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*Irreparable Damage:  
Violence, Ownership, and Voice in an  
Indian Archive*

The Case of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and the  
Sambhaji Brigade

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This paper uses a 2004 destructive incident at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) in Pune, India as a case study to discuss the intersection of caste politics, ownership, and violence in the archives. After a brief overview of the events leading up to, during, and subsequent to the violent destruction of archival documents by an angry lower caste mob, this paper provides the historical context necessary to analyze issues of ownership, politics, and colonialism within the context of a South Asian library, keeping in mind the complex interplay of religion, region,

and caste in India. The paper then explores this incident from an archival studies perspective, looking at archives as both sites of violence and as cultural and political symbols, and explores how issues of ownership, political pressure, and access, if not properly addressed, can boil over into violent destruction of the archival record. Finally, this paper argues that violent incidents such as the one described can occur outside of the Indian context, in almost any archival setting, and concludes with recommendations on how to avoid future destruction in archival repositories.

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*Note*

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic discussed in this paper, many of the American scholars interviewed have requested anonymity for fear of retribution. They are referred to simply as Contributor 1, 2, 3, or 4 throughout. Additionally, several sources advised against contacting the key Indian librarians and scholars involved in the incident, many of whom are elderly, in poor health, and hope to put the attack behind them. Those wishes have been honored and interviews with them are not included in this paper.

*Introduction*

For most days in its almost ninety-year history, the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) in Pune, India, was a genteel place, fostering the sort of quiet atmosphere one might expect in an archives in which international scholars and aging Indian librarians diligently work together to collect, preserve, and translate rare Sanskrit manuscripts. But as these scholars and librarians would soon find out, January 5, 2004 would be no ordinary day at BORI; indeed, the events of that day would have repercussions for archivists and scholars that would

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be felt throughout the world. That morning, as BORI staff opened the gates to the compound, they were greeted not just by the usual group of doddering scholars and librarians, but by an angry mob of approximately 150 young men wielding chains and wooden bats. The well-organized group, calling itself the Sambhaji Brigade, chanted political slogans such as “Victory to King Shivaji!” in the regional language of Marathi, and forced itself into the reading room, where it began to smash chairs, desks, and windows, and dismantle the card catalog. The mob began to make their way to the storage room, where BORI’s 30,000 manuscripts, including a nearly millennium-old manuscript of the epic *Mahabharata*, are kept.

What happened next is subject to debate. Both the Indian and American press almost uniformly reported that the mob destroyed or stole a number of ancient manuscripts, a painting of BORI’s founder, Dr. Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, and a statue of a Hindu god. The exact number of manuscripts that were destroyed or stolen during the incident is unclear; press accounts vary from thousands, to hundreds to twenty-five damaged manuscripts; one news report even claimed that over 30,000 ancient manuscripts and an Assyrian clay tablet from 600 BC was destroyed. [1] In contrast, several American scholars who were in Pune during the time of the attack claimed that the actual damage to BORI’s manuscript collection was grossly exaggerated in the press; some even suggested that not a single manuscript was destroyed. [2] Soon thereafter, the police arrived on the scene. While some of the attackers fled on foot, seventy-two remained and were subsequently arrested and charged with disorderly conduct.

This violent incident in one of India’s premiere research libraries begs the following questions: What is the Sambhaji Brigade, who is the King Shivaji they were shouting about, and why would anyone attack an archival institution? This paper attempts to answer those questions, using the 2004 attack on BORI as a case study to discuss the intersection of politics, ownership, and violence in the archives. After a brief overview of the events leading up to and subsequent to the violent incident, this paper will discuss how the historiography of a 17th century Indian king became a hot button international political issue in the 21st century, and how both archival sources and the politics of the archive contributed to the disenfran-

chisement of a caste group. This paper will then explore how a marginalized group’s perceived lack of voice in the archives and in the construction of collective memory boiled over into violence. This paper will look at archives and libraries as both sites of violence and as cultural and political symbols, and explore how issues of ownership, political pressure, and access, if not properly addressed, can erupt into violent destruction of the archival record. Finally, this paper argues that violent incidents such as the one described can occur outside of the Indian context, in almost any archival setting, and includes recommendations on how to avoid future destruction in libraries and archival repositories.

### *The history of BORI: Colonialism, caste and archives in India*

As the story of India’s past is inextricably linked with colonialism, so too is the story of its archives in general and BORI in particular. Fueled by a growing interest back home in all things Indian, British civil servants stationed in India during the late 1700s and early 1800s played an important role in procuring Sanskrit manuscripts from private owners throughout the Subcontinent. It was not until 1868, however, that the British colonial government in India issued an official order calling for the systematic collection and preservation of Sanskrit literature. [3] In accordance with the Order of 1868, the Government of Bombay authorized ongoing searches for manuscripts in its jurisdiction, resulting in the procurement of approximately 8,000 manuscripts from the time period of 1868–1904, a cache that would eventually form the basis of BORI’s collection (Johnson 1980, 130).

The most productive manuscript searches during and subsequent to this period were led by Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar, a Sanskrit professor at Deccan College whose attempts to transform the growing collection into an active research library were repeatedly rebuffed by the government, which halted its manuscript searches in 1896 (Johnson 1980, 135). By 1900, the manuscript collection amassed by the Government of Bombay was relegated to storage and rendered inaccessible to scholars. Bhandarkar continued to build his own private manuscript collection.

