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Edited by
MICHAEL STAUSBERG



Religions, Mumbai Style

Events | Media | Spaces

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Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Preface by Michael Stausberg</i> | vii |
| <i>Contributors</i> | ix |
| <i>A Note on the Use of Italics and Diacritics</i> | xi |
| | |
| 1. Religion in Bombay/Mumbai: A Scenario <i>Michael Stausberg</i> | 1 |
| 2. Beyond Diversity—Precarious Belonging and Religious Conjunctions: Dalits in Dharavi <i>Martin Fuchs</i> | 62 |
| 3. Does Violence Beget the Ghetto? Evidence from Ethnography in Mumbra <i>Sumanya Anand Velamur</i> | 84 |
| 4. Encountering Religious Difference in the City: Some Reflections on the Participation of Ismaili Muslims in Islamic Revivalism in Mumbai <i>David J. Strohl</i> | 103 |
| 5. Twelver Shia Muslims' Right to the City: Public Performance, Media Practices, and Urban Atmospheres in Mumbai <i>Patrick Eisenlohr</i> | 120 |
| 6. Middle Class Muslims in Mumbai: Three Forms of Engagement with Islam <i>Tanvi Patel-Banerjee</i> | 138 |
| 7. 'God is with the Patient People': Festival, Class, and Interreligious Engagement <i>Raminder Kaur and Syed Mohammed Faisal</i> | 155 |
| 8. Transgressive Spaces: Women's Organizations and Intentional Interventions in Politics of Interreligious Marriage <i>Gopika Solanki</i> | 175 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 9. Strategic Roadside Shrines in High-Risk Zones: Baba for Peace | 193 |
| <i>Anna Charlotta Laine</i> | |
| 10. Taxis as Public Micro-Spaces of Religion: Practices, Symbols, and Communication | 215 |
| <i>Michael Stausberg</i> | |
| 11. Movement and Place-Making: Multiple Crossings in the Lives of Mumbai's ISKCON Members | 239 |
| <i>Claire C. Robison</i> | |
| 12. Towards the Apocalyptic: Myth, Metaphor, and the Dystopic in Contemporary Mumbai Literature | 256 |
| <i>Heinz Werner Wessler</i> | |
| 13. A Hole in the Wall: Religion in the Poetry of Arun Kolatkar | 276 |
| <i>William Elison</i> | |
| <i>Index</i> | 297 |

Preface

I first visited Bombay in 1991, to study Parsi matters at the library of the KRCOI Cama Oriental Institute. During my visit Rajiv Gandhi was killed in Madras and Indian society started to undergo massive changes. In December 1992 and January 1993, Bombay was shaken by horrible acts of violence. When I returned to the city in 1994, my favourite bookseller, who operated from a sticky first-floor space in the Fort Area and who subsequently supplied books to me in Germany (where their characteristic smell transformed our apartment for some days upon arrival), had disappeared. Some of his books were sold on pavements in other parts of the town; nobody ‘knew’ what had happened to him officially, but off the record frightening rumours made the round. My thoughts kept on coming back to him and the lost world of his shop when finalizing this volume.

From my first visit onwards, the religious landscape of the city fascinated and frightened me. I planned a project on religions in Mumbai in the early 2000s, before moving to Bergen (from Heidelberg). At a symposium on Judaism in Asia arranged by Manfred Hutter at my alma mater in Bonn in 2012, Heinz-Werner Wessler encouraged me to revisit the project. Thanks to the input and ideas of my colleague and friend István Keul it got funded by the Research Council of Norway. Indeed, this volume would not have been produced without the grant for the research project *Dwelling and Crossing: The Socio-Cultural Dynamics of Religious Spaces in Mumbai* (2014–18), not least for allowing regular, albeit short visits to the city. I wish to thank István for masterminding this project and for dealing with the bureaucratic task of managing the grant. He also read several drafts of my introductory essay and reliably offered sage advice.

The preparation of the book and the review process took an unusually long time. I thank the authors for their contributions and their patience. One reason for the delay was the prolonged difficulty in getting review reports in; given the increased demands on one’s time, it is ever more difficult to get this kind of work done. At OUP India, over the years, I have

been working with a sequence of four editors (Moutushi Mukherjee, Nandini Ganguli, Darshana Sarkar, and Sohini Gosh), spearheaded by Barun Sarkar. I wish to thank Praveena A for overseeing the production process. My gratitude to Roweena Anketell for the top-class copy-editing.

I wish to dedicate my part of this book to Rusheed Wadia who was introduced to me by our mutual friend Faisal Devji in 1991. I learned a lot from both, but I am afraid that Rusheed's constant appeals on the necessity of me studying the political economy of the city have fallen on deaf ears. We shared sad moments (the loss of our mothers), but rarely have I laughed so much with a fellow academic; eventually, the muscles in my cheeks would start hurting and we earned many a suspicious glance when our guffaws of laughter thundered through Mumbai phone booths, tearrooms, restaurants, and lecture halls.

A final word of thanks to William Elison for his input on the title of the volume.

Michael Stausberg
Bergen, February 2022

Contributors

Patrick Eisenlohr, Professor of Anthropology, Chair of Society and Culture in Modern India, University of Göttingen (Germany). His research interests include the sonic dimensions of religion and the links between media practices, religion, and citizenship. His latest book is *Sounding Islam: Voice, Media, and Sonic Atmospheres in an Indian Ocean World* (University of California Press, 2018).

William Elison, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara (USA). He is an ethnographer with particular interests in Mumbai, popular film, and religion as practised within Adivasi (ST) and other subaltern communities. He is the author of *The Neighborhood of Gods: The Sacred and the Visible at the Margins of Mumbai* (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

Syed Mohammed Faisal, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Jindal School of Banking and Finance, O P Jindal Global University, Sonapat (Haryana, India). He works on Islam, economic anthropology, finance and banking, kinship, and religion. His article 'Shaheen Bagh and the Hermeneutics of Muslim Identity in South Asia' is forthcoming in *HAU Journal of Ethnographic Theory*.

