“ALL THAT IS NOT GIVEN IS LOST”: HUMANITARIAN DISCOURSES IN DOMINIQUE LAPIERRE’S WRITING ON INDIA

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between Dominique Lapierre’s writing on India and the discourses of humanitarianism. Born in 1931, Lapierre is a celebrated French writer of historical nonfiction and advocate for the Indian poor. He is well-known for his book *The City of Joy* (1985) about the residents of a slum in Calcutta (Kolkata) and the humanitarians who assist them. As a result of the commercial success of his writing, and fundraising for marginalised communities in India over the past few decades, he has been able to sponsor numerous humanitarian projects in South Asia. This thesis regards his writing as part of more general discursive practices that govern writing about Indian history and Indian poverty. In particular, this thesis considers those discursive practices that are attached to the institutions and ideologies of humanitarian action.

Such discursive practices are a function of “humanitarian government”, a term used by the anthropologist Didier Fassin in his book *Humanitarian Reason* to designate “the set of procedures established and actions conducted in order to manage, regulate, and support the existence of human beings: government includes but exceeds the intervention of the state, local administrations, international bodies and political institutions more generally” (1). While there have been studies of humanitarian government in the fields of international relations, political science and anthropology, there is less scholarship on the way that humanitarian government is represented in popular writing, particularly creative nonfiction of the kind written by Lapierre. Hence, this thesis attempts to analyse the various discourses that represent and legitimise humanitarian government in India.

I focus on three main texts in this thesis, with each text forming a separate chapter. The first chapter analyses *Freedom at Midnight* (1975), a historical account of South Asia’s decolonisation and Partition. Co-authored with Larry Collins, this text reconstructs the crises of 1947 – 1948 as events which necessitated the humanitarian government of the last Viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten. The second chapter studies *The City of Joy*, which represents missionary humanitarianism and development projects in Pilkhana, one of Calcutta’s poorest slums in the 1970s and 1980s. It also
explores how suffering is portrayed in Lapierre’s writing to construct the Indian poor as deserving recipients of aid. The third chapter examines Lapierre’s memoir *India, My Love* (2013) which recounts his long literary and humanitarian engagement with India. This chapter analyses how the writer asserts his credentials as a leading spokesperson for the Indian poor and how he depicts victim-saviour relationships between needy Indians and humanitarians from the global North.

The three chapters of this thesis collectively demonstrate how Lapierre’s representations of humanitarian government in India rely on a synthesis of the older regime of imperial humanitarianism with the later regime of neo-humanitarianism, with its particular discursive emphasis on development.
Declaration

I, Ariel Tze Ling WEE, certify that:

This thesis has been substantially accomplished during enrolment in the degree.

This thesis does not breach any ethical rules with regard to the conduct of the research.

This thesis does not contain material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution.

No part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of The University of Western Australia and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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This thesis does not contain work that I have published, nor work under review for publication.

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Date: 30 October 2016
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Introduction

“All that is not given is lost”

The title of this thesis refers to an Indian proverb oft-quoted by Dominique Lapierre, the French author whose work and career are the subject of this study. Well-known for his writing on India, including the best-selling books *Freedom at Midnight*, *The City of Joy* and *India, My Love*, Lapierre is also a noted philanthropist. His writing, lectures and activism have made him a famous spokesperson for marginalised communities in India. It is the intersection between Lapierre’s writing and his humanitarianism that forms the focus of this study. In particular, this thesis attempts to consider what legitimises Lapierre’s stories of humanitarianism in India and the discursive regimes they draw upon to power their advocacy.

Related to this question is the phenomenal popularity of Lapierre’s writing. The success of his publications has enabled him to finance various aid projects in South Asia since the 1970s. He has donated much of his royalties and received hundreds and thousands of letters and donations from readers in response to his writing on India. This thesis is interested in the nature of humanitarian action and how it is closely connected to forms of language I will be calling “humanitarian discourses”. While humanitarianism is a vital aspect of human interaction in a turbulent world, organised humanitarian action can be regarded as ever-evolving ideological projects shaping international relations. Indeed, much of the literature in the field of humanitarian studies is produced by members of the aid community. These studies reflect the weight of moral dilemmas tied to humanitarianism, and the importance of self-reflection, sincere feedback and critique. My study of Lapierre’s stories about India is not meant to dispute his inspiring affinity with the Indian poor. It does not question the very tangible material outcomes of his activism. Instead, I seek to analyse the patterns of representation that underpin his writing on India, for his texts have influenced a worldwide readership’s understanding of South Asians, their problems and the humanitarians who assist them.
With this in mind, my introduction first reviews how humanitarianism has constituted various discursive practices beginning in the eighteenth century. It discusses the forms of humanitarian action which have historically emerged in association with these practices and situates Lapierre’s work within this genealogy. I then give an overview of his literary career and humanitarian engagement with India before outlining the scope of inquiry and the following chapters. They are based on three texts: Freedom at Midnight, The City of Joy and India, My Love.

Humanitarian Action as Discursive Practice

This study is based on the notion of “discourse” developed by Michel Foucault. In The Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault states that “discourse” designates “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (54). It is this basic, but far-reaching premise, which underpins Edward Said’s Orientalism. This pivotal postcolonial study demonstrates the critical discourse analysis that will be employed throughout this thesis. Foucault also sees discourses as loci of knowledge that are constantly interrelating, intersecting and competing with each other; what is taken as “truth” is the winning set of discursive practices at any given moment.

In addition, discourse analysis is based not on a notion of history as a continuous process of development but rather periods of history called “epistemes”. Epistemes are organised and explicable in terms of specific world views and discourses. Their rise and fall do not correspond to any neat narrative of origins, development, continuity or progress. Foucault asserts that an episteme can be regarded as “a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that men of a certain period cannot escape” (211). Thus, what is taken as “truth”, and accepted as “knowledge”, can be seen as produced by institutions, disciplines, rules and actions consistent with the specific world views and discourses dominating each episteme. These institutions, disciplines, rules and actions can be studied in terms of their power relations. In the opening chapter of Discipline and Punish, Foucault asserts “power produces knowledge” and “there is no power relation without the correlative
In light of Foucault’s concept of discourse, organised humanitarian action can be understood as discursive practices situated within particular epistemes. David Spurr in *The Rhetoric of Empire* posits not the existence of a “monolithic system” called “colonial discourse” but rather “the existence of a series of colonial discourses each adapted to a specific historical situation yet having in common certain traits with the others” (1-2). Similarly, this thesis regards humanitarian action as manifestations of various “humanitarianisms”. Each of them is situated within a certain geopolitical context and history whilst sharing many traits in common with the rest. Acknowledging the great diversity of humanitarian aid, this approach reflects how organised acts of compassion have never been exclusive to any part of the world.

In recent years, scholars such as Julia Pacitto and Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyueh of the Refugee Studies Centre in The University of Oxford have examined humanitarian action originating in the global South. They study donor states such as China as well as India and other post-colonial nations. This approach contests what Pacitto and Fiddian-Qasmiyueh term the “traditional dichotomy of Southern recipients and Northern donors” in their research paper “Writing the “Other” into humanitarian discourse” (3). It resists dominant representational practices in development studies and other related fields that construct the global South as passive recipients of the interventionist yet humanitarian aid of North America and Europe.