In 1915, a group of Bhandarkar’s colleagues formed a committee to honor him with the creation of a private library bearing his name. Three years

later, the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute opened. Not only did Bhandarkar donate his own manuscript collection, but the Bombay Director of Public Instruction authorized the transfer of the entire Government of Bombay collection, numbering some 20,000 manuscripts, to the new library. Thus, as Donald Clay Johnson (1980, 176) has noted, “the Government of Bombay collection of manuscripts passed from public into private hands.”

This transfer was not an unusual fate for the colonial government’s manuscript collections. Virtually all of the manuscripts collected by the British colonial government in India were either transferred to private collections, shipped to London (where they still reside), or were destroyed. [4] While India has had a National Archives since it gained independence in 1947, public archives have historically been under-funded in independent India and have had to compete with literacy organizations for resources, as S.D. Prasad has noted (1978). Thus, this transfer of publicly owned manuscripts into the private hands of BORI may have ensured their ongoing care and preservation.

The transfer of the collection from public to private hands would also have significant caste implications. Throughout much of Indian history, the ability to create and access written documents was limited to those of the priestly Brahmin caste. [5] In fact, Sanskrit, the language of the majority of manuscripts in BORI’s collection, has always been associated with the Brahmin elite and was never commonly spoken by the majority of people anywhere in India. While caste in modern India is so utterly complicated that a more thorough discussion of it is beyond the scope of his paper, it is important to note that the Brahmin literary tradition continues today in the sense that Brahmins still have higher literacy rates, dominate the educational system and comprise the majority of professors and students in academia.

It is thus no surprise that BORI’s namesake, Bhandarkar, was himself a Brahmin (though in an ironic twist, he was openly critical of the caste system), as were the majority of his colleagues who founded the institution. In this regard, BORI has been seen as an elitist Brahmin institution since its founding – a perception that carries over to the present day, despite the fact that BORI is now currently administered by a government – appointed (though still majority Brahmin) board. Indeed, one American scholar referred to BORI as a

“modern-day Brahmin temple,” which no lower caste Indian would dare enter and which “seeks no educational role in local society, has no outreach to local institutions, and caters primarily to foreigners whose books everyday Indians have no access to” (interview with Contributor 3, April 11, 2008). In the mind of most of the citizens of Pune, BORI is for Brahmins and foreigner researchers only.

### *Shivaji, historiography, and Laine’s book*

Having given some background on the history of the BORI collection and its perceived caste affiliation, this paper will turn to the scholar whose work sparked the violent episode at BORI on January 5, 2004. Like many international scholars of India, James Laine, the Arnold H. Lowe Professor of Religious Studies at Macalaster College, had grown to rely heavily on the archives and archivists at BORI. Over his thirty-year career, Laine had visited BORI on several occasions for months at a time, developing close professional and personal relationships with many of its librarians, most notably the senior librarian, V.L. Manjul. Manjul gave Laine his “first big academic breakthrough” (interview with James Laine, March 26, 2008) by introducing him to an unpublished manuscript of the *Shivabharata*. The previously undiscovered text is an 18th century epic written in Sanskrit (with an interlinear translation in the regional language of Marathi) that detailed the life of Shivaji, a seventeenth century warrior-king (1627–1680) who defended the area that is now known as the Indian state of Maharashtra from the Mughals. Over the next few years, Laine would work closely with BORI librarian S.S. Bahulkar to translate the text, eventually publishing it, with some additional commentary, as *The Epic of Shivaji* in 2001. Laine listed Bahulkar as a co-author to the translation and dedicated the book to Manjul.

As Laine worked on the translation project at BORI, he came across a trove of other unpublished texts relating to Shivaji, and became fascinated with the ways in which the King had been portrayed in archival manuscripts over time. Most recently, Shivaji has obtained quasi-religious stature in the state of Maharashtra, commonly depicted through stories, textbooks, and popular plays as a prototypical Indian nationalist, a valiant Hindu who fought against Muslim rule, and a noble, unwavering warrior of the Maratha caste (which was, at that

time, a lower caste). His image, subsequently, has been used to represent Indian nationalist, Hindu fundamentalist, and Maratha caste movements throughout the past century.

In his next book, *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*, Laine set out to question these dominant forms of Shivaji's image and problematize the nationalist, religious, and caste identities that Shivaji had come to represent. In the book's first chapter, he writes, "the task I have set myself is not that of providing a more accurate account of Shivaji's life by stripping away the legends attributed to him by worshipful mythmakers or misguided ideologues, but rather to be a disturber of the tranquility with which synthetic accounts of Shivaji's life are accepted" (Laine 2003, 8). From the start, Laine's exercise is about the formation and disruption of popular imagination and the ways in which oral histories and collective memories obscure the details found within the archives. He writes, "the dominance of a certain grand narrative of Shivaji's life is so powerful that the particular concerns of its many authors have been largely erased" (Laine 2003, 8). By examining BORI's many unpublished manuscripts on Shivaji and comparing those manuscripts to popular folk narratives, Laine set out to both bring the mythmaking of Shivaji back to textual sources and to uncover uncomfortable tensions within those texts.