Martin Fuchs, Professor for Indian Religious History, Max Weber Centre for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies, University of Erfurt (Germany); member (and temporarily Director), M. S. Merian–R. Tagore International Centre of Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences 'Metamorphoses of the Political' (ICAS:MP) (Delhi, India). His research interests include cultural and social theory, urban anthropology, social movements, struggles for recognition, religious individualization, and normative transformations. Among his recent publications are *Religious Interactions in Modern India* (co-edited with Vasudha Dalmia, Oxford University Press, 2019) and *Religious Individualisation: Historical Dimensions and Comparative Perspectives*, 2 vols. (co-edited with Antje Linkenbach, Martin Mulsow, Bernd-Christian Otto, Rahul Parson, and Jörg Rüpke, de Gruyter 2019).

Raminder Kaur, Professor of Anthropology and Cultural Studies, University of Sussex (UK). Her research spans public culture, race/ethnicity/gender, nuclear developments, and 'cultures of sustainability'. She is the author and co-editor of ten books, the most recent being her monograph, *Kudankulam: The Story of an Indo-Russian Nuclear Power Plant* (2020).

Anna Charlotta Laine, PhD Candidate, University of Bergen (Norway). Her research interests include contemporary Hinduism, everyday religion, and affordance theory.

In 2018 she published 'The Role of Roadside Shrines in the Everyday Lives of Female Devotees in Mumbai' in *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ)*.

Tanvi Patel-Banerjee teaches Sociology at the 'A' Levels and is an independent researcher, conducting qualitative research for several commercial market research firms. Her PhD dissertation *Muslims in Mumbai: The Making of a New Middle Class* was written under the guidance of Rowena Robinson at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Bombay.

Claire C. Robison, Assistant Professor of Religion and Asian Studies, Bowdoin College (USA). Her manuscript *Bringing Krishna Back to India: Global and Local Networks in a Mumbai Temple* examines an Indian ISKCON community in relation to changing understandings of family, class, and gender in urban India.

Gopika Solanki, Associate Professor of Political Science, Carleton University (Canada). Her research interests include religion and politics, indigeneity and the law, and feminist theory. She is the author of *Adjudication in Religious Family Laws: Cultural Accommodation, Legal Pluralism, and Gender Equality in India* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Michael Stausberg, Professor of Religion, University of Bergen (Norway). His research interests include Zoroastrianism and the Parsis, theories of religion and ritual, magic, and religion and tourism. His latest book in English is *The Demise of Religion: How Religions End, Die, or Dissipate* (co-edited with Stuart A. Wright and Carole M. Cusack, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

David J. Strohl, is an independent scholar. He formerly taught anthropology at Colby College (USA). His work has appeared in *Contemporary South Asia* and *Religions of South Asia*.

Sumanya Anand Velamur, former PhD candidate in religion studies at the Department of Archaeology, History, Culture Studies and Religion, University of Bergen (Norway). Her research interests include communal violence in India, Dalit studies, peace building and religion in Mumbai. Before embarking on her PhD studies, she worked in the development sector in Mumbai for eight years.

Heinz Werner Wessler, Professor of Indology, Uppsala University (Sweden). In recent years, he has worked on South Asian classical and modern religious texts, and mostly on modern and contemporary Hindi literature. A recent publication is the essay 'Indian and Universal? The Significance of François-Marie de Tours for the Case of Hindi' (in Carmen Brandt and Hans Harder (eds.), *Wege durchs Labyrinth: Festschrift zu Ehren von Rahul Peter Das*; XAsia, 2020).

A Note on the Use of Italics and Diacritics

The online edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) has been used as a guide to decide on whether words of non-English origin should appear in italic or roman. Roman without diacritics usually indicates that the word is considered to be in common usage and has been passed into English. Where there is a transliterated word in italic with an anglicized plural 's', the 's' is kept in roman font.

1

Religion in Bombay/Mumbai

A Scenario

Michael Stausberg

I threw away my ticket. What refund, I said, I don't care.
I just want to get back home and, well, stay there.

God, I was looking forward to meeting you in the flesh.
But I'm just not cut out for travelling, I guess.

I've often wondered, do you ever come down to Bombay?
If you do, my door is always open for you, remember.

Arun Kolatkar, 'The One Who Did Not Go'

For a long time, Bombay (since 1995 officially known as Mumbai)¹ had the reputation of being the quintessential modern city in India: prosperous, progressive, literate, educated, open, tolerant, fast, excessive, with ample opportunities for consumption and entertainment. Given that modernity and cities were often, albeit wrongly, considered to be antipodes to religion, the image of Mumbai as a model modern city may also have contributed to a widespread obstruction of the location of religion in its fabric.²

¹ Both names will be used interchangeably in this text with a preference to use Mumbai when speaking of the past twenty-five years and Bombay for the colonial and the first decades of the postcolonial period; the name change came some years after the end of the Cold War and the decisive neoliberal turn in India.

² Academic publications on Mumbai cover a wide array of topics such as urban history (planning, architecture, housing), riots and terrorist attacks, politics, the economy, poverty, and labour, class and caste, housing and work, crime and violence, prostitution, sexuality, LGBT, cinema, literature, and cultural politics, health care and water supply, slums and transportation—to name but the most salient ones.

Even though Mumbai is not known as a site of sacrality or pilgrimage, religion plays an important role for many of its inhabitants. In recent years, urban religion, or religion in cities, has become a vibrant area of international and interdisciplinary research (see e.g. van der Veer 2015; Day and Edwards 2021; Keul 2021b; see also Rüpke and Rau).³ In addition to religion *in* the city, one can also speak of religion *of* the city, where one investigates, as we do in the present volume,

urban religion in its diverse forms as a specific element of urbanization and urban everyday life insofar as it is intertwined with other elements from urban fields—urban lifestyles and imaginaries, infrastructures and materialities, cultures, politics and economics, forms of living and working, community formation, festivals and celebrations and so on—and together with these, incessantly generates and (re-)produces the city. Hence, we understand the production of urban religion and religious urbanity as two sides of a continual process in which the urban and the religious reciprocally interact, mutually interlace, producing, defining, and transforming each other. (Lanz 2014, 25 f.; see also Rüpke 2020)

Such a perspective partly resonates with local street knowledge. As Abdulbhai, an experienced broker who was in the business of reclaiming land, explained to an urbanist: ‘Religion, land, money, and power . . . are intricately intertwined in Mumbai and have engulfed everyone’ (Khanolkar 2021, 93 f.).

Overview

The present volume brings together contributions on the urbanity–religion interface in Mumbai. Even though some chapters deal with specific religious groups, the aim of this volume is not to give a basic portrayal of these groups⁴ but to address important facets of their urban realities,

³ See also *Religion and Urbanity Online* (eds. Jörg Rüpke and Susanne Rau; Open Access; de Gruyter).

