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Dom Moraes: A "Traitor" Who "Fractured" India or an Anglicized Middle-Class Empathizer Who Felt with the Marginalized?

ABSTRACT Dom Moraes (1938–2004) is a significant presence within the field of post-independence prose writings about India. However, he has often been misinterpreted as a "traitor" and an upholder of colonial discourse or, at best, a poet who was solely able to express his sensibilities through poetry. Such criticism of Moraes does not take into account his extensive engagement with India and Indian self-fashioning that can be found in his larger literary career, which also consists of a significant volume of his memoirs. Moraes spent his lifetime travelling across India, from the 1960s to the early twenty-first century, documenting his experiences. A nuanced chronological reading of his self-fashioning that forms a major strand in these texts reveals his affiliation to India through a sense of association to the felt community of the marginalized in India. Looking at his notions of individual habitus and class dispositions, this chapter argues that it is, ironically, through this mutually shared feeling of dissociation from a majoritarian image of India that he reclaims his own Indianness.

KEYWORDS Dom Moraes, felt community, habitus, self-fashioning, travelogues

Dom Moraes (1938–2004) has significantly contributed to the repertoire of Indian anglophone poetry and is simultaneously a paramount presence within the field of post-independence prose writings about India. However, he has often been misinterpreted as an upholder of colonial discourse or, at best, a poet who was solely able to express his sensibilities through poetry. In the tradition of what Neil Lazarus identifies as the criticism of Eurocentric views and that of "elitist top-down historiography as the foundational gestures of postcolonial studies" (2004, xiii), some of

the earliest Indian anglophone literary critics, like C. D. Narasimhaiah and M. K. Naik, have criticised Moraes's Anglophilic self-fashioning as a betrayal of his Indian identity. Drawing on Moraes's apparent self-portrayal in his memoirs, Naik refers to him mostly as a poet who "has studiedly disowned his Indian heritage repeatedly" ([1982] 2011, 205) and whose claim to fame rests on being "an Indian English poet" and on his refined linguistic skills. Naik writes: "Moraes has not published a new collection of verse […] and appears to have turned to prose […] [and] his verse has shown little evidence of any startling development consequent upon the reportedly successful transplantation, since he became a British citizen" (206–7). Also, C. D. Narasimhaiah states, "I couldn't care less how it sounds to contemporary English ears […] and I should tell my British friends, if they should ever share Mr. Moraes's misgivings, that it will not do them much harm to learn that the world is a little larger than England" (1976, 12). Eunice de Souza accuses Moraes of catering to colonial discourse in reference to his opinion of the country as being populated by "grotesques and morons" (1978, 339). Bruce King considers Moraes's poetry to be least concerned with either India or "Indianness" ([1991] 2005, 19) and, consequently, criticises his superficial engagement with India. King's statement is understandable, since Moraes's extensive engagement with India is mainly reflected in his memoirs, which were mostly written later. Thus, the later critics of Moraes, like Michael Schmidt (2004) and Ranjit Hoskote (2012), are not merely compassionate to his position but go so far as to exonerate Moraes of such accusations. Foregrounding Moraes's compulsion to lend a voice to marginalised communities across the world, irrespective of their nationality, caste, or class, Schmidt sympathetically portrays Moraes as a cosmopolitan author. Similarly, Rima Bhattacharya (2018) quite literally interprets Moraes's writings about alienation from his home as characteristic of a cynic cosmopolitan identity.

However, the earlier criticisms of Moraes, which were mostly written from the perspective of one's country of origin being a significant marker of one's individual identity and authorial self-fashioning, lack a deeper insight into Moraes's sense of alienation from India, as do most of the later critical interpretations of Moraes as a rootless cosmopolitan. In turn, a significant number of his critics fail to uncover Moraes's need to explore and define his Indian identity that underlines a vast body of his writings. In the decades following Indian independence, the sheer volume of criticism of Moraes's works, as can be observed from the comments of Narasimhaiah, de Souza, Naik, and King, are based on either Moraes's poetry or his personal self-fashioning in the form of his citizenship or marriage. Moraes only finds a cursory reference as an autobiographer in

Naik's text.[1] In this context, Jeet Thayil writes: "it was something no early reader of Moraes could have predicted. After decades of wandering the world he returned to India, where he immersed himself in the country's politics and sensibility" (2016, 225).