Of all the controversial claims made by Laine in his brief book, the most controversial would originate from a joke. Buried on page ninety-three of the 105-page book, Laine recounts hearing jokes that question Shivaji's parentage. He writes, "the repressed awareness that Shivaji had an absentee father is also revealed by the fact that Maharashtrians tell jokes naughtily suggesting that his guardian Dadaji Konddev was his biological father" (Laine 2003, 93). Laine includes no further references to who told these jokes or where he heard them, though, in a 2008 phone conversation, he said "the texts themselves take a tone in which they seem to be covering up the uncomfortable fact that our great hero's father divorced his mother.... You can find that tension in the texts, but unfortunately, I also wrote that when people are trying to avoid an uncomfortable fact they tell jokes about it" (interview with James Laine, March 26, 2008). As word spread about Laine's book, it became increasingly obvious that the claim was not funny to many lower caste people in the state of Maharashtra.

In June 2003, Oxford University Press published Laine's book, *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India*. In his acknowledgement section, he referred to BORI as his "scholarly home" in India, where he "profited from the advice and assistance of the senior librarian, V.L. Manjul," and then thanked by name six additional members of the BORI staff, including S.S. Bahulkar. The book was met with little fanfare initially. However, by November of that year, Laine was back in Minnesota teaching when he began to get e-mails from sources in India criticizing his work and describing events that were being organized to denounce his book publicly. That same month, a group of librarians affiliated with BORI called for the book's withdrawal from the Indian market. Oxford University Press India obliged soon thereafter and issued an apology.

It was not until December 2003, however, that the first violent incident associated with the book occurred. A group affiliated with the political organization Shiv Sena attacked S.S. Bahulkar for his association with the book, physically assaulting him and blackening his face in an Indian gesture of shame (James Laine's Shivaji 2004). The remaining BORI staff members who were thanked in Laine's book were put under 24-hour police protection for the next six months. Writing from his home in Minnesota, Laine issued a formal apology to the BORI librarians that was published in *The Times of India*, writing, "It was never my intention to defame the great Maharashtrian hero.... I foolishly misread the situation in India" (Laine Says Sorry 2003). Less than a week after this apology was printed, the Sambhaji Brigade carried out their attack at BORI, as described in the introduction of this paper.

### *Caste, disenfranchisement, and ownership in the archives*

Named after Shivaji's son, the Sambhaji Brigade is comprised of Maratha caste members and is "affiliated with a larger politico-cultural organization, the Maratha Seva Sangh, which vows to protect the sentiments of the Maratha caste bloc," according to scholar Christian Novetzke (2004). As the caste of King Shivaji, the Marathas have undergone several revisions to their caste status in the past 300 years; originally an agricultural caste, the caste has tried to "elevate itself to the status of Kshatriya [warrior, the second highest caste after Brahmin] from the status of Shudra [the lowest

caste]" by its association with Shivaji (Kinsley 1993, 156). Firmly routed in their caste identity as Marathas, the Sambhaji Brigade has come to dominate local politics in the past decade, and has earned a reputation for having "deeply progressive, if not leftist ideological commitments" (Schlesinger 2005). Indeed, as a prominent South Asia scholar described, "the Sambhaji Brigade is an educational, forward-thinking institution which blames Brahmins for keeping everyone else illiterate" (interview with Contributor 1, March 22, 2008). Somewhat ironically, the group has built and continues to build schools and libraries in the impoverished rural areas of Maharashtra state (interview with Contributor 2, March 24, 2008). Laine's questioning of Shivaji's parentage was particularly offensive to the Sambhaji Brigade, not just because "loose speculation about someone's ancestry is a very serious matter indeed even in the contemporary Indian ethos," (Bhalchandraro and Bagwe 2004) but because it offended their caste pride. The man who Laine suggests could be Shivaji's father, Dadaji Konddev, was a Brahmin, not a Maratha, revealing how through the joke, Brahmins are claiming Shivaji for themselves. In this way, the joke tapped into some deeply rooted caste resentment. As Laine himself said, "There's a 100 year-history of Brahmins rejecting the royal claims of Shivaji's family and a 100 year-history of Marathas criticizing Brahmin dominance of scholarship" (interview with James Laine, March 26, 2008). In this way, Laine's book and BORI became symbolic of centuries of Brahmin domination over India's literary tradition.

Though Laine himself claims that he had no way to predict that his work, though controversial, would lead to such violence, he is aware of the symbolic value of the Sambhaji Brigade choosing his book and BORI as targets. He said:

When my book came out it became an opportunity to revive some contentious discussions about caste. [The Sambhaji Brigade] said that the Brahmins have now craftily made use of an American instrument for their own purposes by feeding him these jokes and lies in order to distort his historiographic imagination. I actually got these e-mails from people saying I am sorry this is happening to you but you have been duped by these evil Brahmins and here's the way history really ought to be read. And of course because I have a voice and [connections with] Oxford University Press and a Harvard degree, they feel disempowered, they don't have a voice, they don't have command of the English language. They are not well educated in the Western academic sense of the term, so they feel like nobody is ever going to listen to them. And here I am capable of

capturing this big audience, just like a Brahmin would. [Their actions] become this frustration at how the elite can control the discourse. I am completely sympathetic with that. I can see how that's a cause that stirs some passion. (Interview with James Laine, March 26, 2008)

Other American scholars agree with Laine's take on the symbolic value of his work. As one scholar said, "the Sambhaji Brigade felt their culture had been desecrated by Laine's book and by BORI and they wanted to desecrate Brahmanic culture in an idiom that Indian society understands, which is violence" (interview with Contributor 1, March 22, 2008).