⁴ See Verghese, Kamat, and Poncha (2013) for such a community panorama. Contributors are mostly local scholars.

of the ways they relate to the city, their productions of Mumbai as their city. A volume such as this assembles selected snapshots—illustrative and significant ones at best—rather than attempting to provide the whole picture. The kind of research put together in this volume provides depth, not totality. Scholarship on religion in and of Mumbai has focused on some areas more than others. Indeed, there is an absence of research on important topics and groups, which also limits the reach of this book.⁵

Whereas it is impossible to do justice to such a dynamic and complex field as religion in Mumbai in all its intricacies, this introductory chapter attempts to provide a broader panorama. Given the dominant focus on the present in this volume, this chapter will provide some historical background and context, from the colonial conquest of the archipelago to the postcolonial megapolis. We begin by reviewing the regime of religious non-interference as the *modus operandi* of British colonial rule. In the nineteenth century, missionaries, education, and print culture provided the religious field with a new dynamic between reform movements and techniques of enchantment (and, for the twentieth century, we will look at Bollywood). Courts are another important arena for the religious field; even if they work under the premise not to decide religious truths, the text reviews examples where they have determined issues of religious identity and ‘authentic’ religion.

A signature of the city is a high degree of religious diversity.⁶ This chapter will review the discursive theme of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and its diverse meanings so as to be able to scrutinize the development of the religious demography of the city by means of census data. Yet, denominators like ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ (which together cover above 85 per cent of the population of the city) conceal the actual diversity of the religious groups and movements on the ground. Already

⁵ For example, Christianities in Mumbai are an understudied field. For an unpublished contribution, see Roberts and Viswanath (2012).

⁶ This trait is shared by many port cities the world over. Facchini’s essay on Trieste and Odessa in the long nineteenth century shows many parallels to Bombay: the idea (myth) of ‘cosmopolitanism’, the importance of religious minorities, ‘mixed’ religious practices and languages, the simultaneous use of different vernaculars and liturgical languages used in religious settings, the adjustments of religious infrastructures to urban settings, the importance of economically and financially successful religious groups for the construction of the city’s infrastructure and of sites of entertainment for interaction among members of different religious groups, the importance of mixed marriages (intermarriages) and educational facilities; in sum: ‘each community of faith witnessed processes of differentiation and change; port cities were at once sites of opportunities and social mobility, but also of class differentiation and conflict’ (Facchini 2021, 128).

since the colonial era, Catholicism and forms of Protestantism have been strong players on the religious field. Besides, Mumbai is home to smaller groups of Middle Eastern origin—Jews, Zoroastrians (Parsis), and Armenian Christians—and the development of the city is to a disproportionate extent tied to the fortune of the Parsis and their migration from Gujarat. Jains have likewise been economic and social achievers in the city. Last but not least, Mumbai has been of central importance for the emerging new Buddhism created by Dr Ambedkar that was adopted primarily by Dalits. While plurality and cosmopolitanism seem to be the sunny side of religious plurality, tensions, riots, discrimination, fear, and memories of violence have been the shadow side. Since the nineteenth century, there have been riots among different groups, the first involving the Parsis. In recent decades, Muslims and Dalit Buddhists were shot at in massacres committed by the police.⁷ While the percentage of Muslims, Jains, Buddhists, Christians, Zoroastrians (Parsis), and Jews is higher in Mumbai than in India as a whole, the opposite is true for Sikhism.⁸

Large public religious celebrations and processions can sometimes occasion tensions. This chapter reviews the biggest Hindu, Muslim, and Christian feasts and fairs that are celebrated in the city. We then move on to Christian, Muslim, and Hindu landmark religious places, some of which are visited by adherents of different religious denominations. In a final section, the essay presents the research chapters assembled in this volume.

Early Colonial Religious Policy: Religious Liberty and Suffrage

The growth of Bombay to national and international significance, just like that of Calcutta (Kolkata) and Madras (Chennai), was tied to the colonial conquest of the subcontinent. In 1534, the archipelago of seven islands, swamps, marshlands, rivers, straits, and creeks—mainly inhabited

⁷ Similarly, most victims of custodial deaths in Mumbai were Muslims and Dalits (Waghmore and Contractor 2015, 226).

⁸ The 2011 census gives a figure of 60,759 Sikhs in Mumbai, corresponding to 0.46 per cent of the population; the same census records a figure of 1.72 per cent for Sikhs at national level.

by the Koli people—that became the city was captured by the Portuguese who built a trading centre there. The Catholic legacy of the settlement is still notable in the contemporary city, in particular through the older churches; even though most of the existing architectonical structures were built much later, churches like St Andrew's in Bandra, St Michael's in Mahim, Holy Cross church in Kurla, and the church of Our Lady of Salvation, popularly known as the Portuguese church, in Dadar were founded by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. In 1662, the archipelago was ceded to the British who granted it to the East India Company in 1668. The company had a fortified city on the South East Indian coast (Madras, also known as Fort St George), and wished to establish a similar outpost on the Western coast that would, unlike Surat, be beyond the control of the Mughals. In 1687 the company shifted its 'Presidency' from Surat to Bombay.

The East India Company had the authority to make and enforce laws, to govern the people, and to organize its defence (Hunt and Stern 2016, 8). Among other changes, the shift from the Portuguese to the British entailed a significant reorientation in religious policy. Apparently, during the reign of the Portuguese landowners, the erection of Catholic churches had gone along with the destruction of several temples and mosques, and there is information on forced conversions (Prakash 2010, 33–34). Apparently too, the Portuguese in turn had found the landmark Hindu temple of Walkeshwar in ruins (Cunha 1993, 43), possibly destroyed by earlier Muslim conquerors. In the year before Bombay came under the control of the East India Company, '123 Christians, 84 Hindus and 18 Muslims presented the king [Charles II] with a petition outlining the abuses of the Portuguese, in particular the fact that there was no religious tolerance and only Roman Catholicism was acceptable' (Smith 2017, 107). It is noteworthy, as this report shows, that this oppressive religious policy was not endorsed by all Christians. When taking over the islands, the company confiscated property from the Jesuits, who had resisted the British takeover insofar as it interfered with their property claims; the Jesuits had threatened insurgence and even supported the 1689/90 siege of Bombay by the Mughal general Sidi Yakut Khan (*Gazetteer* [1910], 3:288) that had almost erased the new settlement and led to desertion and subsequent conversion to Islam by some of the company's men (Hunt 2017; Hunt and Stern 2016).

