest" (6.2.13) with respect to this other natural order. What organizes the natural order of enemies and allies is contiguity. For every ruler of a territory immediately contiguous to one's own is "a natural enemy," whereas the ruler of any territory in the concentric circle immediately around these contiguous natural enemies is "the natural ally" (6.2.19, 20). The king, as "seeker of conquest," and his natural ally share a natural enemy positioned literally between them. Thus, seen as a series of concentric rings centred on the seeker of conquest at a given static moment in time, this natural order's relations seem clear. However, since each discrete polity centres its own *maṇḍala*, its natural allies and enemies will not simply, in binary fashion, either coincide with or be the negative of others'. (The *Arthaśāstra* designates two other possibilities, the intermediate and the neutral (6.2.21-22), which, for reasons of space, I leave aside.)

Beside the question of position is the important question of strength: "power is strength" (6.2.31, 33). Put into action, sources of strength will leave the king superior, coequal or inferior to his prior position and also relative to other kings; accordingly, his sovereignty will prosper, remain stable or decline. Good policy involves judging the relative strengths of natural enemies and natural allies (as well as intermediates and neutrals) and acting strategically (7.1.6-19). The goal is to outwit the others, thus to come out superior to his and others' prior positions and for another not to strengthen from his action unless it is an ally from whose strength he can later benefit (and whom he can outwit at a later conjuncture).

Any action he takes, though, will shift the balance of forces and positions within the *maṇḍala*. For example, if he were to conquer a natural enemy and occupy this enemy's territory, his former natural ally would now become a natural enemy because the king's expanded territory would now be contiguous, though of course the ally could be retained contingently (cf. 6.2.20). Indeed, the *Arthaśāstra* does not commend conquering enemy's land for itself if the consequence is that a powerful "neighbouring king, who was an ally, turns into an enemy" (7.10.6). Gaining an advantage against a weak enemy is not outwitting. Outwitting demands continuous calculations of conjunctural consequences within an economy of forces.

Unlike the absolute natural order of *varṇas*, then, the *maṇḍala* is relative: whereas the former is fixed, the latter is variable. Certainly, the *Arthaśāstra* envisages the possibility that one may fall from caste and prescribes sanctions accordingly (3.2.48, 3.11.29, 4.7.28). Such falling results in a falling altogether out of the four *varṇas* rather than a stepwise descent. (A bad *Brāhmaṇa* does not become a *Ksatriya*.) *Varṇas* then are categorical and remain in a fixed hierarchy. One's relations of superiority and inferiority therefore remain fixed unless one's comportment is so contrary to one's *dharma* that one is cast out as permanently degraded. By contrast, superiority, inferiority and coequality of strength and the natural order of enemies and allies in the *maṇḍala*—that is, forces and positions—change constantly, conjuncturally, and the object of outwitting is precisely to change them by conquering new positions while gaining in superiority.

Whereas superiority and inferiority of *varṇa* describe a fixed qualitative order, superiority, inferiority and coequality in the *maṇḍala* describe a variable quantitative order. By punishment, the king preserves the first, the order of *varṇa*, while, through outwitting, he creates new orders in the *maṇḍala*. The order-preserving and order-creating aspects of sovereignty, simultaneously opposed yet complementary, comprise a political theology, to which I return below. Here, though, I want to explore two passages in which the king's actions make these orders refer to one another.

First, one way in which a king may outwit an enemy is by sending an undercover agent to seduce factions in enemy territory. One revealing suggestion deploys a position of *varṇa* (actually one outside it) to diminish position in the *maṇḍala*: the undercover agent should incite the faction to sedition by saying, "'As a *Candala's* well is fit to be made use of only by *Candalas* and not by others, so this king is vile and is fit to be made use of by vile people and not by *Āryas* like you. That king over there appreciates persons of quality. Go there'" (1.14.10). In the ruse, a qualitative ordering effects a change of quantitative ordering. By referring to the enemy king as categorically most inferior, the sovereign's agent may indeed make him inferior in strength.