Lapierre’s writing, however, conforms to Eurocentric tradition by propagating such power relations. He tends to portray images of compassionate humanitarians from the global North valiantly serving needy Indians. Hence, this thesis draws upon the conceptual framework of earlier studies on humanitarianism initiated by the global North. This kind of humanitarianism, which originated in Europe in the eighteenth century, has evolved into what anthropologist Didier Fassin calls “humanitarian government”. In *Humanitarian Reason*, Fassin defines “government” as “the set of procedures established and actions conducted in order to manage, regulate, and support the existence of human beings: government includes but exceeds the intervention of the state, local administrations, international bodies and political
institutions more generally” (1). What makes this government “humanitarian” is the moral emphasis on “humanity”, that is, “the generality of human beings who share a similar condition (mankind),” as well as “humanness”, which is “an affective movement drawing humans toward their fellows” (2). Other scholars in humanitarian studies concur with Fassin’s idea of “humanitarian government” and often use this term interchangeably with “humanitarianism”. Thomas Weiss and Michael Barnett, for example, argue that the internationalisation and institutionalisation of humanitarianism has come to shape the very nature and purpose of international governance by dominant states in the global North. These two leading scholars have written extensively on the emergence of an international humanitarian order. In particular, Barnett’s seminal Empire of Humanity identifies the common traits of organised North-South humanitarianism since the eighteenth century. He epistemologically classifies them into distinct historical periods. They each correspond to specific discourses and world views that legitimise humanitarians’ power to intervene in the lives of those they assist. (29-32).

According to Barnett, the first characteristic of humanitarian government is that it is organised and part of governance (21). While this may seem self-explanatory, this defining trait is worth emphasising because many international humanitarian organisations have consistently claimed to be apolitical. Humanitarian bodies typically downplay the fact that their work also constitutes a form of government over vulnerable populations and how their very presence in a crisis situation can affect its geopolitics. Many scholars, including Barnett and Weiss in Humanitarianism Contested: Where Angels Fear to Tread, note that the heavy influence of the Red Cross Movement has ensured that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)'s definition of humanitarian action is often taken as “the gold standard” (9). This definition limits humanitarian assistance to the independent, neutral and impartial provision of relief to victims of armed conflicts and natural disasters (9). The ICRC definition overlooks other forms of organised humanitarian action, past and present, which are not geared towards emergency aid. It also distances organisations maintaining their neutrality from humanitarians who strive to identify root causes of suffering and address them to effect socio-political change. One reason for this definition of humanitarianism is that
relief organisations have often found it necessary to maintain their impartial, neutral and independent status in order for states to grant them access to those in need.4

The other two defining traits of organised humanitarian action assert that such aid is, firstly, directed at foreign lands, and secondly, “connects the immanent to the transcendent” (21). The combination of these traits means, for Barnett, that humanitarian action is imbued with a kind of transcendental significance that defies geography, nationality, religion, ethnicity, culture and any other differences between peoples. Humanitarianism appeals to the idea that there is something greater than the individual self, such as the idea of a shared humanity, an imagined global community or the existence of a benevolent divinity (20-21). Such universal notions are morally underpinned by what Fassin calls “biolegitimacy”: the recognition that life is the highest of all values and its sanctity overrides all possible divides between communities and nations (249). Fassin also notes that this belief originates from an older religious belief. He quotes Hannah Arendt’s *The Human Condition*

The reason why life has asserted itself as the ultimate point of reference in the modern age and has remained the highest good of modern society is that the modern reversal operated within the fabric of a Christian society whose fundamental belief in the sacredness of life has survived, and has even remained completely unshaken by, secularisation and the general decline of the Christian faith (317-320).

While humanitarianism can be clearly identified by these distinguishing characteristics, Barnett also organises it into three different ages.

An imperial humanitarianism, from the late eighteenth century to World War II; a neo-humanitarianism, from the end of World War II to the end of the Cold War; and a liberal humanitarianism from the end of the Cold War to the present (30).

While humanitarian studies is a relatively new field of scholarship and tends to focus on events after the 1990s, Barnett’s *Empire of Humanity* offers one of the first comprehensive studies of humanitarianism’s varied forms and competing discursive practices since the abolitionist movement beginning in the late 1700s. Barnett’s historical schema of humanitarianism offers a useful framework for the discussion of scholarship on humanitarian government and its discursive practices. The three ages of humanitarianism can be seen as different epistemes, each positing specific world views and discourses which constituted the kinds of humanitarian action that dominated it.
In the age of imperial humanitarianism (1800–1945), the most prominent forms of humanitarian action addressed the suffering of slaves, native populations affected by European imperialism and people wounded in war. Each of these movements shared the objective of spreading civilisation and Christianity, particularly to non-Europeans. According to Barnett, the ascendance of new religious doctrines since the eighteenth century created more possibilities for salvation and the recognition of others’ humanity (49-50). Nearly all of the founding abolitionists were evangelicals. Many of them were Quakers who believed that all human beings were God’s children who deserved respect (57). Protestant missionaries also helped fuel the anti-slavery movement by criticising the treatment of slaves and the failure to give them Christian instruction (57-58).

This claim is borne out in a number of key studies on the evolution of abolitionist thought and mobilisation against the slave trade, such as Christopher Brown’s *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* and Adam Hochschild’s *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire’s Slaves*. Brown argues that these religious activists propagated “a Christian moral economy centred on reciprocal duties and obligations” instead of “a liberal political economy based on individual rights and liberties”; they successfully generated considerable compassion for non-Europeans (7). In *Empire of Humanity*, Barnett has also noted that during this period, which was marked by the acceleration of international commerce, the Great Power Wars and intensified colonialism, Europeans began to imagine obligations that went beyond slaves’ liberation, including the duty to help them to develop their humanity (59-60).

There also grew a new imagined moral responsibility towards those who were seen as suffering because of imperial expansion. Historians examining the relationship between imperialism and humanitarianism tend to highlight how colonialism, because of such moral sentiments, came to be viewed by its practitioners as a benevolent force that could allow Europeans to atone for sins committed against these peoples. Andrew Porter, for example, discusses in *Religion Versus Empire?* the evangelical view that “the merchant, the philanthropist, the patriot and the Christian, may unite” in conscience and government to spread civilisation and Christianity (150). This view valorised Europeans involved in commercial trade, missionary movements and colonial
administrations as humanitarian agents. Imperial humanitarianism thus offered a rhetorical banner unifying colonial government, the pursuit of secular self-interest and missionary work: these were imagined as opportunities for the white man to atone for sins associated with slavery and colonial conquest (150).