The religious policy of the East India Company took three directions. First, from the late 1660s onwards, religious liberty or, maybe more appropriately, suffrage was practised. ‘The Articles of Agreement between the Governor and Inhabitants of Bombay’ explicitly guaranteed ‘the inhabitants the liberty of Exceriseing their Respective Religion’ (Smith 2017, 103). This was meant as a strategic investment to make the town attractive to newcomers. Second, the different religious groups living in Bombay were allowed to have their own leadership and ‘may be impowered to have a perculiar regard and care of their owne cast to accomdate and quiet all small differiencies and quarrels which may happen amongst them’, as a document from 1673 reads (107). Third, justice should be dispensed ‘without distinction of Nation or Religion’, as the document often referred to as the Magna Carta of Bombay stipulates (Dossal 2010, 17). This seemingly ‘modern’ policy of religious liberty or neutrality was not quite unusual. There was the example of the Dutch, and the Mughal Empire and the Marathas of the time practised religious suffrage. The seventeenth century warrior-king Shivaji Bhonsale had ordered that no mosque was to be destroyed, the bhakti movement of that period crossed religious boundaries, and the Mughal emperor Akbar entertained a project of ‘spiritual ecumenism’ that involved all religious traditions of his empire—even this did not amount to a project of toleration but a kind of ‘spiritual hegemony: every religion had a place in the empire as long as its adherents recognized the monarch as the saint of the age and abided by his laws, both temporal and spiritual’ (Lefèvre 2015). When Aurangzeb reintroduced the poll tax (*jizya*) for non-Muslims in 1679, Bombay could appear as a refuge (Smith 2017). The religious liberty offered at this trading post was probably one—albeit only one—factor that attracted a wide variety of groups.

Religious liberty, however, must not be confused with religious equality; the colonial administrators and rulers always identified with Protestant Christianity, which they considered superior. Yet, there never was only one type of Protestantism that was privileged, and the British were worried about potential conversions to Islam and Catholicism. Evangelism was not discouraged, but was to proceed by way of good example, not by aggressive campaigns or coercion (Smith 2017, 101 f.). Many government-supported charitable projects were set up specifically for local Christians (Chopra 2019, 182) and the British built up their own

religious infrastructure. The East India Company had its own chaplains. The foundation stone of the St Thomas church was laid in 1676 (within the walls of the British settlement), but the church was consecrated only in 1718 and elevated to cathedral in 1833; an Anglican Diocese of Bombay was established in 1837.⁹ The Anglicans wished to celebrate their Sunday worship undisturbed and to keep Sunday as a weekly full day of rest—an alien concept in the Indian context. Eventually, however, the Protestant Christians were no longer content with the opportunity to celebrate their Sunday as they wished and let the rest of the population do as they pleased, so that in 1843 Sunday working was prohibited for the entire population of the city in order to demonstrate to the natives the principles of the Christian religion; not content with that, its rules were to be respected. In other words, the Christian construction of time was established as superior to that of other religions and became the civic norm. Some years later, in 1846/47, Sunday working was prohibited in all government departments throughout India. In addition, government departments were to be closed on two Christian holidays (Easter and Christmas) and two civic-imperial holidays (New Year's Day and the Queen's birthday). Some sort of unequal equality was introduced when each religious community was granted specific holidays that counted as non-working days for its adherents. This scheme contributed to a division of separate communities in terms of festive cultures, and introduced a hierarchy of holidays, as those classified as non-working days counted more than others (Masselos 1994).

The general policy of suffrage or non-interference with 'native' religious affairs did not preclude occasional actions of factual interference when developing the urban landscape. For example, in 1719–20 a monastery was taken from the Jesuits, officially because they engaged in 'some foul practices against the English interest' (*Gazetteer* [1910], 3:289); the building was transformed into a residence of the Governors of Bombay, so the rumour may have served the purpose of rededicating the property. Furthermore, in 1760 a Catholic church was moved to another location because of its proximity to the new town walls. It seems that there was no resistance from the Catholic priests (Cunha 1993, 201 f.). For the same

⁹ <http://stthomascathedralmumbai.com/site/viewPage/7> (accessed 19 July 2020).

reason and in the same year, one tradition has it, the Mumbadevi temple, 'considered the Hindu Cathedral of Bombay,' was removed to a different location (Cunha 1993, 46; Chopra 2011, 193).¹⁰ But the colonial administration was not only the active executor of relocations. An incident of a passive accommodation was recorded in 1871, when a mosque, a house, and a tank were built next to a *dargah* at the Victoria Gardens; the authorities tolerated the encroachment but enclosed it by a wall and a passage, so that the Muslim devotees and the visitors of the park would be separated (Chopra 2011, 228). The issue of 'encroachment' in the sense of intrusion on somebody else's property has been a recurrent issue in the city and has intensified as the population grew and space became even more scarce. As we shall see below, religious structures such as roadside shrines and temples have continued to 'encroach' on private or public space such as pavements or roads. While these examples relate to buildings, performances also spurned governmental interventions; in particular, the major Muslim feast of Muharram was curtailed in the name of public order during the colonial era (see below).

Missionaries, Education, and Reform in the Nineteenth Century

In 1813, the charter issued to the British East India Company was renewed by an Act of Parliament of the United Kingdom. Among other things, the Charter Act of 1813 gave Christian missionaries greater access to India and obliged the company to take up an active role in the education of the Indians under its dominion. In Bombay, education and mission went together as the earliest missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions set up schools from 1814, for which they hired Brahmins and Jews as teachers. In these schools, students were 'learning to understand and respect Christianity'. Rather than speeding up Christian proselytization, the government was reluctant to open the doors for religious propaganda. In 1820, the Governor of Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone, 'feared that too rapid

¹⁰ There are other sources on the prior location and shift of this temple; see Vicziany and Bapat (2009, 517).

advances would be made against the prejudices of the natives' (Wilder 1861, 59–60; Gupchup 1993, 37). Several mission societies were active in Bombay, including the Church Missionary Society, an Anglican organization founded in London in 1799. The first schools operating in English were started in the 1830s, partly to educate future Christian teachers. In 1832, John Wilson from the Scottish Missionary Society opened an English school at his own residence. In the same year, Wilson resolved to found the 'Bombay Ladies School for Destitute Native Girls', as he considered the lack of female education a major hurdle in the way of 'progress' among the Indians. Wilson was a highly educated man; in addition to mastering several ancient languages, he learned several vernaculars, which allowed him to address the native population directly. Wilson was the leading Orientalist scholar of the city in his time. The intimate ties between education and mission came to the fore in 1839, when two Parsi (Zoroastrian) students were baptized, and then again in 1843, when the same happened with a Brahmin boy. These conversions created upheaval among the native communities, but at the same time they initiated a new discursive culture: processes of intellectual apologetics and polemics, comparison and competition, response and reflection on the history and nature of non-Christian local religions (Gupchup 1993; Stausberg 1997; Palsetia 2006).