Second, the *Arthaśāstra* alludes in an ambiguous way to the 'law of the fish', the ancient image of a kind of state of nature before rule, where larger, mightier fish prey on smaller, weaker fish. Referring to sovereign punishment, it warns, "When one fails to dispense it, ...it gives rise to the law of the fish—for in the absence of the dispenser of punishment, a weak man is devoured by a stronger man, and, protected by him, he prevails" (1.4.13-15). Coming directly before a recommendation that the king affix people to the *dharmas* of the four *varṇas* and *āśramas*, the allusion to the law of the fish would seem to enjoin the king to protect the weak through punishment so that the weaker prevail against the stronger. Yet note that when applied to the *varṇas*, its sense is ambivalent. If stronger/weaker refer to superior/inferior power in the *varṇa* hierarchy, then it rings false: *Śūdras* never prevail. If it refers to what the *Arthaśāstra* designates as the physical strength of members of each *varṇa*, then it might ring true: *Brāhmaṇas* may indeed be physically weakest of the four *varṇas* (cf. 9.2.22-24). Yet when applied to relations among kings, it would seem that the law of the fish would indeed be preferable, for outwitting in the *maṇḍala* should not as a rule lead to the weaker prevailing against the stronger but to the seeker of conquest rising in superiority of counsel, might and effort (6.2.33).

Ghose's "Wise and Stable Synthesis"

The *Arthaśāstra* takes for granted that sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* is enacted among equal political units enabled by inequalities among *varṇas* (and between them and outcastes). In other words, Kauṭilya presumes "sovereign equality": even if the polities boast superior or inferior strength quantitatively, they are recognized as qualitative equals. Indeed, the virtuosity of outwitting depends on this equality in the *maṇḍala* order, supported by and supporting inequality in the order of *varṇa*. By contrast, Aurobindo Ghose wrote "Indian Polity" at a moment when India, subject to the British *rāj*, enjoyed no sovereign equality. Contributing to an anticolonial project, Ghose's task, then, was to establish that India merited recognition as Britain's equal. He did this precisely by strategies meant to downplay *varṇa* and caste inequalities in the political history of Indian civilization. It could be said, then, in the end that he fought British imperialism by tacitly advancing "*brahmanic* imperialism" (Dumézil 66).

'Indian Polity' belongs to a series of essays on spirituality, art, literature and cultural analysis collectively titled 'A Defence of Indian Culture' originally published in the monthly *Arya* in 1919-1921.The four essays of 'Indian Polity' were published as the pamphlet *The Spirit and Form of Indian Polity* in 1947, while Ghose was still alive, and 'A Defence' was bundled together with three other essays and published as *The Foundations of Indian Culture* after his death. In the series, Ghose felt compelled to reply to the question, still debated among British critics in the years before Europe's Great War, whether India counted among the world's civilized cultures. To such critics, it lacked great aesthetic achievements, but, in the bulk of the collection, Ghose patiently highlights monuments of Indian architecture, philosophy, poetry and visual art, and discusses the criteria for making sense of a civilization's spirit.

As for politics, one strategy often used since the eighteenth century by European critics' intent on proving Indian barbarism was to point to caste cruelties. Furthermore, the absence of enduring governing institutions signalled the fragility or absence of Indian political order, since nothing significant remained of pre-Moghul, pre-British times. Ghose refuted such a view in four movements. First, against the "legend of Indian political incompetence" (334), he offered a

sweeping historical overview of the ancient political system as having developed forms that rival European counterparts but which cannot be finally compared with them. Second, by an evolutionary spiritual analysis of "the Indian mind," he established the centrality of *dharma* as a critical safeguard against perilous mechanicising rationality, which underwrote "the monstrous artificial organisation of the bureaucratic and industrial State" in Europe (350). Third, inspired by the revisionist (and controversial) research of K.P. Jayaswal's *Hindu Polity: A Constitutional History of India in Hindu Times*, Ghose presents India as having solved—through organic balancing, coordination, and widespread popular participation—problems that Europeans historically suffered, such as absolutist monarchical centralization and class-driven regime forms. Finally, examining the Indian polity's external forms rather than internal function, he addresses criticisms that the former are to blame for the absence of a native imperially unified India.