In addition, colonialism, especially in the nineteenth century, articulated the concept of “trusteeship” which propagated civilisation and conversion as salvific forces. Trusteeship reveals how European colonisers acknowledged that their powers came with moral obligations to responsibly benefit the ruled. Colonial rule was deemed “humanitarian” because it alleviated the poverty and physical suffering of non-Europeans, who were considered part of the human family though inferior and in need of paternalistic rule. Furthermore, colonialism as an agent of civilisation and Christian instruction offered the slave and the indigene spiritual deliverance from primitive superstitions and oppressive religions. In the case of India, Thomas Metcalf’s influential study, *Ideologies of the Raj*, explains how colonial government in India was shaped by liberal ideals which justified the British civilising mission. He cites James Mill’s *History of British India* as a classic text articulating such liberal views. It ranked Hindus poorly on the scale of civilisation and argued that they were the most enslaved portion of the human race, oppressed by despotism and a system of priestcraft perpetuating degrading and tormenting superstitions. In this text, Mill argued that colonial rule would free India’s civilisation from stagnation and set it on the road to progress (18). Clearly, while appealing to “universal” concepts such as humanity and divinity, imperial humanitarians illustrated how these notions are not absolute but rather contingent upon prevailing world views and specific discourses. Their beliefs in a transcendental Christian Creator God and the notion of a stratified humanity propagated Europeans’ ideas of their own racial, cultural and religious superiority. This, in turn, morally justified their paternalistic rule and intervention in the global South as a form of humanitarian government.

The idea of a humanity bonded together by a Christian Creator God began to recede only towards the early twentieth century, when the first generation of human rights activists came to prominence. According to Barnett, the “nascent human rights movement drew from the distinctive liberal, humanist tradition” while missionaries and Christian administrators “cited God” (73). The early human rights activists
favoured a form of cultural relativism which accepted European superiority but also insisted that “local populations had cultures worthy of respect and could soon realise an ability to run their own affairs” (74). The shift towards a secularised notion of humanity became officially recognised in the League of Nations Covenant in 1919. This Covenant referred not to God but to humanity when articulating the sacred trusteeship role imperial powers had to prepare colonised peoples for independence. The notion of humanity thus became gradually secularised and imperial powers themselves began to omit the term “Christianity” in official rhetoric. Nevertheless, most Europeans still understood the concept of trusteeship as something based on Christian principles and the transcendental idea of a Creator God (74-75).

At this point, it is important to draw the distinction between humanitarianism and human rights. Many prominent human rights scholars, such as Jack Donnelly, have discussed how world leaders have cooperated to codify human rights in a globally-recognised “human rights regime” of treaties, institutions, and norms. For example, when the United Nations (UN) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, it proclaimed humanity’s rights, including entitlements to food, housing, medical care and security through this comprehensive charter. This historic event illustrates how human rights and humanitarianism have many shared concerns and why human rights activism is often assumed to incorporate humanitarian action.

Both fields, however, can be distinguished by examining the fundamental difference between “right” and “need”. Barnett argues

Human rights rely on a discourse of rights, humanitarianism a discourse of needs. Human rights focus on legal discourse and frameworks, whereas humanitarianism shifts attention to moral codes and sentiments (16).

In other words, humanitarian action is predicated on the obligation of the giver but human rights champion the right of the recipient. Although their origins can be traced back to the Enlightenment, and many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) today are seen as engaging in humanitarian action and protecting human rights, they can be recognised as two historically and ideologically distinct movements. Human rights historian Samuel Moyn asserts in The Last Utopia that “humanitarianism, with its origins in Christian pity and Enlightenment sympathy through its high era of imperialist entanglement, had developed in historical independence of rights talk”. He also
stresses that the dramatic ascendance of human rights in the 1970s “occurred in striking autonomy to humanitarian concern”; it had more to do with pursuing rights for dissidents under authoritarian regimes than offering aid to suffering peoples in need (220).

In terms of its application to other fields in the humanities, human rights have occupied a far more prominent place than humanitarianism. For instance, the past decade has seen the publication of literary studies such as *Theoretical Perspectives on Human Rights and Literature*, a compilation edited by Elizabeth Goldberg and Alexandra Moore, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives* by Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith as well as the seminal study by Joseph Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc*. As for humanitarianism, there have been texts identified with humanitarian movements, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) and Henry Dunant’s *A Memory of Solferino* (1862) as well as numerous texts exalting missionary humanitarianism, imperialism, colonialism and development. With the exception of *A Memory of Solferino*, however, these texts tend to be analysed not as “humanitarian literature” but as specific literary genres. Examples include abolitionist literature, missionary writing, or more generally, imperial and colonial literature. This tendency to study humanitarian discourses in isolated contexts reflects not only the dominance of ICRC’s definition of humanitarianism which limits it to emergency aid, but also Barnett’s point that “contemporary historical accounts of humanitarianism leave the past and the present unconnected” (7). By recognising humanitarianism’s long history since the Enlightenment, and the importance of reading contemporary humanitarian government in light of its global antecedents, one can see the great potential for cohesion and growth in the field of humanitarian studies.

*A Memory of Solferino* is explicitly identified with humanitarianism worldwide because it was written by one of the key founders of the Red Cross movement. More importantly, Dunant’s memoir, written after witnessing the carnage and suffering of wounded soldiers abandoned on the battlefield during the conflict between France and Austria-Hungary, is regarded as an exceedingly influential text which inspired another form of humanitarian action in the 1860s, about fifty years after the abolitionists began their campaigns against slavery. By establishing the Red Cross, formalised as the International Committee of the Red Cross in 1876, and successfully
getting European governments to agree on the Geneva Conventions granting special protection to soldiers wounded in war and those caring for them, Dunant and his co-founders paved the way for international humanitarian law and a new kind of humanitarian action in the age of imperial humanitarianism. According to Barnett, Dunant’s vision for Red Cross societies and the Geneva Conventions tapped into existing moral and legal discourses propagating international norms, such as the regulation of war, to ensure a stable and just order of European states. Furthermore, because the ICRC’s “very existence and effectiveness depended upon states”, it strove to assert its independence (78). This led to the formation of its principles of humanity, independence, neutrality and impartiality. Scholars examining the history of the Red Cross movement, such as John Hutchinson and Roger Cooter in Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross, have noted that after the Ottoman Empire and Japan adopted the Geneva Conventions, this imagined European community later expanded to become the ideology of a global “community of nations” (203). The ICRC began to regard its cause as a global Christian civilising mission, though it still upheld the notion of a stratified humanity. According to Barnett, the ICRC’s prominent founding members, such as colonialist Gustave Moynier, speculated that “savage peoples” could be rescued from their “brute instincts” by the ICRC’s civilising mission if they adopted the Geneva Conventions and formed local Red Cross societies (82). Thus, while striving to maintain a politically neutral definition of humanitarianism, the ICRC’s goals aligned it with that of other imperial humanitarians who believed that the global North had the moral imperative to lead the community of nations towards Christianity and civilisation. During World War I, the ICRC distinguished itself: its monitoring and assistance to prisoners-of-war garnered considerable prestige to help it to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1917. Barnett argues that the ICRC’s civilisational mentality in World War II justified its “very patrician and exclusive” eighteen-member Genevan committee’s belief that European conquest could be better for Ethiopians. The ICRC used its principles of neutrality, independence and impartiality to support its passivity towards Italian atrocities in the African state (93).