Of particular interest for the missionaries' efforts of proselytization were the Jains. Given that Jains were much more numerous in Bombay than in other colonial cities, the Jain religion caught the attention of the missionary scholars. While the Scottish missionaries started to edit Jain scriptures and learnt about the acrimony between (some) Jains and Hindus in historical sources, the Jains informed the missionaries that their religion was different from that of the Hindus. This encounter gave rise to the idea of Jainism as a distinct religious entity and the Jains as a religious community in its own right (Numark 2013).

Across different religious communities, together with growing levels of school education and an emerging print culture, this new discursive set-up gave birth to tendencies or movements of planned change (reform). Typically, such discourses emphasized morality, a return to presumed original sources, the importance of education and science; they advocated turning away from what they branded as superstition and costly festive practices which were considered excessive; the status of women also

tended to be a topic. In Bombay, these reformist discourses were put forward in newly established journals and magazines and coincided with the emergence of a new class of educated public intellectuals who challenged the traditional leadership of the wealthy (Dobbin 1972). Even though the reformist initiatives had some impact, they mostly remained a minority affair, even in eventually highly educated communities such as the Parsis. Parsis were also active in the establishment of the Theosophical Society. In 1879, the founders of this society—Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott—arrived in Mumbai from New York, and in the following year the first lodge was founded in Bombay (Wadia 1931). Theosophy was an important counterpoint to Christian hegemony and stimulated reinterpretations of indigenous religions.¹¹ Some years earlier, in 1875, Bombay had also been the stage for the inauguration of the first branch of the Arya Samaj—but it was only in the Punjab that the movement started to expand, mainly in North India, becoming the most influential Hindu reform society of the early twentieth century (Fischer-Tiné 2018).

The Bene Israel, the largest of India's Jewish communities, were another example of the impact of Christian mission. They had settled in the Konkan (a section of the western coastal region of India, mainly to the south of Bombay) and spoke Marathi. After many had migrated to Bombay, they exposed themselves to education provided by the missionaries. Very few Bene Israel converted to Christianity, but due to the impact of Christian missionary education the community sought to 'expurgate "heathenish" practices, particularly idolatry' (Numark 2012, 1793)—meaning their engagement with Indian deities—and to (re)discover their Jewish legacy, in particular the Hebrew Bible; thereby, they adopted a more clear-cut Jewish identity closer to standard international models of Judaism. The education imparted to them by the missionaries enabled them to criticize and emancipate themselves from Christianity, while it simultaneously transformed their mode of being Jewish (Numark 2012).

In the case of Islam, Nile Green holds that tried-and-tested traditional forms of 'enchanted' religion with an emphasis on immediacy, intercession, charisma, materiality, and spaces expanded rather than receded. Islam diversified remarkably and showed a vital religious creativity and productivity when Bombay, in the nineteenth century, became the

¹¹ In the mid-1920s, a Theosophical Garden City was founded in Juhu (Banerji 2019).

leading port and point of connectivity of the Indian Ocean, so that the city turned into a veritable experimental laboratory of Islam in between East Africa, Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, North India, the coastal regions, and Hyderabad. Bombay was a major centre of Islamic printing and production of religious materials; it was 'both a crucial factory and market' for various forms of Islam (Green 2011, 27). The case of Islam also illustrates that mission, proselytization, and propaganda were not the exclusive prerogative of Christianity—and this continues up to the present day. Even though spokespersons of Hinduism like Gandhi have influentially dissociated their religion from models of conversion (Roberts 2016), a broad range of religious leaders, ascetics, miracle-workers, gurus, and other religious operators or entrepreneurs have found fertile ground in the city. The main difference, however, is that Muslim activists and organizations—consider, at present, the Tablighi Jamaat—have primarily approached people from the orbit of their respective traditions while Christian missionaries have sought to attract people across different communities—as did Hindus, but without demanding a formal shift of religious adherence. (For ISKCON, as an exception, see Robison, Chapter 11 in this volume.)

Religious Neutrality and Religious Essentials at Court

The idea of non-interference in religious affairs was difficult to put into practice as the British possessed legal authority. While the colonial courts did not consider matters of religious truth claims as their business, religion entered the courts through the backdoor, for example in disputes over religious property or inheritance (Shodhan 2001, 34). After the rebellion of 1857 was suppressed, the East India Company dissolved, and the country administered directly by the British government, this strategy of religion-avoidance became even more difficult to sustain. In 1858 Queen Victoria proclaimed freedom for all her Indian subjects to practise their religion. Yet, what counted as 'religion'? Even if courts did not wish to settle religious matters, on occasion they could not help but do exactly this. An analysis of two cases involving small caste-like religious groups mainly of traders and merchants—the Khojas and the