Several American scholars who were in Pune during the attack make a distinction between those members of the Sambhaji Brigade who organized the attack and those who carried it out. They suggest that while the organizers of the attack were most likely literate enough to have read portions of Laine's book, those who carried out the attack probably did not have access to it or the ability to read scholarship in English. In fact, one scholar claims the attackers were brought in from rural areas and "were unemployed, or at least unemployed on that day, and were given some material benefits for carrying out the attack, such as a promise of lunch" (interview with Contributor 2, March 24, 2008). While free lunch might have been a motivating factor for the attackers, it is clear that, ideologically speaking, the organizers of the attack were motivated by retaliation for what they perceived to be an upper caste assault on their revered leader.

In many ways, the attack voiced growing Maratha frustration with Brahmanic control of archival sources relating to Shivaji. For example, after the attack, a spokesman for the Sambhaji Brigade, Shreemant Kokate, described BORI as "a centre of cultural terrorism," and that "scholars should be happy that BORI has still remained intact" (Damle 2004a). He is also quoted as saying, "Even if BORI is burnt down ten thousand times, the insult inflicted upon [Shivaji's mother] would not be mitigated.... Those who fed [Laine] the offensive information should be hanged" (*Indian Express* 2004). Another political group that voiced support for the attack demanded that BORI's entire collection of manuscripts be seized by the government and reviewed by a panel of experts before they are made accessible to scholars in order "to avoid distortion" of Shivaji's legacy in the future. The group went as far as filing a petition in the Bombay High Court

demanding that all documents at BORI be seized by the union government (Damle 2004b). What is at stake here is not just access to the archives, but participation in the formation of the collective memory of Shivaji, a process that pits Marathas against Brahmins, foreign scholars against Indian archivists, and liberal Western ideas of intellectual freedom with centuries of Indian tradition.

### *Political pressure and violence in the archives*

The attack occurred in Indian election season and it would be hard to overestimate its political impact. As Novetzke has written, "At times during the recent elections in India in March and April in 2005, from the perspective of the Maharastrian news media, it seems that Shivaji and Maratha legitimacy were the sole issues at stake" (Novetzke 2004, 192).

In many ways, the attack at BORI provided an opportunity for political candidates to garner wide support by condemning Laine's book, showing their reverence for Shivaji, and turning a blind eye to the attackers. On January 9, 2004, just four days after the attack, Laine was charged under sections 153 and 153(A) of the Indian Penal Code with "wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot" and "promoting enmity between different groups... and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony" (James Laine's Shivaji 2004). Days later, on January 14, the state government of Maharashtra, led by a political party up for re-election, filed a motion to ban Laine's book. While the Prime Minister of India, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, soon condemned the ban, he was widely criticized for it, and soon backpedaled; two months later, at the launch of his political party's election campaign in Maharashtra state, he expressed his support for the book ban, saying it would serve as "a warning to all foreign authors that they do not play with our national pride" (James Laine's Shivaji 2004). By March 2004, Pune's police commissioner announced that he would begin proceedings to extradite Laine for a trial. As Novetzke describes it, "a war of words ensued between the Democratic Front and the Shiv Sena [two political parties] over who could 'speak for' the Marathas and Shivaji's legacy," with each party trying to outdo the other in reverence for Shivaji and condemnation of Laine in advance of the elections (Novetzke 2004, 192).

Laine himself sees the charges filed against him as political posturing. "The charges were just for

public consumption. I never got any direct communication from the Indian government," he said, adding that he would find out about his own court case by reading Indian newspapers (interview with James Laine, March 26, 2008). More recently, in 2007, the Indian Supreme Court exonerated Laine and the High Court in Bombay lifted the ban on the book.

In another example of how politics have influenced this incident, many American scholars have claimed that the executive board of BORI exaggerated the damage done by the Sambhaji Brigade in order to garner political sympathies. As described in the introduction to this paper, press reports vary widely on the exact amount of damage done to manuscripts in the collection. One scholar reported that BORI staff could not identify a single damaged or lost manuscript in the manuscript catalog despite repeated requests (interview with Contributor 3, April 11, 2008). Another American scholar who was in Pune during the attack said, "the actual extent of the damage was always somewhat obscure, since the BORI had reason to exaggerate it in order to get large grants from the state government" (interview with Contributor 3, April 11, 2008). A third scholar confirmed, "There was some damage done to some precious things, including manuscripts, but the accounts were overblown," adding, "The Bhandarkar has benefited financially and in terms of public relations enormously since the attack" (interview with Contributor 2, March 24, 2008). Indeed, Indian newspapers reported that "a steady flow of funds started pouring in" after the attack, (*Economic Times* 2004) and that "following that incident... large amounts of public funds were allocated to [BORI] for modernization and digitization" (*Indian Express* 2007). In this regard, the BORI administration, and not just the attackers, had political motivations.