Since World War I, emergency relief for civilian populations at risk began to become institutionalised, with new agencies such as British charity Save the Children asserting the principle of impartiality and discourse of children as innocent
representatives of humanity who should be eligible for relief, even in states considered enemies of Britain and America. According to Barnett, the severity and duration of World War II led to the "public governance of relief" and more internationally coordinated action by relief organisations and states (83). On the refugee crises caused by this war, he describes how the League of Nations created the High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR) and International Relief Union (IRU). Both bodies represented international agencies coordinating relief efforts and acting upon the principle of humanity as well as the ideal of international solidarity (88-89). Although state boundaries and politics prevailed in tragic instances where many European countries were reluctant to shelter refugees, particularly Jews and other persecuted peoples, the creation of both humanitarian institutions reflected the growing importance of an "international public morality" and an increasingly secularised idea of a global community of nations responsible for the welfare of displaced persons (90).

In the age of neo-humanitarianism (1945-1989), Barnett asserts that World War II, decolonisation and the Cold War “created a new space for imagining new kinds of commitments to the welfare of more populations”. The end of colonialism also “created an institutional vacuum in the Third World, quickly occupied by the superpowers, non-governmental organisations … and international organisations pledging to bring progress and modernity to the backward populations” (31). While the notion of an all-equal humanity slowly edged out views of a stratified humanity, paternalistic ideologies proclaiming that the rich and powerful had an obligation to guide the rest of the world supported new forms of global governance. The term “neo-colonialism” has been used by various activists and scholars. They include Jean-Paul Sartre who critiqued French foreign policy and Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first prime minister and later President. These critics maintain that the global North retained considerable privileges and mechanisms of power over the South, including post-colonial states which had formal sovereignty. According to Barnett, although the humanitarian sector relied on the ICRC principles to try to transcend machinations of politics and power during this period, humanitarian government persisted in many ways to affect a paternalistic “neo-humanitarianism”. Similar to abolitionists who argued that colonialism would help atone for the sins of slavery, many aid agencies insisted that the wealthier global North had inherited both moral and causal
responsibilities because of colonialism (105). The abolitionist view that freedom would mean little without the intellectual and material tools necessary for progress was also applied to new sovereign states to support interventionist development projects (105-106).

In light of World War II atrocities, international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights were given remarkable impetus and articulation between 1948 and 1950. First, the Geneva Conventions were revised, expanded and readopted by the international community in 1949. This reworking of the Geneva Conventions enshrined the special role of the ICRC, granting it access to the sick, wounded and prisoners-of-war. Second, the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights took place in 1948 and 1950 respectively. In his article "The Principles of International Humanitarian Law" in *International Review of the Red Cross*, Jean Pictet, former Director of ICRC, notes how these events historically elevated IHL “from being a mere branch of international law” to “a province in its own right with a wide measure of autonomy”. IHL contained the legislation of human rights and effectively made the UN its main propagating authority instead of the ICRC (455-457). In the same journal, Louise Doswald-Beck and Sylvain Vité, both legal specialists in international law working with the ICRC, discuss the incorporation of rights into IHL. Their article “International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law” discusses how the latter has become increasingly perceived as part of human rights law applicable in armed conflict since the UN Human Rights Conference of 1968 (94-96). This historic development explains why human rights and IHL are often analysed together by scholars of legal and human rights discourses. More importantly, it illustrates how IHL as a legal instrument recognises rights instead of appealing to the moral sentiments of humanitarian discourses. This historical context on the legislation of universal human rights and IHL is important because it helps explain why humanitarianism is often assumed to be part of the human rights movement. In spite of its name, IHL is coded in terms of rights and operates as a function of its discursive practices.

Furthermore, since World War II atrocities were historically justified in terms of differences between peoples, the notion of humanity propagated after 1945 by human rights and humanitarian discourses strove to discredit differences and affirm universal equality amongst humankind. The notion of a stratified humanity and infantilising
civilising ideology were no longer politically acceptable in the age of neo-humanitarianism. According to Barnett, the imagined role of the international community since the age of neo-humanitarianism has been to “play the role of superego”. The reworking of the Geneva Conventions was “less a breakthrough for humanity than a belated recognition that the brutality of war had exceeded acceptable limits. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was less a climactic moment in the indefatigable march of human rights than a mournful recognition of humankind’s deficit of humanity” (102-103).

Hence, this reinvented notion of humanity and the assertion of human rights – especially in IHL – can be read as moral and discursive responses to the genocidal acts which took place during World War II against entire communities. According to Barnett in *Empire of Humanity*, what imbued the concept of an imagined international community/humanity with transcendental significance is the belief in a global spirit, based on the common identity of being human, which could not be eroded by individual differences or state conflicts (103). The humanitarian sector experienced an incredible surge and expansion as relief agencies rushed to liberated areas after the defeat of the Axis Powers (103). This historical evolution, together with the idea of a global spirit, fuelled the formation and growth of more international organisations and aid agencies with the ambition of alleviating suffering worldwide.

In addition, Barnett notes that the age of neo-humanitarianism was also marked by the trend of states creating, and becoming increasingly central to the funding of, aid agencies (105). Scholars such as Barnett and Thomas Weiss agree that political discourses in the United States (US) related security to aid during this period – the latter became an instrument of foreign policy in the global North, as well as the channel for distributing American agricultural surplus worldwide. Barnett, in particular, notes that humanitarian agencies morphed from organisations constantly reacting to emergencies into quasi-bureaucratic, rationalised institutions using expert knowledge and quasi-technocratic language to justify their interventions (105). The growth of the aid industry continued to propagate the rhetoric of states and international agencies from the global North leading humanitarian action worldwide. It also capitalised on events such as 1960s famine in Biafra and 1980s famine in Ethiopia to claim universal jurisdiction. According to Barnett, as the superpowers waged the Cold War which
continued to carve up the world into spheres of Northern dominance, the ICRC and other international aid organisations held fast to the ideology of state sovereignty. As they became anxious about their dependency on state resources, these humanitarian groups continued to emphasise the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence – particularly as they reached out to vulnerable populations during the confrontations of these superpowers (30-31).

In addition, Barnett notes that in the political climate of the Cold War, development and modernisation were exalted in anti-communist doctrines which propagated them as antidotes to totalitarianism (97-99). Yet, humanitarian government in this period, similar to imperial humanitarianism, upheld inherently paternalistic views which posited the global South as problematic communities. The distinctions made between “developed and “undeveloped” states suggested that the global North represented the idealised, ideological future of others and they had the moral obligation to offer interventionist assistance (105-107). This paternalism has been examined by many development critics. Anthropologist Arturo Escobar in his famous text, Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World, defines “development” as a discourse, “an apparatus that links forms of knowledge about the Third World with the deployment of forms of power and intervention, resulting in the mapping and production of Third World societies” (213). In the 2011 edition of this influential text, he describes how interventionist action is mistaken for “humanitarian concern” instead of the “bureaucratisation of social action”. The latter can be studied to understand how “development discourse has regulated the comings and goings of people in the Third World” (103-110).