Pushtimargis—from the 1860s has pointed to the peculiar logic applied by the court: the cases were decided on the basis of normative notions of authentic or true Islam and Hinduism respectively; in this way, two communities were no longer seen as independent traditions, but classified as a branch of Islam and Hinduism respectively, and their specific histories were subsumed under these entities (Shodhan 2001). In the Khoja case, what was officially a dispute on property ownership and payment of revenues would in the course of the proceedings turn into a case determining the religious identity of a community. In the court proceedings the Khojas were treated not on their own terms, but as Shia Ismailis. The religious identity of a group like the Khojas that did not squarely fit mutually exclusive notions of Sunni vs. Shia or Muslim vs. Hindu came to be disambiguated (Purohit 2012). As the court set out to decide in favour of one set of claims, it *de facto* interfered in religious affairs, and the Khojas were redefined from an endogamous caste-like group to a religious community grounded in an ancient doctrinal creed (Masselos 1973, 16). In this and other cases such as the Bombay Parsis (Zoroastrians), where court cases redefined religious identities (Sharafi 2010, 2014), the colonial authorities did not actively set out to interfere in religious beliefs. Yet, as some groups were unable to settle their disputes internally and there now was the opportunity to try other avenues, some parties hoped that the colonial courts would rule in their favour and thereby alter the power structures within the respective communities. In this process, their claims had to be made intelligible and be translated to become operative in the British legal machinery. In the Khoja case, the plaintiffs approached the court to expel the Aga Khan, who had moved to Bombay in 1845, from Khoja affairs and to return the properties he had appropriated to the Khoja community. In effect, however, the court confirmed the Aga Khan's position (Purohit 2012) and thereby provided him with an additional layer of legitimacy. In the later nineteenth century, two subgroups split off from the Khojas, one becoming Ithna' Asharis (Twelver Shiites), another one becoming Sunnis.

In the postcolonial dispensation, the Constitution of the Republic of India guarantees citizens 'free profession, practice and propagation of religion' (§25); 'every religious denomination or sections thereof' is entitled 'to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes' and to 'freedom to manage religious affairs' (§26). Like its colonial

predecessors, postcolonial courts must not interfere in religious affairs of religious communities. Yet, where exactly does the religious start and where the secular? Given these obscure boundaries, contemporary courts are in the business of determining religion legitimate or ‘authentic’ religion, even when determining the realm of the ‘secular’. For example, in 2016, the High Court of Bombay delivered a judgement on a public interest litigation concerning alleged gender discrimination and arbitrary denial of access to women in the sanctum sanctorum of the city’s most prominent *dargah* (Haji Ali), where the trustees had changed the rules of access so that women were no longer permitted to be in close proximity of the saint’s tomb. The court ruled that this exclusion violated their rights under articles 14 (equality), 15 (non-discrimination), and 25 (freedom of religion) and ordered that women be readmitted on a par with men. In their judgement, the judges state: ‘The State has the power to regulate secular activities without interfering with the religious activities.’¹² But an appeal to article 26 of the Constitution was not applicable as the trust managing the *dargah* is a public charitable trust open to people irrespective of their caste, creed, or sex, and its objects ‘are in respect of purely secular activities of a non-religious nature, such as giving loans, education, medical facilities. Neither the objects nor the Scheme vest any power in the trustees to determine matters of religion.’¹³ According to the court, the trust was not authorized to ‘manage religious affairs’ and the *dargah* was a public place open to all. For the judges, such parts of a religion as are considered ‘essential’ are exempted from state intervention and protected by the Constitution. The concept of religion that the contemporary court puts to work is in tune with an ‘essentialist’ and ‘Protestant’ prototype centred on beliefs, faith, and textual sources—in this case the Qur’an—not unlike its colonial predecessor. The case and the judgement were widely reported in the media in the city. (We will revisit this *dargah* below.) Similarly, in 2018, the Bombay High Court decided on a petition filed in 2017 by Parsi activists asking that the construction of a Metro tunnel under the two most important Zoroastrian

¹² Bombay High Court, Dr Noorjehan Safia Niaz And 1 Anr vs State Of Maharashtra And Ors on 26 August, 2016, Bench: V.M. Kanade; section 34; <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/139113138/> (accessed 23 July 2020).

¹³ See Bombay High Court, Dr Noorjehan Safia Niaz And 1 Anr vs State Of Maharashtra And Ors on 26 August, 2016, Bench: V. M. Kanade; section 35.

fire temples of Mumbai be halted and reconsidered. Among other things, the judge declared: ‘I conclude that the petitioners have failed to establish that items (i) to (vi) ... are integral and essential part of the Zoroastrian religion.’¹⁴ In other words, the court felt entitled to determine about what counts as the ‘essential part’ of a religion.

Tropes: Diversity and Cosmopolitanism

The diversity of religious groups that had settled in Bombay since the late seventeenth century is a recurrent topic in the representation of Bombay. Before turning to the present, let us review three examples, published in different languages in the years 1820, 1863, and 1920—a period in which the city grew by 1 million people, from an estimated 200,000 to some 1,200,000, thereby becoming one of the largest cities of the world. In 1872, Bombay was the second largest city of the British Empire (Kosambi 1986, 35). In 1820, the earliest major account of Bombay Islam, an anonymous Persian text called *Jān-e Bomabā’i* (‘The Soul of Bombay’), mentions ‘the English, Portuguese, Greeks, Dutch, Zoroastrians, Jews, Chinese and many “sects” [*farqa*] of Hindus’ and ‘a bewildering range of Muslim groups ...: Arabs and Turks, Iranis and Turanis, Sindis and Hindis, Kabulis and Qandaharis, Panjabis and Lahoris, Kashmiris and Multanis, Madrasis and Malabaris, Gujaratis and Dakanis, Bhaghdadis and Basrawis, Muscatis and Konkaniis’ (Green 2011, 4). As most of them wore different kinds of costumes, dress, and hairstyles, this created a colourful cityscape—another enduring stereotype of the city. In 1863, the writer and publisher Govind Narayan published an account of the city in Marathi: *Mumbaiche Varnan* (‘Description of Bombay’). Even though Narayan had lived in the city since he was 9, he observed it with the eyes of a visitor, so that the text almost reads like a guidebook. He is ‘entertained’, ‘enthused’, ‘amazed’, ‘wherever one goes, there is something to catch the eye’. There is ‘magnificence’, ‘splendour’, ‘opulence’. Narayan speaks of the ‘famous sites’ that visitors would be likely to want to see—but contrary to

¹⁴ High Court of Judicature at Bombay Ordinary Original Civil Jurisdiction, Writ Petition No. 2890 of 2018 (<https://bombayhighcourt.nic.in/libweb/recentinfo/WP2890of2018.pdf>), §298 (p. 417).