This political debate over the attack and the significance of BORI as a political symbol recall the work of both Jacques Derrida and Verne Harris regarding the complex interplay of politics and the archives. In his book, *Archive Fever*, Derrida explores the ways in which power, authority, and control are expressed in the archive. In an often-quoted footnote, he writes, "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (Derrida 1998, 4). It seems

no one better understood Derrida's take on archives than the Sambhaji Brigade and their political defenders. In the political debate ensuing from the BORI attack, the archive became a cultural symbol of the power to formulate collective memory, and the control of the archive became synonymous with political power; to paraphrase Derrida, there is no political power in the state of Maharashtra without control of BORI, if not of the memory of Shivaji in the popular imagination. Derrida's claims about the relationship between archival access and democracy also directly apply to the BORI incident; as previously discussed in this paper, participation in and access to the archival record at BORI is symbolic of the larger issue of the marginalization of the lower castes from both the written record and the histories that are based on those records. Similarly, effective democratization of Indian society can be measured by the degree to which marginalized groups participate in and have access to the archive; while India is the world's largest democracy, it is, like all democracies, imperfect, as the BORI incident and its political aftermath show.

Influenced by Derrida's theories, South African archivist Verne Harris has posited that politics are an integral part of the archive and not a wholly separate entity that occasionally intrudes on the otherwise apolitical mission of the archival enterprise. He writes "I want to argue that the archive is politics – not that it is political, but that it is politics" (Harris 2005, 173). While cases like the destruction of Apartheid-era records that Harris is writing about and the BORI incident are extreme examples of the archives as politics, they belie the deeper truth that "recordmakers, including archivists, are, for the beginning and always, political players" (Harris 2005, 175). As has been discussed earlier in this paper, politics and power have been integral components of the BORI collection since its inception; first, with the colonial enterprise that collected the manuscripts that would form the basis of the collection, next with the Brahmin elite who established the archive in Bhandarkar's name, then with the Maratha caste groups who demanded control of the archival record through violence, and finally with the Indian political parties who continually invoked the BORI controversy in an election year. In this way, the BORI incident confirms Harris's claim that "the archive is the very possibility of politics" (Harris 2005, 175).

If the political pervades the archive, as Derrida and Harris claim, then archivists themselves can no longer remain neutral nor claim neutrality. Librarians and archivists have recently published a great deal of work that calls into question this once-sacred notion of neutrality. [6] As this recent work posits, while librarians and archivists cannot and should not control the content of secondary sources written using their materials, they do play an active role in shaping the sources made available to scholars through the appraisal and description processes. As Victoria L. Lemieux (2001, 104) summarizes, the record-keeper does not simply passively hold the record, but, in many cases, participates in shaping its original inscription and what happens to it subsequently through processes of re-inscription for preservation, recurrent transmission, and contextualization: the record-keeper shapes the record's meaning and becomes its co-author.

In this new, postmodern world, as characterized by Terry Cook (2001), "the archivist as much as the creator or researcher is one of the narrators" of a multi-faceted history who "exposes... deeper contextual realities," and performs key functions (such as appraisal, arrangement, description, preservation, and providing access) that are "critically important in shaping... meaning."

This is, of course, not to say that the librarians at BORI agreed with (or were even aware of, prior to publication) Laine's controversial claims about Shivaji. [7] In this particular case (as well as in others in which a climate of intellectual freedom is not a given,) it is entirely understandable that archivists would not want to admit to their role in shaping scholarship, given that such an admission could have had serious, even fatal, consequences. However, in more stable political climates, archivists as a profession should come clean regarding their role as active participants in creating the historical record. For example, claims such as those made by the Society of American Archivists' Code of Ethics (2005) that archivists, "should not allow personal beliefs or perspectives to affect their decisions," should be reexamined in light of this new postmodern perspective.

### *Impact on scholarship and the archives*

In wake of the attack, the seventy-two arrested members of the Sambhaji Brigade met no serious consequences. In fact, they were publicly glorified

by a host of Maratha caste groups, including one that used a photograph of all seventy-two attackers on the cover of its February 2004 newsletter. A translation of the Marathi headline is, "Sambhaji Brigade: They Did a Great Nationalist Deed!" [8] But while the attackers went free, the incident has had a profound impact on archives and scholarship in South Asia.

Although scholars who have done research at BORI since the attack claim that the only noticeable change there is a plan to build a retention wall, the attack could potentially serve as a wake up call for libraries with significant South Asia collections in the U.S. to hasten their preservation microfilming programs. In his discussion of archival violence in Bosnia, Riedelmayer has written about the role of American scholars and OCLC in cataloguing, microfilming, and preserving copies of some of the records that were destroyed in the politically-motivated Bosnian National and University Library fire. In the BORI case, American libraries are taking similar steps in preserving manuscripts from South Asian repositories in the event of future destruction (due to violence, natural disaster, or neglect).