Besides development projects, broad-scale North-South humanitarian initiatives included foreign assistance in areas of food production, resource management, medicine, economics, urban development, education and the formation of institutions of law and government. Hence, existing scholarship on the discourses that supported these organised humanitarian endeavours tend to be segregated in various specialised fields. They include development studies, anthropology, international relations, political science, media studies, cultural studies and postcolonial studies. In the field of humanitarian scholarship, there is much potential
for more inter-disciplinary analysis on the discursive practices historically situated in the period following World War II to the end of the Cold War.

Compared to the literature on neo-humanitarianism, the field of humanitarianism studies mushroomed dramatically, and with urgency, during the age of liberal humanitarianism. This period began with the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and continues to the present day. Political scientists such as Francis Fukuyama and David Chandler note respectively in *State-building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century* and *Empire in Denial: the Politics of State-building* that interventionist policies eroding states’ self-sovereignty reflect how international order is seen to be threatened by weak and failing states. This view, in turn, can be seen as a response to the fact that the post-Cold War era has been marked by more civil wars, ethnic conflicts and governmental breakdowns. Much of the turbulence worldwide has been attributed to states’ declining abilities to provide security and basic governance as well as the rise of paramilitary organisations leading to civil wars and local emergencies.

Unlike previous decades, civilians are also increasingly viewed as the targets of warfare. Since the 1990s, security and humanitarianism have become intertwined in the international community’s responses to these perceived threats, which often take the form of humanitarian intervention and liberal peacebuilding. Jeff Holzgrefe, editor of *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal and Political Dilemmas*, defines humanitarian intervention as “the threat or use of force across state borders by a state (or group of states) aimed at preventing or ending widespread and grave violations of the fundamental human rights of individuals other than its own citizens, without the permission of the state within whose territory force is applied” (18). It is often justified as a response to “complex humanitarian emergencies”. This term arose in the 1990s, during which debates waged over foreign intervention, or lack thereof, in troubled states – particularly in response to tragedies in Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Kosovo. Liberal peacebuilding, on the other hand, is geared towards long-term state-building. Liberal peacebuilding seeks to address the root causes of conflict and suffering by establishing free markets, democracy and rule of law, including human rights – all promoted as the foundation of peaceful and progressive societies.
Both humanitarian intervention and liberal peacebuilding are justified by liberal philosophy, which posits a social contract between states and their peoples. In his article "The liberal Case for Humanitarian Intervention" in *Humanitarian Intervention*, legal scholar Fernando Tesón explains that in liberal thought, human beings whose individual autonomy and entitlements are being denied by states should be helped by outsiders (foreigners, foreign governments and international organisations) who have a *prima facie* duty to intervene and rescue them (96-97). Given the current ascendancy of human rights discourse, unjust or failed states tend to be defined as those which commit mass violations of human rights. In conjunction with human rights discourse, liberal humanitarian discourse legitimises humanitarian intervention and liberal peacebuilding by asserting that the international community bears the moral obligation to intervene and assist vulnerable citizens of unjust or failed states.

This moral obligation propagated by liberal humanitarian discourse has been enshrined in the UN’s rhetoric of “the responsibility to protect” (R2P). Humanitarian intervention and liberal peacebuilding are often charged with violating the moral significance and legalities of state sovereignty and national borders. Armed humanitarian intervention, in particular, has been the subject of considerable debate in the field of humanitarian studies. As mentioned, political scientists and international relations experts such as Barnett and Weiss analyse the emergence of a humanitarian world order. Legal scholars such as Simon Chesterman in *Just War or Just Peace?* consider whether the use of armed forces in places like Kosovo breached and redefined international laws. The moral legitimacy of humanitarian warfare is also explored in depth by scholars from different fields. In the wake of the controversies surrounding humanitarian intervention and liberal peacebuilding, the UN in 2005 endorsed the reconceptualisation of sovereignty in terms of responsibility rather than control. This concept was framed as a “moral responsibility” in the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, an official recognition of international humanitarian government.

The rhetoric of R2P also justified liberal peacebuilding because it is not limited to what is morally expected of the international community during times of crises in failed or unjust states. Gareth Evans, former Australian Foreign Minister and one of the key architects of this manifesto, argues in *Responsibility to Protect* that “prevention is
the single most important dimension of the responsibility to protect” (79). In his 2002 Wesson Lecture in International Relations at Stanford University, Evans noted that before the events of 9/11, the “really big issue in international relations – the one that must have launched a thousand Ph.D.s” – was “the right of humanitarian intervention”: if, when and how it was appropriate for one state to take coercive, armed action against another state for the purpose of protecting people at risk at that other state. In the same speech, Evans explained that ideology of R2P had come about when the UN sought to reconcile its “foundational principles of member states’ sovereignty … and the primary mandate to maintain international peace and security … with the equally compelling mission to promote the interests and welfare of people within those states.” If one could “rethink sovereignty” in terms of responsibility and not control, the question of the moral responsibility to protect humans at risk took precedence over the question of right to intervene in other states. This critical reconceptualisation of sovereignty outlined by Evans reflects how the concept of human security, which is increasingly important to the discourse of international relations, can morally override state sovereignty and the principle of non-interference. According to Evans, it counters any claims “of the unlimited power of the state to do what it wants to its people.”

The concept of human security morally underpinning humanitarian intervention and liberal peacebuilding is legitimised by human rights and humanitarian discourses. The global humanitarian government of Northern states, the UN and international humanitarian bodies, which coexists symbiotically with the international human rights regime, asserts the moral imperative of saving lives above other concerns in this era of ongoing civil wars, ethnic conflicts and governmental breakdowns. Since the declaration of the global war on terror (GWOT) in the twenty-first century, this rhetoric has justified wars such as the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Scholars such as Thomas Weiss in *Humanitarian Intervention* argue that the “fallout” from such events is the fear that humanitarian intervention and the moral mandate of RSP can be “manipulated to conceal imperialist agendas”, particularly that of an increasingly militant US. On Iraq, Weiss notes that “the debate within the United Nations … was at least as much about American power and its role in the world as it was about the risks posed by Iraq’s disdain for UN resolutions and the search for weapons of mass destruction” (143). In spite of any reservations against the rhetoric of
R2P, the ideal of a secular global fraternity today asserts *all nations’* responsibility to protect human lives – they are morally obliged to save lives and enforce human rights even if this entails overriding state sovereignty.