In accordance with his anticolonial orientation, Ghose's general strategy is to claim for Indian culture and polity similarity yet difference: India is "not only a great civilisation, but one of the half dozen greatest" documented (332); yet at the same time, its relative superiority cannot be revealed by European, but rather native, standards. In common with other societies, its system originated in a "primitive form" of clan rule with initially non-hereditary kings and priests (335), but it later evolved a unique order:

> A hereditary kingship was established, a powerful princely and warrior class appeared, the rest of the people were marked off as the caste of traders, artisans and agriculturalists and a subject or menial caste was added, perhaps sometimes as the result of conquest but more probably or more commonly from economic necessity, of servants and labourers. The predominance from early times of the religious and spiritual tendency in the mind of the Indian people brought about at the top of the social system the growth of the Brahminorder,.. a development paralleled elsewhere but here given an unequalled permanence and definiteness and supreme importance. In other countries with a less complex mentality this predominance might have resulted in theocracy: but the Brahmins in spite of their ever-increasing and finally predominant authority did not and could not usurp in India the political power. As sacrosanct priests and legists and spiritual preceptors of the monarch and the people they exercised a very considerable influence, but the real or active political power remained with the king, the Kshatriya aristocracy and the commons. (336)

This passage contains all of the crucial elements of Ghose's thinking on sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* but one, *dharma*. Without explicitly mentioning *varṇa*, Ghose presents it as an evolutionary product. Combining organicist, vitalist and evolutionary thought and refracting these European currents through a neo-*Vedantic* metaphysics, Ghose consistently interpreted Indian social, political, and cultural forms as developments of a collective life force (Klausen 190-191). Hence, each *varṇa* is presented as having congealed out of "the organic totality of the social existence" (344) a specific life function. Each formed a necessary part of an ordered whole: spirit and intellect, power and action, production and wealth, finally, labour and service (cf. 118). On one view, these are mere occupations—analogous to the three or four estates one might find in Europe (357). On another, any such "resemblance however is only in the externals" because India's *varṇa* system fused "religious, social, political and economic" ends (357). Each part

separately and all parts together expressed an inseparably organic-vital-evolutionary-rational-spiritual necessity.

Second, adopting the perspective of "organic totality" meant that Ghose viewed the Indian people as "an organic living being with a... communal soul, mind and body" (344). Reading the collective as an individual person writ large, Ghose can thus refer to "the Indian mind and temperament" as a coherent entity arriving at "a wise and stable synthesis" manifested in a particular political formation (360). In itself, this scalar projection underplays political conflicts, but Ghose moreover emphasizes the unique equilibrium of this Indian totality. Less complex mentalities do not harmonize soul, mind and body, so one of the four social functions would have become separated off and predominated in a mechanical—inorganic—way to produce a theocracy, absolute monarchy, "mercantile oligarchy" or democracy (cf. 359).

Ghose's defensive posture about the role of *Brāhmaṇas* is telling. Although Ghose ended his political career a decade before, "Indian Polity" nevertheless retained his anticolonial orientation. As such, Ghose remained sensitive to English criticism that India suffered the backwardness of *Brahmanical* theocracy. At the same time, he wanted to reject the purported secularism of the European polities by contrast with which India was considered "backward." Misunderstandings of *varṇa*—actually mistakes of *jāti* for *varṇa* (366)—from India's period of decadence, not a true appreciation of *varṇa's* classical order, would lead one to dismiss it as an abusive system (357). Ghose repudiated such misrepresentations by a twofold strategy: he denied Brahmanical political dominance, while nevertheless defending the Indian polity's spiritualism.

Hence, simply, India was not theocratic because *Brāhmaṇas* lacked sovereignty, which rested with the *Ksatriyarāj*. Social hierarchy did not imply political hierarchy (358). *Brāhmaṇas* exercised authority in their domain, but theirs was not politics, the purview of *Ksatriyas*. Moreover, *Brāhmaṇas* did not even maintain "a monopoly either of sacred learning or of the highest spiritual knowledge," since such study remained "always open to the three higher orders" and, though "denied in theory to the *Shudras*," even they historically led "religious movements" (357-358).

Likewise, at the same time that Ghose insists on *Ksatriyas'* political specialization, he integrates the *varṇas* into a common unity:

> The whole Indian system was founded upon a close participation of all the orders in the common life, each predominating in its own field, the Brahmin in religion, learning and letters, the Kshatriya in war, king-craft and interstate political action, the Vaishya in wealth-getting and productive economical function, but none, not even the Shudra, excluded from his share in the civic life and an effective place and voice in politics, administration, justice (359).

According to Ghose, the *rāj* ruled in fact "a mixed polity in which none of the orders had an undue predominance" (360). The king took counsel from ministers representing all four *varṇas*, which in turn were balanced by metropolitan and general assemblies of the kingdom representing "the whole people" and excluding no *varṇa* (362). Hence, rather than Brahmanical theocracy or a tyrannical *rāj*, Ghose finds wise, stable political synthesis.