contemporary 'Mumbai darshan' trips, no religious places are listed here. He mentions that 'people of many races, castes, and tribes are resident in Mumbai, the differences between whom are clearly visible' (Narayan 2012, 61). One can be 'entertained' by strange costumes, and their sight is inspiring. Finally, the Parsi Dinshaw Edulji Wacha, a merchant and founding member of the Indian National Congress, who was knighted in 1917, used the word 'cosmopolitan' for this state of visible diversity in his *Shells from the Sands of Bombay* (1920). He asks: 'Is it not literally true that in modern Bombay we witness a truly cosmopolitan population in which every nationality is represented, not only from China but from Japan on the east [*sic!*], and from Brazil, Mexico, California and San Francisco on the West?' (Wacha 1920, 411). Note that Wacha gives a list of nations, not of religious groups, so it is ethnic rather than religious diversity *per se* that is addressed here. Turning to the present age, the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (who was born and raised in Bombay) finds cosmopolitanism 'Mumbai's self-governing cliché' (Appadurai 2013, 200) and the Mumbai-based journalist-cum-scholar Nareesh Fernandes wrote: 'Among the truths Bombay holds to be self-evident is the fact that it is cosmopolitan' (Fernandes 2013, 56; original italics). Fernandes bemoans the disappearance of this cosmopolitan culture—and the events from 1993 that will be reviewed below seem to have unmasked this self-perception as a tenuous myth.

The trope of the cosmopolitan city and its residents as cosmopolitans is a theme dealt with in some of the best fiction coming out of the city. For example, in his novel *Family Matters* (2002), the Toronto-based novelist Rohinton Mistry, a Parsi who was born and raised in Bombay, has erected a literary monument to the Bombay cosmopolite in the figure of Mr Kapur, the owner of the Bombay Sports Emporium and boss of Yezad Chenoy, a Parsi. Vikram Kapur, a Hindu, came to Bombay as an infant, when his parents fled the Punjab in 1947. He has a passionate love for the city: 'What I feel for Bombay you will never know. It's like the pure love for a beautiful woman, gratitude for her existence, and devotion to her living presence' (Mistry 2003, 152). In a conversation with his Parsi employee, he says:

'You see how we two are sitting here, sharing? That's how people have lived in Bombay. That's why Bombay has survived floods, disease,

plague, water shortage, bursting drains and sewers, all the population pressures. In her heart there is room for everyone who wants to make a home here.' ... 'You see, Yezad, Bombay endures because it gives and it receives. Within this warp and weft is woven the special texture of its social fabric, the spirit of tolerance, acceptance, generosity.' (159)

A little later in the conversation, Mr Kapur intones the following hymn, where the key term of cosmopolitanism makes its appearance:

'This beautiful city of seven islands, this jewel by the Arabian Sea, this reclaimed land, this ocean gift transformed into ground beneath our feet, this enigma of cosmopolitanism where races and religions live side by side and cheek by jowl in peace and harmony, this diamond of diversity, this generous goddess who embraces the poor and the hungry and the huddled masses, this Urbs Prima in Indis, this dear, dear city now languishes—I don't exaggerate—like a patient in intensive care, Yezad, my friend, put there by small, selfish men who would destroy it because their coarseness cannot bear something so grand, so fine.' (160)

Cosmopolitanism is a big word with a wide variety of meanings. It is a disputed and mostly normative—moral and political—concept that comes in a variety of versions and is used in a range of different academic disciplines and fields (see e.g. Delanty 2018; Rovisco and Nowicka 2011). The term could well resonate with the liberal-modernist representation of Bombay, where the emphasis is on openness, opportunities, and overcoming 'bigotry'. This is an ideal typical trope of the educated and the wealthy, the middle class, literati and intellectuals, and the transnational business elite. More recently, in the context of globalization, the disadvantaged have developed a '(micro-) cosmopolitanism from below' by extending their horizons beyond the confines of the city to connect with members of similar communities in other parts of the country and the world and by reaching out to visiting dignitaries (Appadurai 2013). In addition to elitist, sophisticated, and universalist cosmopolitanism as a normative ideal or a political idea, there is everyday or vernacular cosmopolitanism as socially situated, lived, experienced, and talked about (not least to outsiders) (Keul 2021a; Werbner 2006). At the level of talk, the notion of cosmopolitanism means a positive appreciation of diversity in

its aesthetic aspects, such as a wide range of colours, foodstuffs, dresses, hairstyles. In a social sense, evoking cosmopolitanism expresses a basic wish for undisturbed coexistence, if not conviviality.

Turning from ideas and discourses to actions and material culture, one can speak of cosmopolitan practices, often in relation to suffering and healing (Mayaram 2009). Many people keep material items from different religions in their homes, either placed in a devotional context or spread out as decoration. As we will see below, festivals are an interreligious contact sphere. As an exemplary cosmopolitan, Mr Kapur from the Bombay Sports Emporium announces a kind of cosmopolitan window-dressing:

‘From now on,’ said Mr. Kapur, ‘in this shop we will celebrate all festivals: Divali, Christmas, Id, your Parsi Navroze, Baisakhi, Buddha Jayanti, Ganesh Chaturthi, everything. We’ll decorate the windows, put up appropriate greetings with lights and all. We are going to be a mini-Bombay, an example to our neighbourhood.’ (Mistry 2003, 159)

Yet, when researching the theme on the ground, the celebrated lived cosmopolitanism turns out to be mainly as ‘a combination of pragmatism, politeness and indifference’ (Keul 2021c, 216; see also Kaur and Mohammed, Chapter 7 in this volume) On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that Mumbai is an exception to the general tendency in India where some fundamental religious ideas are shared across religious boundaries. For example, a recent report on *Religion in India: Tolerance and Segregation* by the Pew Research Center showed that 77 per cent of Hindus and (!) Muslims affirm the idea of karma, and almost a third of Christians believed in the purifying power of the river Ganges (Pew Research Center 2021, 7).