In many ways, the South Asia Microform Project (SAMP) has been at the forefront of international efforts to preserve via microfilm endangered materials. Founded in 1967 by a committee of librarians working on South Asian materials and administered by the Center for Research Libraries, the project has worked diligently to microfilm rare manuscripts, newspapers, books and other documents at libraries throughout South Asia (Wells 1988; Center for Research Libraries 2005). SAMP's efforts are particularly important in light of the BORI attack; in the event of future violence, American scholars will continue to have access to many materials at the libraries of their home institutions through SAMP's interlibrary loan program via the Center for Research Libraries. That said, many of the scholars interviewed for this paper said that their work requires being present in India and that accessing microfilm in the U.S. would not serve as a substitute for work at BORI.

The incident has also had a profound impact on the ways in which American scholars conduct and publish research on India. Laine himself has not returned to India since the attack, never intends to return to Maharashtra again, and is unsure if he would even be granted a tourist visa to travel elsewhere in the country. He said,

The attack has had a chilling effect on scholarship in South Asia, no question about that. I was a member of an international group of scholars who have worked on Maharashtra state and certainly within that group there has been a really heightened sense of danger and a desire to avoid any kind of controversial work, especially any that deals with caste. There have been so many people pulling back and saying no, I'm not going to write on that topic. Caste is absolutely essential stuff to understanding Maratha culture because it is such a highly charged and important fact. But people are saying no, too dangerous, can't do it. And you can see how if you were a young scholar hoping to get tenure and you have to write a book, you don't want to be in a position where suddenly you can't even visit the country you studied. The [Maratha caste groups'] strategy of saying, 'well, our feelings have been hurt by this and therefore we are going to charge you in court for it' appears to be working (interview with James Laine, March 26, 2008).

Other scholars working in Pune have confirmed Laine's statement. With the exception of Laine, all of the scholars interviewed for this paper refused to be publicly quoted on the topic for fear of sparking another attack on themselves or on BORI. One prominent scholar has noted a "self-censorship" in her work since the attack and has since taken on a political advisor who reviews all of her work before publication. Additionally, she is considering publishing some work only after her own death (interview with Contributor 2, March 24, 2008). All five scholars also lamented that they are no longer able to thank colleagues, librarians, or institutions in their introductions, effectively eliminating a scholarly tradition of acknowledgement.

### *Archives as symbolic targets for violence*

As the scholars working at BORI quickly learned, important documents and books (such as the texts regarding Shivaji that are housed at BORI) have value beyond the information they contain. James O'Toole has written (2007) about the symbolic value of documents and shown how societies can both venerate and loathe them as objects and artifacts. In his discussion of document veneration, O'Toole writes, "the desire to possess the documents as physical things was at least equal to the desire to possess the information they contained," while document loathing is marked by the desire to "express contempt" for documents by physically hurting or destroying them (O'Toole 2007, 44). Particularly pertinent to the BORI incident, O'Toole posits that "hostility toward written records may be felt with special intensity by those whose ability to

read and write is limited" (O'Toole 2007, 49). Applying O'Toole's ideas to the BORI incident, the violence there was not just about the information contained within specific manuscripts in the collection (many of which, after all, were sacred to the attackers), but about the manuscripts as symbols—symbols of Brahmin domination over the lower castes, of the marginalization of the Marathas from texts about Shivaji, and of Western scholarship run amok. O'Toole summarizes that "all [documents] are carriers of information, but it is information that operates on a number of different levels at the same time, information that is both literate and non-literate," and concludes chillingly with a warning that "those who encounter such documentary artifacts... ignore those different levels at their peril" (O'Toole 2007, 51–2). It seems that in the BORI case, O'Toole's warning was ignored; those who ignored the symbolic value of documents there (as James Laine arguably did) did so not only at their own peril, but of that that of the archive as a whole.

Many scholars have taken O'Toole's claims a step further, by writing about the connection between archival violence and genocide. Rebecca Knuth has written extensively on the systematic destruction of libraries and archives in the twentieth century as a way of destroying and/or eradicating particular cultures. Using the destruction of books in Nazi Germany as a primary example, she argues that "libricide" (the destruction of a book) is inextricably linked to genocide, as the social and political functions of libraries and archives make them symbolic targets for political violence. She also writes about the connection between archival destruction and literacy, writing that the destruction of books is the first step in the "wholesale extermination of literate classes" and is "as part of the process of homogenizing discourse, suppressing individualism in the interest of the collective, and co-opting or purging the intellectuals" (Knuth 2003, 236). We can see all three of these factors at work in the BORI incident. The Sambhaji Brigade wanted to control the official story of Shivaji, suppress the intellectual freedom of scholars writing about him, and purge the intellectuals, both the Brahmin elite and Western academia.

Like Knuth, András Riedlmayer has written about the connection between genocide and archival destruction. He describes how in 1992 Bosnia's National and University Library was

bombed and set on fire by Serbian nationalist forces in an attempt to completely destroy Bosnian culture; the National Archives, over 155,000 rare books, and 478 manuscript codices were destroyed in the blaze. As Riedlmayer describes (2001), this was not an isolated incident; destruction of libraries and museums was one of the hallmarks of the war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s and was inextricably linked to acts of genocide. Like Knuth, he claims that destruction of archives, libraries, and cultural institutions has been used as an initial intimidation tactic that leads that ethnic cleansing if not stopped.