Moraes's evolution as an Indian author stretched as long as his writing career, and a chronological reading of his prose narratives on India reveals the developing trajectory of his identity as an Indian. Moraes's earliest return to India after a long period of absence from his country of origin and his prose writings about the experience date back to 1960 with the publication of his first memoir, *Gone Away*, where he refers to the journey as the "Return of a Stranger" (2003a). This apparent dissociation from his country of origin is rather ensconced within a problematic entanglement that he sought to resolve through his extensive travels across India and, subsequently, writing about them. A nuanced reading of his writings would reveal the morass that Moraes was trying to unravel with regard to his identification with his country of origin (Chattopadhyay 2012, 2014). His concern with "India and Indianness" is not merely a matter of his later writings. The subject shaped Moraes's self-fashioning as early as the 1960s and continued to do so throughout his life, as can be interpreted from his numerous travel narratives on India. The following sections shall, therefore, first deal with the charge of Moraes being a traitor to India that is often levelled against him and then trace the evolution of Moraes's Indian self-fashioning in terms of his socio-cultural habitus and his association to India based on his empathy for the 'felt community,' a term denoting communities that are formed, shaped, and sustained through a commonality of sentiments, which I borrow from Rajat K. Ray (2003).

Moraes's Childhood, "Dream England," and the Charge of a "Traitor"

Moraes was the son of the Indian journalist Frank Moraes and one of the earliest Indian female pathologists, Beryl Moraes (née de Monte). Born and brought up by a middle-class, English-speaking parentage, he grew up linguistically different as a child from the majority of Indians

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1 In contrast to Naik's opinion of Moraes as primarily a poet, Ghosh (2008) refers to Moraes as the "greatest Indian prose stylist, with the most beautiful sentences" while speaking about his memoir, *My Son's Father*.

(Moraes 2003a, 167; Moraes and Srivatsa 2002, 21).[2] With the experience of a traumatic childhood in India as a result of his mother's insanity and his linguistic alienation from the country, an adolescent Moraes wished to become an anglophone writer based in England. As a result, the distinct colonial middle-class desire of becoming English found an exponential heft in Moraes in the form of "dream England" (Chattopadhyay 2022, 109). Interestingly, on his return to London from his first visit to India, after spending a little less than a decade in the West as a student, Moraes writes:

> But landing in London is my beginning, my perpetual peaceful return to your hand in sleep at last made actual. I will bring back yaks to you in my head, and lamas; rice-fields drying in the sun, the living and the dying of a world half-the-world away. (2003a, 158)

Moraes's quote begins with a contestation: India being his country of origin is what should be usually considered as his beginning, yet Moraes implies the opposite, stressing that his life in England is the peaceful refuge, the "dream England" from his childhood and "at last made actual," as home, in the early phase of his writing career. That return does not, however, imply that he could isolate himself completely from India. Instead, he promises to bring with him memories of the Indian voyage and relay "the living and the dying" that he came across. Moraes's statement is a record of his interest in Indian society, and within the context of a brewing political emergency that eventually led to the Sino-Indian war, his broaching of the subject of political asylum for the fleeing, homeless Tibetan "lamas" from China in Nehruvian India already reveals a knack for Indian politics.[3] The quote also highlights by his own sense of homelessness, which is apparent in his remark, "I can bring you nothing else, because all the rest comes from you" (158), made immediately after. The statement is a re-iteration of his anglicization, but a closer look at the statement reveals that it is also underpinned by his peculiar colonial middle-class bearing. It is this middle-class perspective that he often prioritizes, and in the following section we shall see how that significantly shapes his outlook; before we

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2 See Chattopadhyay (2012, 2014) and Chattopadhyay (2022, 104–5) for further details about how Moraes's linguistic alienation from India and his traumatic childhood affected his self-fashioning.

3 As early as his first return to India, in a conversation with Nehru, when Moraes was asked "which India" he would write about, his impromptu reply was "Tibetan borders" (2003a, 39), which was a socio-politically problematic space at the time.

do so, however, I would like to focus on a few other crucial incidents that informed Moraes's dissociation from/identification with India.