The politicisation and militarisation of humanitarian action in the past few decades has troubled the aid community. David Rieff notes in *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* that “all of” the aid sector’s “historic certainties – the neutrality so prized by the ICRC, the notion that aid should be fundamentally apolitical and should have no other agenda than service and solidarity – are being questioned by aid workers themselves as well as outside critics” (24). Rieff’s view, like many others, is offered from a Dunantist perspective privileging the ICRC’s definition of humanitarianism as emergency relief. These responses reflect how the apolitical principles held sacred by emergency aid agencies, especially in the Cold War era of neo-humanitarianism, have been dramatically challenged by events and discursive practices of liberal humanitarianism. In addition, Deborah Eade and Tony Vaux, the editors of *Development and Humanitarianism: Practical Issues*, note how the global aid sector has been quite alarmed by acts of aggression led by the US; aid workers wonder how they can serve in Iraq and Afghanistan without their presence being interpreted as complicity in wars politically justified on humanitarian grounds (7-8). There is also a growing body of literature and studies on how emergency aid agencies can maintain the moral integrity of their operations. Hugo Slim, for instance, discusses humanitarian ethics in war and disaster, often for members of the aid sector. In other disciplines, there have been studies of humanitarian government in the fields of international relations, political science and anthropology. They include the work of scholars such as Barnett, Weiss and Fassin. There have also been a number of studies on the “humanitarian narrative” by scholars of mass communications and cultural history. Literary scholars, however, have paid less attention to the way that humanitarian government is represented in popular writing, particularly creative nonfiction of the kind written by Lapierre.
Dominique Lapierre’s Writing

Born in 1931, Dominique Lapierre’s literary career – which spans over six decades – has been dominated by travel writing, literary journalism and historical nonfiction. A survey of his writing reveals four interrelated trends. First, there is his interest in twentieth-century leaders who govern, and often try to save, the lives of masses including people of different nationalities. Second, India has been the focus of his writing in the last half century. Third, Lapierre has consistently focused on the lives of the poor and afflicted, and the humanitarians who serve them. Fourth, Lapierre’s writing illustrates the commitment to humanitarian action directed to causes that are promoted in his books. These trends suggest why Lapierre’s writing offers a useful case study of humanitarian government and humanitarian discourses, particularly in India.

As mentioned, although influential nineteenth-century texts such as Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and Henry Dunant’s *A Memory of Solferino* have been studied extensively, the analysis of humanitarian discourses in twentieth-century literature is less developed. This thesis seeks to meet this need in humanitarian studies.

Before further outlining the scope of inquiry, it is helpful to introduce Lapierre and his body of work in chronological order. Lapierre published his first book, *A Dollar for a Thousand Kilometres* (1950), an account of his eventful travels through the US, Mexico and Canada, at the age of twenty. It was acquired by a prestigious French publisher who later sold the foreign language rights to other European countries and organised lecture tours for this bestseller in France, Switzerland and Belgium. After a year-long honeymoon across Japan, Hong Kong, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Lebanon, Lapierre published *Honeymoon Around the Earth* (1953). As a reporter with the French news magazine *Paris Match*, Lapierre and photojournalist Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini obtained special authorisation from Nikita Khrushchev, Joseph Stalin’s successor, to journey through Soviet territory with their wives. The story of their travels and experiences with ordinary Russians then became the travelogue *Once Upon a Time in Soviet Union* (1958). *Chessman Told Me* (1960), is a literary journalistic account of American convict Caryl Chessman’s confession to Lapierre before his execution at San Quentin prison as well as an indictment of capital punishment. Chessman, who spent twelve years on death row, was a famous and divisive figure in
American and international debates about prison reform and the death penalty. He wrote prolifically about being wrongly convicted of kidnapping and rape. Lapierre, who witnessed Chessman’s execution, alleges he had been framed by corrupt members of the Los Angeles Police Department.

Lapierre attained greater commercial success as the co-author of *Is Paris Burning?* (1965) with American *Newsweek* journalist Larry Collins. This book marked the start of six fruitful collaborations. Two of them – *Is Paris Burning?* and *O Jerusalem!* – were later adapted into films, further boosting their success as journalists-turned-popular historians. Most of these texts are historical nonfiction borne of extensive research and they feature famous personalities in twentieth-century world history. *Is Paris Burning?* narrates the liberation of the French capital in August 1944. It is based on first-hand accounts, including that of General Dietrich von Choltitz, the Nazi governor of Paris who defied Hitler’s orders and hastened the Allied forces’ liberation of occupied Paris in 1944. *Or I’ll Dress You in Mourning* (1966) is a biography of Manuel Benítez Pérez, a matador also known as “El Cordobés” who came to prominence during a time of significant change in Spain. Through this bullfighter’s life story, the authors represent key episodes in the history of Spain from the 1930s to the 1960s with special focus on the rule of the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. *O Jerusalem!* (1972) chronicles the conflicts surrounding the creation of the state of Israel and Arab Palestine. Representing Arab, Jewish and British perspectives, it is based on research and interviews with participants in the conflict, including leaders such as David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Sir Alan Cunningham and Abdullah Tell. Lapierre and Collins’ last two collaborations, *The Fifth Horseman* (1980) and *Is New York Burning?* (2005) are fictional thrillers offering two variations of the same plot: the race to locate and defuse a bomb hidden in New York by terrorists. The latter is often regarded as a post-9/11 reinvention of the former. It examines terrorism and the involvement of the US, Israel, Europe and India in the contemporary war on terror.

The writers’ fourth collaboration, *Freedom at Midnight* (1975), marked a major turning point in Lapierre’s career and personal life. The book narrates events surrounding the British transfer of power in India in 1947 and Mohandas Gandhi’s assassination in 1948. *Freedom at Midnight* (FAM) offers in great detail the perspective of Lord Louis Mountbatten, the last Viceroy, and portrays the Englishman and Gandhi
as saviours of the subcontinent. After the success of this book, Lapierre began his philanthropy in Calcutta (Kolkata) and most of his subsequent work addressed, in one way or another, humanitarian issues in India. Since FAM, Lapierre has dedicated a significant portion of his royalties to non-profit humanitarian organisations based in India and included fundraising appeals in his books. To date, The City of Joy (1985) is his most well-received account of the Indian poor and the subcontinent's humanitarian issues. Based on the real life experiences of a rickshaw wallah and a Christian missionary in a Calcutta slum, the text was adapted into a film of the same title in 1992. Lapierre has credited the growth of his charitable foundation, Action Aid for Lepers’ Children of Calcutta, to donations from readers worldwide in response to this book. For over three decades, Lapierre and his wife have financed, and fundraised for, the operations of this NGO and many others in Bhopal, Calcutta and rural Bengal.