Taking both Knuth and Riedlmayer's claims seriously, it remains to be seen if archival violence at BORI is a harbinger of society-wide violence to come in the state of Maharashtra. One scholar interviewed referred to the rhetoric of the Sambhaji Brigade as "genocidal against Brahmins," (interview with Contributor 1, March 22, 2008) and the Sambhaji Brigade itself has threatened to hang the (Brahmin) archivists at BORI who worked with Laine (*Indian Express* 2004). While there are obvious differences between the genocides committed in Nazi Germany and the former Yugoslavia and the BORI incident, the debate over caste privilege in Maharashtra continues to be a contentious flash-point with little sign of resolution. Indeed, one scholar placed the BORI incident within "a larger trend of attacks on all cultural institutions throughout India over who gets to define the culture," and noted that anti-Brahmin violence has been going on in Pune for decades (interview with Contributor 1, March 22, 2008). Another scholar predicted, "Absolutely we can expect to see more of these types of attacks. As long as violence mobilizes some political community, the threat is there" (interview with Contributor 4, March 19, 2008).

### *Provenance, ownership, and listening to other voices in the archives*

Given that the Sambhaji Brigade specifically and Maratha caste groups in general have expressed considerable anger at being shut out of the Brahmin-dominated archive, is there a way to reconfigure the archive to include their disenfranchised voices? How does the BORI attack relate to the larger discussion within archival studies about including voices of the marginalized in the ar-

chives? Under the threat of future violence, what is an archivist to do? Here, again, I turn to post-modern theory for ideas.

In 1988, postmodern theorist Gayatri Spivak helped launch the field of post-colonial studies by asking the now-famous question, "Can the subaltern speak?" By "subaltern" Spivak was referring to the colonized, the disenfranchised (via caste, ethnicity, or gender), the Other (Spivak 1988). By asking if they can speak, Spivak is essentially looking for the same kind of "whispers in the archives" that Jeannette Bastian seeks (2005) when she looks to "find the voices of the colonized in the records of the colonizer" (Bastian 2005, 25). In the case of the BORI incident, the subaltern refers to the disenfranchised Marathas who clearly felt that they were not speaking through the archival record, and as a result, were not taking part in the formation of the collective memory about Shivaji. As suggested previously in this paper by an American scholar who said that violence was an idiom well understood by Indian society, violence seems to be a way in which the subaltern can ensure their voices are heard, even when they are rendered mute by the archival record. Through violence comes a sense of ownership, which, though destructive, can also be empowering.

Here it is useful to discuss Bastian's concepts of archival ownership and provenance in the context of the BORI incident. Writing from within a Caribbean context, Bastian (2003) posits that the connection to records is not only historic and political, but emotional. Collective memory, she acknowledges, is based not just on written records, but on oral histories and other types of information that cannot be divorced from the community. Just as Bastian's Virgin Islanders have relied on collective and social memory to construct historical narratives when denied access to archival sources, so too the Marathas of India have constructed their own narratives of Shivaji while being denied access to the BORI collection. In this way, the BORI incident reinforces Bastian's claim that, "a community will construct a memory regardless of the tools with which it has to work" (Bastian 2003, 86).

However, the BORI incident renders problematic Bastian's redefinition of provenance to encapsulate community ownership. In asking who the rightful owner is of colonial-era documents, Bastian (2003, 75) expands the archival concept of provenance to include entire communities. She then posits the

West African term 'sankofa,' meaning "go back and fetch it," as a meaningful concept and inspiration for return of the records. But what may seem just in a conflict between colonized and colonizer in the Virgin Islands is harmful in a caste-based conflict in India. The Sambhaji Brigade, for example, can be seen as justifiably "going back and fetching" manuscripts during their attack at BORI, though of course Bastian does not advocate violence in the process of fetching. In this Indian context, however, Bastian's injunction to "go back and fetch" archival documents has a chilling effect, particularly given the Sambhaji Brigade's intent to destroy or severely limit access to BORI's collection.

Instead of Bastian's sankofa concept, perhaps a more useful concept in the BORI case is Joel Wurl's notion of stewardship. Wurl (2005) describes the experience of delivering a conference paper on the administration of an immigrant history archive in Los Angeles during the Rodney King riots in 1992. He later learns of an incident at Southern California Library for Social Studies & Research (SCL) in which angry rioters were convinced not to destroy a library by being told that it held the history of underrepresented groups. He writes:

The SCL was saved due in part to the bravery of one man but significantly also due to a realization on the part of those bent on destruction. The facility contained something important to them, probably something they hadn't been fully aware of before then. In fact, it contained a partial antidote for what drove them to act out in the first place. It comprised documentation not only about underrepresented communities but more importantly of those communities. Not just the ongoing power of history but also the core question of who owns that history surfaced in one fateful flash point that illuminates some important lessons to draw on in considering how-and of course why-various cultural communities might be documented by archivists and others. (Wurl 2005, 66)

Subsequently, Wurl calls into question the archival concept of provenance and posits that records can originate from and be owned by an ethnic group and not just an individual. He writes that by expanding our definition of provenance to include ethnicity, the underrepresented groups whose records we collect must be respected and acknowledged as owners. He then posits that the concept of custodianship, where archival materials are physically transferred to a repository, be replaced by stewardship, whereby archival materials are "viewed less as property and more as cultural asset" jointly held by the community and the repository (Wurl 2005, 72).