Nonetheless, Ghose emphasizes a unique distinction for *Brāhmaṇa* and *rāj*, which marks a special interdependence between them. Each promoted *dharma*: *Brāhmaṇas* as "recorders and exponents" interpreted *dharma*, whereas the king as "guardian, executor and servant" administered it (340, cf. 352). *Dharma* ruled as an "impersonal authority" with which "no secular authority had any right of autocratic interference." Indeed, sovereign power was subject to *dharma* yet obligated "to punish and repress" offences against it (340, 352).

Dharma as impersonal authority figures centrally in Ghose's sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* system, and a depersonalizing totalizing view enables it. Although he mentions the importance of sovereign punishment of *dharma* transgressions, Ghose precludes any possibility of violence by *Brāhmaṇa, rāj, Ksatriya*. In his transcendental-spiritual version of the organismic metaphor of the nation, the Indian polity manifests in outward form India's *Geist*. All conflicts between difference and identity, diversity and unity, will have been resolved, at least during "the height of its evolution and in the great days of Indian civilisation" (371). By designating Indian polity "a wise and stable synthesis" and counting caste abuses only as signs of "the final decline" (381), Ghose is able to represent the Indian political tradition as inwardly superior and potentially sovereign, equal to Britain's. Yet Ghose's anticolonial vindication must rule out of existence physical violence against *Śūdras* or *Dalits*. Making the Indian mind transcend all real embodied persons and synthesizing *varṇa* in it, he ignores real personal experiences of repression within the collectivity and avoids confronting interpersonal bodily violence. Indeed, he endows the Indian polity with sovereignty by sublating the violence of and between *varṇas* to inter-civilizational and international relations.

The Political Theology of *Varṇa*

In *Political Theology* Schmitt hypothesizes that the "metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of political organization" (46). Though he ventures no conclusions beyond Europe, his insight may illuminate the *Arthaśāstra*'s natural orders and Ghose's wise and stable synthesis. The metaphysics developing out of *Brahmanical* domination in various epochs corresponds to variations in the political theology of *varṇa*. Though the metaphysics inspiring the *Arthaśāstra* remains implicit—unlike Ghose's manifest neo-*Vedantism*—it is possible to draw some conclusions about sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* and political theology in the texts.

Both the *Arthaśāstra* and Ghose describe a special *rāj-Brāhmaṇa* bond which enables sovereignty. In each case, the tie activates and entwines the two kinds of violence that Walter Benjamin called law-making and law-preserving violence, violence that initiates order and violence that maintains it. Lawmaking and law-preserving violence sometimes oppose, sometimes complement each other, according to Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence'. In a resonant analysis, Dumézil argues that Indo-European traditions featured dual sovereignty, in which a magician-king who violently produces order both opposes and complements a jurist-priest who preserves the order. (Note that Book 14 of the *Arthaśāstra*recommends "esoteric practices"—magic—for the king to strengthen his power.) While Dumézil associates the latter figure of order-sustaining sovereignty with peace and benevolence (67-73), Dalit and *Śūdra* perspectives would suggest—along with Benjamin—that sustaining order is as violent, though differently so, as initiating it.

In the *Arthaśāstra*, sovereignty weds two orders of violence: the *rāj* produces his own violence abroad while generating and distributing other kings' violence, and the *rāj* allies with the *Brāhmaṇas* to generate and distribute violence that safeguards the natural order through *varṇa* rigidities. Thus while the *rāj* produces, generates and distributes violence among kings in the *maṇḍala*, he collaborates with *Brāhmaṇas* so that the latter generate and distribute violence in cascades between *varṇas*: the Brāhmaṇas against the *rāj*'s fellow *Ksatriyas* and the rest below them; *Brāhmaṇas'* and *Ksatriyas'* violence against those below them; the violence of all the twice-born against *Śūdras* and outcastes; finally, the violence of all four *varṇas* against outcastes. In other words, as *Brāhmaṇas* bless the *rāj*'s constant creation of new orders through his conquests by outwitting other kings in the *maṇḍala*, the *rāj* consecrates the Brahmanical preservation of order of *dharma* through the violence of *varṇa*.