After The City of Joy (TCOJ), Lapierre published Beyond Love (1991), an account of the Franco-American race to identify and treat the AIDS virus in the 1980s, and how Mother Teresa’s Missionaries of Charity set up the first AIDS hospice in New York. Lapierre later co-wrote the screenplay for the 1997 biopic Mother Teresa: In the Name of God’s Poor. The film was subsequently nominated for the Humanitas Prize in spite of the fact that the Missionaries of Charity withdrew their support for the film prior to its release. In 1999, Lapierre published his first memoir, A Thousand Suns, which interweaves his life story with the most memorable experiences of his literary career. It is a collection of autobiographical stories which also features the writer’s experiences with famous, and infamous, twentieth-century personalities. In 2001, Lapierre collaborated with Javier Moro to publish It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal, an account of the explosion at the Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal on December 3, 1984. This tragic event, which killed at least 16,000 residents of the city, is regarded as the world’s worst (in terms of death toll) industrial disaster. Exposure to toxic fumes from the explosion also caused widespread severe and permanently-disabling injuries amongst the residents of the city. The text contains various eyewitness accounts and highlights Lapierre’s financial support for a gynaecological clinic treating women suffering from long-term effects of this disaster. In 2009, Lapierre published A Rainbow in the Night, a history of South Africa from the seventeenth century to Nelson Mandela’s victory in the 1994 democratic elections.
This account represents struggles against apartheid as a historic fight for civil rights and liberty. It includes profiles of famous South Africa leaders and humanitarians such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Helen Lieberman, who is known as the “Mother Teresa” of South Africa. Lapierre’s most recent work, *India, My Love* (2013), is a memoir devoted to his travels and literary and humanitarian engagement with the subcontinent. It contains many anecdotes which have been revised from stories related in *A Thousand Suns* as well as the prefaces and epilogues of later editions of *FAM* and *TCOJ*. *India, My Love (IML)* cements Lapierre’s reputation as historian, philanthropist and spokesperson for the underprivileged in India. He relates various successes to do with his writing about the Indian poor and the tangible outcomes of the NGOs financed by his royalties and donations from his readers and supporters in Europe and North America.

**Scope of Inquiry**

The following chapters consider the discourses that animate Lapierre’s writing on humanitarian government in India. They analyse, in chronological order, three texts that problematise South Asians, and their history, to posit the need for moral leadership and humanitarian intervention. The first chapter examines *FAM*, one of Lapierre and Collins’ most successful collaborations. Devoted to the “high politics” of South Asia’s independence and Partition, this 1975 text offers a pro-British and pro-Congress account of the ruling elites’ territorial division of the subcontinent. This text suggests that Mountbatten and most of the nationalist leaders accepted that Partition was a necessary solution to the problem of communalism in India. It also depicts how Partition later led to the traumatic escalation of violence, ethnic cleansing and population exchange between India and Pakistan. This chapter analyses how Lapierre’s first book on India reinstates the “white man’s burden” at precisely the moment British rulers were ready to relinquish South Asia. In particular, I consider how *FAM* represents Mountbatten, the last Viceroy, and Gandhi working valiantly to restore peace and order. Although written nearly three decades after the transfer of power and Gandhi’s assassination, *FAM* alludes to Partition’s continuing legacy of religious strife and ongoing Indo-Pakistani conflicts. In this, it creates a view of independent
South Asia as a subcontinent filled with irrational, fervently religious and violence-prone communities. Moreover, in its particular reverence for Mountbatten’s paternalistic trusteeship, FAM exalts the figure of the imperial humanitarian.

After narrating the violence and tragedies associated with the formation of the Indian state, Lapierre continued to portray its citizens in need of foreign aid in TCOJ, his next book on India. Since this text has been credited by the writer with generating great momentum for his humanitarian work and activism in Calcutta, the second chapter examines its portrayal of the former administrative capital of the British-Indian Empire and the relationship between white humanitarians and the poorest peoples of this city. While this 1985 bestseller praises the resilience and solidarity of the residents of Pilkhana, one of Calcutta’s slums, it represents these qualities as the moral triumphs of a marginalised community. Lapierre situates the slum community within a historical context of misfortune and urban disaster in Calcutta. They are also portrayed as victims of India’s exploitative, class-conscious and caste-ridden society. Furthermore, he constructs the people of this slum as grateful beneficiaries of white humanitarians’ leadership and empathetic friendship. Lapierre not only denies the historic role of the colonial state in his narration of overpopulation and squalor in this city but also exalts the ideology of the white man’s burden. By appealing to Christian discourses, he likens humanitarian assistance and self-help programmes to the ministry of Christ. This association between aid workers and Christ constructs them as salvific forces assisting slum communities.

The final chapter critiques Lapierre’s latest memoir, IML. Published in 2013, this biographical account relates the writer’s involvement with India beginning with his research for FAM in the early 1970s. While India is shown to have declined from being the “Jewel in the Crown” of “the greatest empire of all time” (90) to a modern state grappling with poverty, communal strife and Indo-Pakistani conflict, the writer’s love for this country deepens as he researches its imperial and nationalist leaders, befriends the Indian poor and is inspired by the work of missionaries such as Mother Teresa. Lapierre describes the depth of his affection and fascination with India and suggests that such views came about as a result of his immersive research in the lives of great leaders such as Gandhi and humanitarians including Mother Teresa and Gaston Grandjean, the Swiss nurse who inspired the missionary protagonist of TCOJ.
By highlighting how his writing and passionate advocacy of the Indian poor has been recognised by the Indian state and the people of India, Lapierre establishes his authority as a spokesperson for this country and its most disenfranchised peoples. He appeals to neo-humanitarian ideas of development and foreign aid to posit the global South as needy recipients of assistance from sympathetic benefactors in the North.

These chapters focus on three of the four texts Lapierre set in India. Although *It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal* is based on events in an Indian city, it is only considered in passing in this study as it does not focus on humanitarian government. It does reinforce Lapierre’s continuing involvement, as a writer, with the plight of India’s poor. It is a disaster narrative chronicling the formation of the Union Carbide pesticide production, the budget cuts prior to the lethal gas explosion, the growth of bustees (slums) around the plant and, finally, the horrific impact of the disaster on these vulnerable Indians. In addition, Lapierre has also written two other texts with Indian characters: *Beyond Love* and *A Thousand Suns*. Although the former depicts Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity, it is mainly set in the US and Europe. This precludes it from a study of humanitarian government in India. *A Thousand Suns*, Lapierre’s first memoir, is largely centred on the writer’s successes with other historical nonfiction texts set outside of India. Less than a third of this text relates to his writing and humanitarian action in South Asia and most of this material is repeated or reproduced in abridged form in *IML*. My study of Lapierre’s writing on North-South humanitarianism, however, highlights pertinent links between these texts and *FAM*, *TCOJ* and *IML*. This illustrates dominant themes and tropes in Lapierre’s writing.

The following chapters illustrate in chronological order the development of Lapierre’s responses to the subcontinent’s humanitarian issues. This structure also enables the reader to see how the writer represents India at different points in its relatively short history since the dissolution of the Raj in 1947. From *FAM’s* exhaustive account of decolonisation and Partition, to *TCOJ’s* construction of urbanisation and poverty in post-colonial India, and Lapierre’s reflections on his fascination with India and the impact of his humanitarian projects, these three texts construct various problems faced by the subcontinent and reflect the contradictions and dynamics between different humanitarian discourses.
Chapter 1

Freedom at Midnight

In *Freedom at Midnight*, Dominique Lapierre’s first work of historical nonfiction about India, Lapierre and co-author Larry Collins narrate a poignant anecdote related by Fay Campbell-Johnson, wife of then Governor-General Lord Louis Mountbatten’s press attaché. Mrs Campbell-Johnson had been tasked to escort busloads of British retirees evacuated from their homes in Simla. Like other refugees in the subcontinent, the passengers on those buses were fleeing the sectarian violence which escalated after the British transfer of power at midnight of August 15, 1947. Owing to their advanced age, these Englishmen – “the retired Romans of the Raj, former colonels of the best regiments in the Indian Army, former judges and senior officers of the I.C.S. who had once administered the lives of millions” – had weak bladders (379). Lapierre and Collins narrate how the buses had to stop every two hours for the men to relieve themselves.