Moraes publicly denounced his Indian citizenship during the 1961–1962 Indian army annexation of Goa, his ancestral homeland. The dramatically staged burning of his Indian passport on TV, besides being an act of protest against Indian politics, can be interpreted as a personal act.[4] Moraes ponders about the drastic step in his later memoir, *Never at Home* (originally published in 1992): "Nehru had refused a plebiscite and forced the issue, making the Goans Indians without consulting them, I was ashamed to be an Indian" (371). He further adds that, though he could express his dissent against the act in England, "the Indian press tore [him] to pieces, an effigy of [Moraes] was burnt in public in Bombay, and the Indian High Commission protested to the newspaper that had published [his] article" (371). Moraes recalls being invited to a debate organized by BBC on the issue of an Indian student calling him a "'Traitor!' and [Moraes notes …] others took up the word. It was impossible to say anything much" (371). Moraes addresses such accusations as "the Indian habit of talking about 'cultural heritage of the nation,' and then attempting to foist it on others" (372). His assessment in the form of a generalization, "the Indian habit," describes his own opinion about India. For him, a hostile, nationalist India over the years represented a monolithic, majoritarian voice that he strongly detested. Also, most postcolonial imaginations of India had been conceived as non-anglicized till around the 1980s, and later, an idea of a Hindu-majoritarian country became dominant, about which he extensively writes in his last two travel narratives that he co-authored with Sarayu Srivatsa. Within such a nationalistic, majoritarian frame, he would hardly find an acceptance as an anglicized, colonial middle-class writer. Consequently, his own remark about India is coloured by a simplistic, generalized opinion about India.

In spite of this, Moraes's desire to reclaim his association with India repeatedly brings him back to the country from early 1969 till the 1980s. Thayil remarks, with regard to Moraes's writings, that it is his poetry rather than his prose that reveals his affiliation to India (2016, 229). In reference to Moraes's visit to India in the early 1970s while working for the BBC film *The Bewildered Giant*, Leela Naidu (2010) writes about a conversation that the producer, Tony de Lotbinière, had with them. De Lotbinière had asked

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4 In *Never at Home*, Moraes writes about his meeting with a Goan "newfound friend" (436), sometime around 1969, who provided clarification on Moraes being treated as a hero in the state: "you expressed what all of us were feeling" (436), vis-à-vis the Goan "'liberation'" (436).

Moraes about his and Leela's identity, with the question, "'She's half-Indian and half-French. You're an Indian genetically, but you seem like a brown Englishman,' [...] 'How do you position yourself?'" (107). She had promptly replied, "I can understand the Europeans and I am at home in India. I can grow roots anywhere" (107). She added that Moraes very meekly followed it up with "'Me too,' [...] and shut up [...] He was uncomfortable with self-revelation when it was direct [...] he could shape it into his poetry, but he could not talk about himself" (107–8). This insight into Moraes's attitude highlights the paradox with regard to his apparent dissociation from his country of origin; it is, therefore, important to untangle and chronologically read the various incidents, discretely jumbled up by Moraes in his travelogues and memoirs, in order to understand the writer's dissociation and simultaneous self-fashioning as an Indian. Thus, paradoxically, one of the first things that Moraes was able to think as he held the newborn son he had with his English wife was, "[he] has English apples for cheeks, but somewhere behind them is a tinge of gold and olive, the colour of the country from which I came" (2003a, 334). In marking his own identity in the "tinge of gold and olive" against that of the "English apples" of his son, he subconsciously reiterates the binary, India and England, which had been existent in his mind. It is this sense of binary that actually led to his understanding of living in England and anglicized self-fashioning as being contradictory to his Indian identity. However, with time, England as a space of escape no longer provided him with a sense of safety.

In *Never at Home,* he writes about his migrant status in England, which he was repeatedly made aware of during the period between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, in the wake of the Notting Hill crisis: "England was my home. Was I to be treated like an immigrant? Then it occurred to me that I was an immigrant" (417). These incidents proved to be a fact-check that London, too, could add to his sense of rootlessness. Similarly, he opens up about the anxieties that he faced in England: "I had had breaks in my poetry, but never such a block as this" (416). In the same context, he writes of his recurrent dreams about a close acquaintance, Brian Higgins, a Yorkshire poet, who perished loveless and friendless in London (420–3). Noting that Higgins's situation repeatedly haunted him, Moraes feared that he might face something similar if he was incapable of writing any more. The crisis was further aggravated by his reviewers' comments on his collection titled *Poems 1955–1965* (1966). Moraes notes one such criticism by Hayden Carruth: "[there] was not a word about the country [India] in the entire corpus of [his] poetry," when India was "unbelievably full of material." In turn, he responds, "[it] was still not too late; I could return to my proper place" (2003a, 392).