Ghose defines stable synthesis by a general interdependence among all four *varṇas*, which he casts as an "organic totality of the social existence" that thus generates a division of labour among functions that meet the needs for development of soul, mind and body but also integrates them into a human unity. Whereas the *Arthaśāstra* allies *rāj* to *Brāhmaṇa* to advance *dharma* through personal authority, Ghose absorbs both into a political theology that subordinates their authority to a depersonalized *dharma*: "This impersonal authority was considered sacred and eternal in its spirit and the totality of its body, always characteristically the same, the changes organically and spontaneously brought about in its actual form by the evolution of the society" (340). Integrating simultaneous change and continuity into a higher order, this *dharma* likewise fuses order-preserving and order-creating aspects of sovereignty—for, as Ghose emphasizes, No one creates *dharma*, not even the *Brāhmaṇas*, and none wields personal authority over it. Yet, as its eminent caretakers, *Brāhmaṇa* and *rāj* enjoy a special interdependence that, in fact, serves as the model for "wise and stable synthesis."   In other words, Ghose models a general interdependence of the four *varṇas* from this special case. Given that order-creation and order-preservation co-occur spontaneously, impersonally, integrally, and that neither *rāj* nor *Brāhmaṇa* need unleash violence for the sake of *dharma*, Ghose assumes that all *varṇa* relations unfold frictionlessly.

In neither case does sovereignty-violence-*varṇa* trace a line of exclusion. As Dumézil argues:

> The Indians' social hierarchy, like the system of ideas that sustains it, is linear in appearance only. In reality it is a sequence, rather Hegelian in character... *brāhmaṇa*, *kṣatriya* and *vaiśya*... are not numbered "one, two, three." The *brāhmaṇa* is defined at the outset in opposition to the *kṣatriya*; then the two are reconciled and collaborate in a new notion, that of "power"... which is then immediately definedin opposition to *vaiśya*... an opposition itself resolved by a synthesis into the *dvija,* "the twice-born," which is then confronted by the appearance of the *śūdra* (65).

Opposition and complementarity, then, better than exclusion or abandonment may explain the political theology of Brahmanical imperialism across epochs and texts.

In the *Arthaśāstra*, both *varṇa* and *maṇḍala* relations appear linear. However, they obey concentric logics, though their logics differ considerably. It would seem that king-natural enemy-

natural ally trace a horizontal line across boundaries, like the *varṇas* trace a vertical line of hierarchy. The *maṇḍala*, however, is a circle whose center may shift and strengthen, yet its logic is principally serial and binary: my neighbouring natural enemy's neighbour is his natural enemy. The *varṇas* also generate a series of circles, but their logic is dialectical: the *Śūdra* is not the natural ally of the *Ksatriya*, nor is the *Vaisya* the natural enemy, though they may in nested rings form oppositional and complementary relations.

Ghose's wise and stable synthesis would seem to defy the opposition and complementarity that Dumézil describes by pre-resolving it as organic congruence. Yet he notes an exception that could unravel the synthesis dialectically: "The four orders grew into a fixed social hierarchy, but, *leaving aside the status of the outcastes*, each had attached to it a spiritual life and utility, a certain social dignity... and a place and duty and right in the communal body" (358, emphasis added). Ghose's political theology excepts Dalits, but then—perhaps unexpectedly—this exception points dialectically "backwards" to a complementarity between *Dalits* and *Śūdras* in opposition to the twice-born, and onward, until Dalits*, Śūdras, Vaisyas,* and *Ksatriyas* confront the *Brāhmaṇas*.

In conclusion, what appears here in these relations is not the inclusion/exclusion that, following the logic of abandonment, generates Dalits and *Śūdras* as bare life, according to Giorgio Agamben's argument. Rather than being organized by a "threshold," even one whose topology defies linearity since in it "life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable" (Agamben 28),the political theology of *varṇa*, strengthened by order-creating and order-preserving sovereignty and violence, nevertheless may call forth oppositional-complementary solidarities, solidarities from the bottom up, that disintegrate and disorder a durable and enduring hierarchy. Indeed, the Dalit Panthers and the Dalits at Durban engaged in this very strategy of globalizing oppositional-complementary solidarity by invoking a "Third Dalit World" or forging common cause among those oppressed by racism and casteism, among the Souths in the global North and the Souths in and even against the global South. Through such a transversal global political strategy, these *Dalits* glimpsed not bare life, but the barest possibility that sovereignty-violence-*varṇa*, in its mutually reinforcing domestic and international dynamics, might be overthrown.

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