If we apply Wurl's concept of stewardship to caste groups instead of ethnic groups in the Indian context, then the manuscripts at BORI belong to the Sambhaji Brigade more than they belong to the archivists at BORI. Indeed, BORI is merely "stewarding" the Shivaji manuscripts for the Maratha caste, since the texts are about a Maratha king. This arrangement, though conceptual rather than practical, presents a paternalistic arrangement in the BORI case whereby the lower castes are not deemed adequate keepers of their own histories.

A better conceptual framework for a resolution to the BORI situation, I would like to posit, is neither 'sankofa' nor stewardship, but inclusion. If Marathas were included on the staff and board of BORI (as they would be soon after the violence), then they would have been less likely to feel so disenfranchised and might not have resorted to violence to force their voices to be heard. While the problem of the oppression of the lower castes in India is clearly systemic and much larger than a particular archival repository, inclusion of marginalized groups in an archives' administration is a potential antidote to violence. This inclusion was achieved to a certain degree at BORI by the appointment of a Maratha board member in 2007. While it remains to be seen if this appointment represents a new era of inclusiveness at BORI and if so, if such inclusiveness will prevent further violence at the archive, it does represent a radical symbolic shift in the Brahmin leadership that has guided BORI in the past.

In many ways, the concept of inclusion draws heavily on Wurl and Bastian's expansion of provenance to include not just the individuals who created specific documents, but the larger societal groups to which they belong. Through this expansion of provenance, archival documents are the products not just of individuals acting alone, but of a larger context of group interactions and identities; the care and maintenance of these documents then should be entrusted, in part, to members of the group from which they originated. As group identities can shift considerably over time (as seen in the case of the Maratha caste), inclusion is less a hard and fast rule, and more a guideline or a goal for which to strive.

In the larger archival context, this concept of inclusion has significant implications for collection development and staffing. Under the concept of inclusion, archives and libraries have a social responsibility to reflect the larger community

through both their collections and their administration. While this concept would obviously not apply to a repository that is specific to a particular ethnic or social group, it could have an important impact on the repositories of universities, geographic-based historical societies, and government institutions, in that both the materials collected and the staff would more accurately reflect the diverse make up of the community in which the repository resides. Guided by the concept of inclusion, for example, the SCL repository described by Wurl would not only collect materials by African Americans and Latinos, but also have a significant representation of African Americans and Latinos at the every level of its administration. While clearly this would not be an easy goal to achieve (particularly given the lack of ethnic diversity in the archival profession in the U.S.), it is certainly a worthy goal.

### *Conclusion: Toward an archive of inclusion*

Just as documents have symbolic value beyond the words they contain, archival institutions have symbolic value beyond the manuscripts they contain. Through an examination of a single violent episode at one library in India, we see how an archive can serve as a potent cultural and political symbol and, if issues of ownership and access are not properly addressed, a site of violence as well. If such violence can occur in even a secular, pluralist democracy like India, it can also occur in our own secular pluralist democracy, as Wurl describes in his article about the Los Angeles Riots. In this way, the BORI incident can serve as a warning to archival repositories and libraries worldwide to actively reflect the voices and experiences of marginalized groups in both their administration and in their collections in order to create a more inclusive collective memory and to prevent violence in the future.

### *Notes*

1. For the report of thousands, see *The Economic Times* (Gurgaon, Harayana, India) 2004. For the report of hundreds, *The Hindu* (Chennai, India), 2004. For the report of twenty-five, see *The Times of India* (Gurgaon, Harayana, India) 2004 and *Overland* 2004. For the report of 30,000 see *Financial Times* (London) 2004.
2. Contributor 1, interview, March 22, 2008; Contributor 2, interview, March 24, 2008; and Contributor 3, interview, April 11, 2008.

3. For a thorough explanation of the British colonial government's motivations for this order, see Johnson 1980.
4. Bhandarkar's son, S.R. Bhandarkar reported seeing loose leaf manuscripts used as wrapping paper by grocers (Johnson 1980, 135–136).
5. While an explanation of the Hindu caste system is beyond the scope of this paper, a useful introduction can be found in Kinsley 1993: Chapter 8, Hindu Social Structure, 152–175.
6. For a thorough exploration of recent thought on this topic among librarians, see Alison Lewis, ed., *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian* (Duluth, Minnesota: Library Juice Press, 2008).
7. As mentioned, the librarians at BORI who helped Laine were not interviewed for this paper out of respect for their privacy, so it is not possible to make any claims in this paper about their opinions, intentions, or knowledge of Laine's controversial work prior to its publication.
8. Lee Schlesinger, who was in Pune during the attack, has scanned some of the Maratha periodicals from around the time of the attack and put them online. The particular cover discussed from *Marathamarg*, can be viewed by clicking on "February 2004: Cover" at the following website: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~schlesin/maratha/Periodicals1.htm>

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