Consequently, we find him being ever more involved in writing about India, as is revealed in the series of books published during this time. He published *The Open Eyes* (1976), a book on Karnataka, where for the first time he revealed his changing opinions about India. As an engineer working for a colonial India, his grandfather had "built roads and bridges [...] and that he had certainly been through these areas, on foot or horseback" (2005 [1976], 57), in the state of present-day Karnataka that Moraes, too, was travelling across for the purpose of his book. He sympathetically admits:

> Though I was not aware of it until a few years back [... my] grandfather [...] was posted there for some years [...] when I was child we didn't like each other much, but looking around me at the landscape I thought of the dedication of the engineers, the doctors [...who] had none of the facilities available now, but they were tough men driven by a sense of duty [...]. (57)[5]

The changed opinion seeps down to other Indians, whom he no longer finds "uniformly crass in [...] behaviour" (Moraes and Srivatsa 2002, 21). Thus, sometime around the late 1970s, he accepts the Time-Life project of writing *Bombay*, as part of the series *The Great Cities*. The project aimed to explore significant cities around the world through the eyes of a person who is usually considered to be an expert on the topic for a metropolitan audience. It was a rather covert move on the part of Moraes as an author to accept the project, being well aware of the fact that he was specifically chosen to author the text as an insider to the city of his birth. In doing so, Moraes subtly reverses his role from being the stranger to being an author who had grown up in the city and returns to reclaim it through his writing.

Despite Moraes's wish to reconcile with his country of origin, his task was hardly easy. After his years spent on becoming English, his portrayals of India often faced scathing criticisms by nativist critics. Alasdair Pinkerton observes in this context that, after the BBC showed *The Bewildered Giant*, to which Moraes contributed significantly,

> [t]he Indian High Commission in London reported receiving a deluge of letters from both non-resident Indians (NRIs) and others in Britain, "expressing their concern and distress at these films being derogatory to and highly biased against India." (Pinkerton 2008, 539)

What followed was a censorship notice by the government of India, under the prime ministerial regime of Indira Gandhi, on 14 August, 1970, which instructed the BBC to shut down its Indian offices within a period of 15 days. The negative reception of his works in India prolonged Moraes's

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5 See also Moraes (2003a, 194–5).

uncertainties about returning to India and living in the country. Writing about other instances of bewilderment that he faced, Moraes mentions a situation that he experienced while shooting for one of the BBC documentaries at Kolkata. The English crew of his team refused to eat with their Bengali counterparts, "whose table manners disgusted them" (2003a, 350), but had no issues with him or his English counterpart. Being in charge of the team, he finds himself "in a very strange position," and when asked about the conduct of the English fellows, he writes, "I had spent years to become English; Clive and I were from the same culture. The Bengalis and I were not. But neither were the two British cameramen like me […]. I was afraid to face the answer" (350). Moraes finds that he could no longer fit into any unitary idea, either English or Indian. His being "afraid" to face the question is rather a realization that he will have to forgo the constructed binary between a distant Indian homeland and an English home that he bore for a lengthy period.

The Nehruvian Colonial Middle Class and Moraes's Individual Disposition

One way to assess Moraes's socio-cultural and political outlook would be to go back to his childhood and adolescence, which was shaped in a certain way. A glimpse of this phase can be found in the beginning of his book *Bombay*, where he writes about his anglicized, colonial middle-class upbringing (1979, 37–40). I draw my understanding from Sumit Sarkar's definition of the colonial middle class as the section of Indians who received Western education from around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (1989, 65–70) and whose social roots "lay not in industry or trade […] but in government service or the professions of law, education, journalism or medicine" (68). This section of middle-class Indians forms the earliest nationalistic leader-cum-writers of India and imagined India as a nation in the form of nationalist autobiographies (Holden 2008; Boehmer 2005b). However, by the time India emerged as an independent nation-state, nationalistic sentiments started settling down among the England-returned middle-class writers. Iyengar mentions Nirad C. Chaudhuri's works, written after Indian independence, as a significant contribution within the field of Indian anglophone prose works and refers to Chaudhuri as "an intellectual who has the courage to stand aside and be different from the crowd, a critic of Indian society with an almost Swiftian capacity for making surgical probes" (1985, 572). Similarly, Iyengar mentions in passing the travel memoirs of Ved Mehta and Dom Moraes (568–9),