The confluence of different traditions across communities can also be observed in music and film. Learning, playing, and listening to Hindustani classical music has provided a space of creative encounter, and it is not uncommon that teachers adopt students from different communities, for example Muslim singers having Hindu and Parsi students (Niranjana 2018). The film industry has since its beginnings thrived on the collaboration of different ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities (Appadurai 2013, 202). Parsi theatre was a main inspiration for the emergence of cinema; the pioneers of Bombay cinema came from diverse

backgrounds: Parsis, Jews, Gujaratis, and Maharastrians. There were friendships, affairs, and marriages across communities—just as there are today (Dwyer 2006, 18, 98, 134). Suketu Mehta has the following to say about the present situation:

The Hindi film industry has always had the secularism of a brothel. All are welcome as long as they carry or make money. The financier might be a hard-core Hindu nationalist. The lyricist can be a fundamentalist Sunni. A star who plays a Hindu will actually be Muslim, and his heroine, playing a Muslim, will be Hindu ... (Mehta [2004] 2006, 407)

Not only are people belonging to different religious groups involved in the making of Indian popular films produced in Mumbai (aka Bollywood), but Indian cinema depicts and represents religion(s) on different levels and in different manners including mythological and devotional films (see e.g. Dwyer 2006, 2010). Yet, minority religions are ‘scarcely acknowledged’ (Dwyer 2006, 141). This also includes Christianity—even though it is not uncommon to see Hindus showing respect for Christian churches, where they are even shown praying (143). Muslims and Islam have been exoticized, marginalized, and even demonized (Chadha and Kavoori 2008). Some films create a generic religious ambiance, so that one does not know which religion is actually represented (Mehta [2004] 2006, 435). While most religious films that focus on Hindu themes are set in rural locations, ‘Muslim Devotionals are urban-based’ and ‘Bombay is seen as the city of Muslim modernity in India, as well as the port of departure for the Hajj’ (Dwyer 2010, 128). The topic of interreligious relationship has, for example, been addressed prominently in one of the most successful Bollywood blockbusters: *Amar Akbar Anthony*, a multi-star film directed by Manmohan Desai. The film came out in 1977, towards the end of the Emergency. It tells of the separation, shortly after their birth, of three brothers who came to be adopted into Hindu, Muslim, and Christian families respectively, and of the ultimate reunification of the brothers and their parents. One surface reading of the film sees it as a utopia of interreligious reintegration; this reflects the idea of Bombay cosmopolitanism and the ideology of Nehruvian secularism. Yet, another reading considers it as an expression of a Savarkarian ideology of

Hindutva as reflected by the name of the mother—Bharati, ‘a mythic signification of India as a Hindu nation’ (Osuri 2013, 107).¹⁵ In 2008, the release of *Jodhaa Akbar*, a historical drama directed by Ashutosh Gowariker that features the marriage of the Mughal emperor Akbar with the Hindu princess Jodhaa Bai, sparked controversies (partly because of the gender structure, i.e., a male Muslim taking a Hindu woman as wife). On the surface a nostalgic celebration of interreligious harmony, Goldie Osuri (2013, 114) finds this film to assert ‘Hindu religious-cultural sovereignty’. A key theme is the princess’s condition for her marriage, namely that she will not convert to Islam, but will be allowed to retain her Hindu religion even after marriage and that a temple will be built for her devotional practice—a demand accepted by Akbar. While religious identities remain separated and the film expresses a strict anti-conversion stance, its aural and sonic dimensions express a ‘heterolingualism and heteromusicality [that] substitute for an unacknowledged heteroreligiosity’ (119). The soundscape of Bollywood plays with a variety of influences to manufacture ‘cosmopolitan mediations’ (Beaster-Jones 2015).

There have been some organized initiatives to stimulate cross-religious literacy and to build bridges between religious communities in the city. Some colleges have had programmes or weekend courses on interreligious awareness. The Centre for Study of Society and Secularism founded by the Muslim (Bohra) scholar and reformer Asghar Ali Engineer (1939–2013) seeks to foster mutual respect for different religious or non-religious world-views. The societal impact of these initiatives is difficult to assess, but scepticism is not unwarranted.

A litmus test for cosmopolitan attitudes is so-called intermarriage or mixed marriage, where the partners are from different religious communities. These marriages are still clearly the exception to the rule—which is notable in a city that perceives itself as fundamentally cosmopolitan—and when such marriages occur, they are not always welcomed by parents and relatives, especially when the prospective partners are Muslim, low-caste, or Dalits (see e.g. Keul 2021a, 43).¹⁶ When it comes to family, concerns of caste and social status easily outperform ideas of cosmopolitanism. Even

¹⁵ For complex interpretations of this film, see Elison, Novetzke, and Rotman (2016).

¹⁶ In India in general, it seems that ‘marriages across religious lines ... are exceedingly rare’ (Pew Research Center 2021, 9). According to this study, resistance against interreligious marriages is less among Christians and highest among Muslims (29).

for Bollywood celebrities intermarriage can occasionally spark controversy; for example, when Saif Ali Khan married Kareena Kapoor there were reportedly death threats and there were rumours about 'love jihad'. A Hindu nationalist magazine for young women published an image of Kareena Kapoor, where her face was divided into two: one side showing her usual glamorous self with bindi and sindoor powder, while the left half of her face was covered by niqab. Underneath the Hindu side of her face, the English word 'love' appeared transliterated into Devanagari script (in orange), while the Arabic word 'jihad' (again translated into Devanagari script) was displayed underneath the Muslim side of her face (in green).¹⁷ Khan responded by publishing a column in the *Indian Express* with the title 'Intermarriage is not jihad, it is India'.¹⁸

The controversies around the film *Jodhaa Akbar* show that interreligious marriage has occasionally been a controversial topic in Bollywood (Osuri 2013, 121). The film *Amar Akbar Anthony* provides a telling example: each of the three protagonists falls in love with a woman from their own religious community, even though their religious identities were formed by accident, namely by their adoption into different families. The Tamil-language drama *Bombay* from 1995, directed by Mani Ratnam and reckoned to be a classic Indian film, was the first Indian film to depict a love-romance transgressing religious boundaries. The film, set in the context of the riots of 1992–93 (see below), narrates the story of a Hindu boy from Tamil Nadu who studies journalism in Bombay. On one of his trips home he falls in love with a Muslim girl; against the resistance of her family she joins him in Bombay. We are here witnessing the more acceptable gender structure of a Hindu man marrying a Muslim woman. They have twins who are socialized into both parental religions. Bombay is here represented as a refuge for interreligious couples, allowing them to break with oppressive conventions in rural India. However, as we shall see, in the city they face no less cruel problems.

Mumbaikars speak of 'cosmopolitan' buildings for places where families belonging to different ethnic or religious groups reside; similarly,

¹⁷ See the *International Business Times*, 18 January 2015; <https://www.ibtimes.co.in/love-jihad-intermarriage-controversies-that-involved-saif-ali-khan-kareena-kapoor-photos-620776> (accessed 7 March 2022).

¹⁸ 16 October 2014; <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/intermarriage-is-not-jihad-it-is-india/> (accessed 7 March 2022). For the context, see Jenkins (2019, ch. 6).