which differ from the national writings of their middle-class predecessors. Once India gained independence and there was a political need to mould a national consciousness different from the colonizers,[6] Indian colonial middle-class writers often sought to interrogate the socio-cultural, economic, and political differences that India as a nation confronted. Though the Indian colonial middle class was necessarily divergent in several ways,[7] the Nehruvian Indian middle class, as Sanjay Joshi (2017) writes, was a class "characterized by its cosmopolitan urbanity, its liberal or left-leaning politics, and a degree of embarrassment or at least cultural cringe when it came to any public discussion of matters of caste and religion". Brought up within Nehruvian middle-class self-fashioning, it is important to understand that Moraes grew up with his individual dispositions. To clarify this, we shall draw from what can be called—in Pierre Bourdieu's nomenclature—the concept of socio-cultural 'habitus' and 'individual habitus.'

Bourdieu's concept of habitus can be understood as a "structured and structuring structure" (1994, 170). Regarding Bourdieu's definition of habitus, Karl Maton writes that it is "the property of actors [...] 'structured' by one's past and present circumstances, such as family upbringing and educational experiences. It is 'structuring' in that one's habitus helps to shape one's present and future practices" (2012, 50). Bourdieu argues that it is not simply the past that determines the present and future but, rather, a self-propagating transaction that occurs both ways. Arguing that one's activities are in various degrees socially conditioned, besides "externalization of internality" (Bourdieu 1977, 72), Bourdieu's theory emphasizes the all-pervasive and dynamic nature of social structuring. Foregrounding the issues of fashioning with regard to class, the distinct individual interactions within a specific spatial and temporal plane, and the past conditioning (in terms of the capital, field, and habitus, respectively), Maton suggests Bourdieu's theory of practice as a significant lens to analyse social interactions (2012, 50–2). Further, Bourdieu adds that habitus is:

> [the] product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g. of language, economy, etc.) to succeed in reproducing themselves more

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6 The national/ist autobiographies (Holden 2008; Boehmer 2005a, 2005b) of Nehru or Gandhi that sought to build an image of India in opposition to its colonial history were definitely products of the existent pre-independence contingencies (see also Iyengar ([1962] 1985, 295; Guttman 2007, and Majeed 2007.

7 See Fernandes and Heller (2006); Sarkar (1989); Torri (1990) for details about differences among the colonial middle class in India.

or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions, in the organisms (which one can, if one wishes, call individuals) lastingly subjected to the same conditionings, and hence placed in the same material conditions of existence. (1977, 85)

It should be mentioned here that Bourdieu has developed this concept throughout the trajectory of his sociological career, and although dense and often contested as a theoretical concept (see Bennett 2007; Reay 2004), habitus provides an understanding of being implicated within socio-cultural spaces. According to Bourdieu, individuals act within an incul-cated set of value systems, generated within the respective socio-cultural and economic category, and are, in turn, disposed to act within a range of possibilities that the category engenders. Thus, the individual acts miti-gated through one's language, mannerisms, and tastes are all variably shaped by their social standings and are simultaneously self-propagating. Bourdieu sees these simultaneously structuring structures as embodi-ments of a complex operative strategy. Besides the "material conditionings of existence," Bourdieu distinguishes the social classes as objective condi-tioners that majorly impact an individual's habitus as he lays the ground for his argument: "the history of the individual is never anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his group or class, each individual system of dispositions may be seen as a structural variant of all the other group or class habitus" (1977, 86). Yet Bourdieu makes space for the individual spontaneity of practices within any specific field, which has often been considered as going against the grain of his first argument. In fact, the complexity of his theory mostly derives from this duality that he persistently argues throughout his writings.

Thus, in *The Logic of Practice* (1980), he distinguishes between what he terms the "class habitus" as an overdetermining structure and the "indi-vidual habitus." Bourdieu describes the latter as the "singularity of their social trajectories, to which there correspond series of chronologically ordered determinations that are mutually irreducible to one another" (1990 [1980], 60), while distinguishing it from the overarching former category of class habitus (60–1). Considering the differences between individuals' "social trajectory," despite being located within a similar matrix of class and temporal conditioning, he states that all individuals operate from a subjective perspective. The subjectivity results from his/her relative series of experiences, which make room for what Bourdieu describes as the in-dividuality of practices. This proposition of subjective operations within an overarching structural objectivity is further justified in his theoreti-cal work, *Distinction*, as he writes, "the habitus is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and

meaning-giving perceptions" (1984 [1979], 170). Bourdieu adds that the subjectivity is not necessarily always in sync with the collective dispositions and can be defined in terms of individual perceptions that evolve through the unique order of life experiences that an individual chances upon but are also, at times, consciously practiced. Bourdieu exemplifies his argument thus:

> Intellectuals and artists have a special predilection for the most risky but also most profitable strategies of distinction, those which consist in asserting the power, which is peculiarly theirs, to constitute insignificant objects as works of art or, more subtly, to give aesthetic redefinition to objects already defined as art, but in another mode, by other classes or class fractions (e.g., kitsch). (282)

While claiming that individual tastes and dispositions are always subject to unrealized conditioning that, consequently, continues to reinforce the structure itself, he highlights conscious acts on the parts of intellectuals and artists to consciously break with the normative range of responses. Whether the strategic dissociation succeeds in forging a clear boundary between the objective pattern and a subjective enactment seems debatable; however, what is significant herein is the "[assertion] of power" through such practices. Thus, Reay (2004) speaks of Bourdieu's sociological lens as a tool through which "[we] begin to get a sense not only of the myriad adaptations, responses, reactions and resistances to 'the way the world is,' but also of individuals struggling to make the world a different place" (437). With this insight into the possibility of individual practice within a field, it will be easier to understand Moraes's self-fashioning.

Moraes's stance of dissociating from his country of origin, as already argued, is underlined by his persistent desire to return and re-write his version of India. Thus, his being "afraid to face the answer" at the aforementioned lunch was because he could neither place himself in the position of the Bengali cameramen, who were hardly accustomed to English table manners, nor that of the racially prejudiced English cameramen who threw a tantrum at sharing a table with the former. The incident was problematic, as the binary that he had created vis-à-vis India and England was falling apart. This realization, however, starts taking concrete shape as Moraes travels across the country and finds himself at ease and appreciative of Indian spaces when he visits Karnataka. In *The Open Eyes*, he was able to feel at home in the "hospitality, uneffusive, unobtrusive" at his host's house, where the latter remarked, "Karnataka is basically a middle-class society. We have no real poverty, but we have not produced

any Tatas or Birlas" (2005, 127).[8] By the time Moraes had settled in India, his understanding of himself was hardly pitted against the binary of an Indian self or an English identity, but arose quite in terms of a class disposition.

Thus, when asked about his sense of companionship with Indians like Mr Dhagat, from his travels in Madhya Pradesh, about whom he writes in the book *Answered by Flutes*; or Basu Bhattacharya, who was his constant companion in Bombay after he returned to the city; Moraes replies, "I disliked most urban Indians I met because they were more obsessed with money and success than anyone else I had ever encountered," emphasizing "the crassness of many newly rich Indians, or those who had suddenly climbed into an avidly acquisitive middle class" (Moraes and Srivatsa 2002, 44). His settling down in India by the 1980s coincided with socio-political changes in the country that had become apparent by the 1990s:

> Three landmark events at the start of the 1990s highlight these transformations—one, the agitation against the recommendations of the Mandal Commission (1990); second, policies of economic liberalization adopted by the Government of India (1991); and third, the December 1992 destruction of a 16th-century mosque by a Hindu nationalist mob that wanted to build in its place a Hindu Mandir (temple). (Joshi 2017)

These changes brought about an evident socio-cultural change in India, besides redefining its political setup. Instead of a colonial, Nehruvian India, the post-1990s period saw the emergence of a new middle class (Fernandes and Heller 2006; Fuller 2009) as the dominant force behind the socio-cultural and political framework of India. Brought up within the traditional colonial middle-class habitus, Moraes naturally found the change and the habitual brandishing of the newly acquired status of the new middle class overbearing. Simultaneously, what irked him about the change was the aggressive religious or caste clashes that had erupted since the 1990s. Moraes thus found the 1992 demolition of the sixteenth-century Babri Masjid by a Hindu nationalist mob a jolting spectacle of the rise of a Hindutva voice that sought to create a majoritarian Indian identity (Varshney 1993; Shani 2005). This time, however, instead of opting to leave the country, he sought to address his situation of being a minority among a rising, violent, majoritarian tide in India. It is this conscious attempt that shaped Moraes's two twenty-first-century travelogues, and in these texts,

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8 Tatas and Birlas are Indian business conglomerates owned by eponymous business tycoons.

in turn, he seeks to identify with India through his feeling of empathy for the dissociated and the marginalized voices of the country.

Moraes and the Felt Community of the Dissociated in India

In *Out of God's Oven*, Moraes strings together incidents of violence perpetrated against minorities and, consequently, seeks to project the pluralities of India as opposed to a majoritarian Hindutva identity; he calls it "the advent of a new and brutalized form of Hinduism under a government that encouraged unbridled communal hatred" (2002, xiv). Moraes opines that such violent caste and religious clashes, propagating communal tensions and hatred, refuse to consider the centuries of shared Indian history marked by different identities for different residents of the country. Within this context, he writes, "[the] Indian people [have] no sense of history. Their heroes shared the fate of their ancient monuments […] now books were written in defense of Godse, the man who killed him" (68). Highlighting the case of right-wing violence (of which Nathuram Godse, who had assassinated M. K. Gandhi for the latter's campaigns for the cause of Dalits and Muslims in India, was a representative), Moraes pinpoints the change that India has witnessed in the form of worshipping the Mahatma on the one hand, and books being written that normalize Godse's act on the other. Again, in his portrayal of the Sikh community and their feeling of being betrayed, Moraes paints a picture of another marginalized section of society that can hardly reconcile to a majoritarian Hindutva identity. Moraes quotes Mr Brar, a Sikh, who voices his alienation from the state: "[we] are an entirely separate race […] different from the Hindus, different from the Muslims" (163). At the core of this alienation, as Brar argues, lies a violent history: "[have] you read how many of our people were martyred during Partition, fifty years ago? […] In 1984 the Hindus martyred even more of us in Delhi" (163). Brar argues that the Sikhs share a sense of alienation with other Indian minorities: "in 1992 they massacred Muslims in Mumbai […] Soon they will turn on other minority communities" (165).

Mr Brar's feeling of alienation finds resonance in the opinion of another Indian Urdu poet from Lucknow, once the seat of high culture in Mughal India. Moraes quotes him: "In Lucknow and UP, over the last fifty years, there has been a purposeful attempt to destroy Urdu" (255). The poet argues that it is an ironic stance on the part of the Indian "government […] the misguided ones [… who] hate the language because they say it is Muslim" (255), who have in turn sought to replace the language with

Sanskrit, which is equated with Hindu and the majoritarian Indian culture. Besides the fact that the interpretation of Urdu as the language of Muslim invaders is a complete misinterpretation (Metcalf 2003) of Indian history, it is also problematic to establish Sanskrit as an authoritative language of the land. In the context of the overall obfuscation of Indian history by the majoritarian Hindutva followers, Romila Thapar writes:

> [Some] are now propagating an interpretation of Indian history based on Hindu nationalism and what has come to be called the Hindutva ideology [...] arguing that the Aryans and their language, Sanskrit, were indigenous to India. The [...] theory became axiomatic to their belief that those for whom the subcontinent was not the land of their ancestors and the land where their religion originated were aliens. (2002, 15)

Challenging this theory, Thapar writes that by "the mid-twentieth century, the notion that language and race can be equated was found to be invalid, and indeed the entire construction of unitary races was seriously doubted. The concept of an Aryan race fell apart" (15).

Foregrounding the divisiveness in India through these conversations, Moraes challenges the notion of majoritarian Indian identity. This line of argument can be also observed in the next travelogue, *The Long Strider*. Depicting a sixteenth-century Mughal India as observed through the eyes of his protagonist, Thomas Coyate, Moraes writes:

> Indians belonged to religions; to villages or towns, or to small provinces. The Hindus within the area ruled by the Moguls would never acknowledge loyalty to the Emperor, but had no language to link them with the other Hindus beyond the borders. The Muslims could hardly be expected to protect Hindu interests that conflicted with their own, and had their divisive sects, as the Hindus had castes. (2003b, 155)

The differences in caste, religion, and language that presented themselves in the form of riots or institutional/authoritative suppression, as documented in *Out of God's Oven*, are projected as part of sixteenth-century India under the rule of Jehangir as well. The perspective finds further heft in the quoted remark of a Sikh in *The Long Strider*: "the Muslims under Jehangir started to persecute Sikhs. Under Aurangzeb, it became worse [...] This has become a tradition in India. When the Muslims are not following it, the Hindus do" (135).

Comparing the practices of dividing communities, authoritative violence, and suppression of minorities in India from the two time-frames, Moraes critiques the very basis of modernity that India claims to have ushered in since its independence and, simultaneously, the Indian

government's claim of India being a modern, democratic nation-state. Alexander Motyl suggests that, in the context of the existence of modern nation states, "[democracy] and the market are two forces that compel individuals and groups to compete unremittingly, that produce winners and losers continually" (1992, 313) and argues that for a modern, democratic nation-state to function, there is a persistent need for secularism that hinders majoritarian or totalitarian tendencies. He writes that this "secularism is premised on the division of authority between a ghettoized religious sphere and an ever-growing public sphere, a polity that exerts the authority formerly exercised by the religious" (318) within the context of European nations. The Indian modern nation-state that came into being after independence was primarily moulded by the England-returned colonial middle class. One of the distinctive attributes of this otherwise disparate class was the significance of a public sphere that was differentiated from one's private life.[9] This separation between the private or religious sphere and the public sphere is naturally non-existent in a sixteenth-century Mughal India and seemed to be one of the major tenets that Nehruvian secular India sought to implement and, perhaps, extensively failed at (Khilnani 2004; Guha 2007). However, as observed by Moraes, the distinction is equally lacking in twenty-first century India, which has seen a rapid rise of Hindutva politics. With his own intellectual leanings of a traditional, liberal, Nehruvian middle-class man, Moraes found himself connected to the marginalized sections of society in his feeling of alienation from the majoritarian Indian idea.

Arguably, therefore, Moraes only feels at home in the presence of a handful of Indians with whom he could connect, rather than in the larger India. He thus remarked, "I thought I had never been so happy in my life, not even in England" (2002, 41) as he travelled across Madhya Pradesh in the company of Mr Dhagat during his research for the book *Answered by Flutes,* where they managed to prevent an innocent tribal boy from being unjustly punished in a case of murder, where evidence had been tampered with by the village's rich and powerful local leaders. It is this aspect of Moraes that was highlighted by some of his later critics, who found that the criticisms of Moraes as a 'traitor' to India was not merely incoherent but a prejudiced misreading. Thus, Ranjit Hoskote points out Moraes's feeling of oneness with the marginalized, stating that the latter was

> [largely] ignored by those academic regurgitators of postcolonial theory in India, who find they cannot twist him to their limited purposes. [… Moraes]

9 See Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008, 119–142) and Sudipta Kaviraj (2015, Chapter 10).

explored the enigma of the human condition, of selves [...] torn apart and recast [...]. The fashion has been to discredit his prose as ephemeral, forgettable, irrelevant to his true calling. (2012, xvi–xvii)

In a similar fashion, Sarayu Srivatsa writes about Moraes as "the advocate of the marginalized wherever he went" (2019, xi). We must note in this context that Moraes extensively travelled India in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, gathering his data to highlight the situation of the marginalized, on various fronts, in the country, hoping to create a picture of India that differs from its majoritarian nationalist politics.

A group bonded by a sense of affiliation based on mutually shared feeling is what Rajat Ray terms a 'felt community,' suggesting that such fragmented voices together might, as well, bear the potential of shaping a nation. Ray writes:

When a cultural community assumes definite shape in a state, it becomes, in his perception, a nation [...]. Indeed, if a community of emotion, in the process of becoming a nation-state, incorporates more than one cultural community, the structure may, in certain conditions, fragment [...] it is historically closer to reality to treat these various communities of sentiment, [fragments], as nationalities coexisting in a civilization underpinned by a common mentality, i.e., a broader community of emotion. (2003, 9–10)

What Ray suggests is that the nation in itself is brought together by shared cultural perceptions. However, the divergent cultural elements that underlie the broader national sentiment, which he calls 'fragments,' usually co-exist within any nation. Identifying these "sentiments" or "[communities] of emotion" as "nationalities," Ray hints at the possibility of rupture that exists within every nation. By depicting the marginalized voices/sentiments in India, who feel just as alienated as Moraes—who was regarded as a traitor and an outsider on the basis of his linguistic, socio-cultural, intellectual backgrounds—Moraes seeks to undermine his self-fashioning as a stranger in India. It is in his association to the numerous other Indians who feel dissociated from a majoritarian India, therefore, that Moraes reclaims his Indian identity.

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