Watching those old men who had once ruled India urinating there by the roadside under the impassive bronze stares of their Gurkha guards, a strange, yet hauntingly appropriate thought flashed across Fay Campbell-Johnson’s mind.

“My God”, she said to herself, “the white man really has laid down his burden!” (379)

Mrs Campbell-Johnson’s comment intimates that the English had lost control of the British-Indian Empire as surely as these old men had lost control of their bladders. This, however, was not quite the case, or at least not yet. Her anecdote follows shortly after Lapierre and Collins reveal “the most closely guarded secret of the last Viceroy’s life” – that in early September he had reluctantly agreed to govern India again, at the behest of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who did not know how to handle the post-Partition crises (365). Hence the reader already knows that the white man’s burden is far from over. Mountbatten, the forty-six year-old great-grandson of Queen Victoria and the former Supreme Allied Commander of Southeast Asia, is still charged with the responsibility of governing India.
Despite its humour, this example conveys the atmosphere of political emergency represented in *Freedom at Midnight* (*FAM*). Indeed, Lapierre and Collins depict events in 1947-1948 South Asia as an unremitting chain of crises and tragedies. And it is this mounting sense of unfolding humanitarian catastrophe that provides the mandate for Mountbatten’s actions in the last days of the Raj. In this chapter, I analyse the way in which *FAM* functions as a text that is heavily invested in the concept of humanitarian government. In particular, I illustrate how this text, as a work of historical nonfiction written in the 1970s but describing the 1940s, straddles the paradigm shift in humanitarian government that took place during the twentieth century. It is written in the era of neo-humanitarianism but looks back nostalgically to the era of imperial humanitarianism. To locate this dialectic between the two modes of humanitarian action that take place in *FAM*, it is useful to recapitulate the story it tells.

*FAM*’s narrative begins on New Year’s Day 1947, when the Englishman is offered the post of Viceroy to oversee negotiations for the transfer of power with India’s nationalist leaders. The new Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, tells him that Britain is trapped between the demands of the Muslim League and Congress Party as the former insists on the creation of a separate Islamic state while the latter is opposed to Partition. This antagonism between the nationalist leaders mirrors the sectarian violence between India’s Hindus and Muslims which is escalating every day. Mountbatten accepts this offer and secretly promises his cousin, King George VI, that he will strive to make independent India part of the British Commonwealth. The King hopes that their country’s “imperial dream” can endure as “a multiracial assembly of independent nations, with Britain *prima inter pares* at its core” (39-40).

On the same day, the second protagonist, a distressed Mohandas Gandhi, is on a “Pilgrimage of Penance” in a village in Noakhali. Determined to address sectarian violence in troubled provinces and stop calls for Partition, the Mahatma wins over Muslim and Hindu leaders who reconcile and become joint guarantors of their communities’ peace. When Mountbatten and Gandhi meet for the first time, the Indian leader promises the Viceroy that he can persuade his Congress successors to let Mohammed Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League, form a government and spare India from Partition. Although Mountbatten agrees to let Gandhi explore this solution, the aged leader later fails to convince Nehru and his deputy Vallabhbhai Patel. Their
refusal, coupled by an intransigent Jinnah who calls Partition a “speedy surgical operation”, leads Mountbatten to conclude that a territorial division is the only way to prevent Britain from becoming “hopelessly entrapped in an India collapsing in chaos and violence” (125). While Gandhi remains “a voice crying in the wilderness”, Mountbatten helps his successors intimidate Jinnah into accepting a smaller, “moth-eaten” Pakistan (188). The leaders also agree to India and Pakistan becoming Dominion States in the Commonwealth in exchange for a swift transfer of power. Mountbatten tries to convince Gandhi that conferring Dominion status and letting each province vote on whether to join India or Pakistan may allow for a miraculous outcome: the people of India themselves may vote to stay in India and thus avert Partition. Gandhi, filled with uncertainty and doubt, does not oppose Partition publicly.

The Indian Independence Bill is quickly approved by the English Parliament. The news of a pending Partition, however, is followed by escalated sectarian violence. As refugees flee to New Delhi and form the first refugee camp, Mountbatten prepares an armed Boundary Force to police the Punjab. He urges Gandhi to go to Calcutta, the capital city of Bengal, to help maintain peace in that province. Together with Muslim leader Shaheed Suhrawardy, Gandhi offers his life as guarantor of peace and the Hindu leader succeeds in maintaining order in Calcutta in August. As independence celebrations take place at midnight of August 15, 1947, the Boundary Force in Punjab is unable to contain its sectarian violence. Gandhi, on the other hand, is credited with bringing about the “miracle of Calcutta” (344). When riots break out between Hindus and Muslims after sixteen days, however, Gandhi undertakes a fast which stops all conflicts.

When New Delhi faces “an absolute collapse of law and order” because of riots and the influx of refugees, Nehru and Patel ask Mountbatten to secretly govern the country (364). The Englishman, who is India’s first Governor-General, imposes a strict martial rule which begins to contain the chaos in the capital, thus saving the fledging government. Nevertheless, continued outbreaks of ethnic cleansing lead to an unprecedented population exchange between India and Pakistan. Unable to stop this, Mountbatten leads the Indian leaders in coordinating relief efforts. Earlier, Mountbatten and Patel persuaded India’s princely states to sign Acts of Accession to peacefully integrate with either independent India or Pakistan. The Pakistan-supported
tribal invasion of Kashmir, one of the remaining kingdoms, is met with a show of force by Nehru which results in the first Indo-Pakistan War (402-403; 411-413). Mountbatten, who intervenes but fails to get the United Nations to hold a plebiscite (referendum) for Kashmir, is supported by Gandhi. In January 1948, when Gandhi decides to undertake another fast onto death to help unite all the religious communities in New Delhi, Mountbatten brings up the matter of India’s refusal to pay a bankrupt Pakistan its share of the Treasury funds. Gandhi, who wants India to demonstrate exemplary conduct to other states, decides to set as one of the conditions for breaking his fast that India honours its agreement with Pakistan. After his fast succeeds in unifying various leaders and communities in New Delhi, and effects the payment to Pakistan, he is murdered by members of the Hindu political fundamentalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) who blame him for Partition and helping Muslims. As Nehru and Patel are immobilised by grief, Mountbatten offers to organise his state funeral. The Englishman, who has handed executive leadership back to Nehru, takes charge once more to lead the nation in mourning. The funeral procession he directs is later attended by millions, “the largest crowd ever to gather on the face of the earth” (517). The writers conclude in the Epilogue that the Mahatma “achieved in death what he had striven for in his last months of life”: “his murder ended forever the insensate communal killing ... in India’s villages and cities”. Furthermore, the enmity between India and Pakistan became limited “to the conventional plane of conflict between nation states waged between regular armies on the battlefield” (522).

The irony in Gandhi’s transformation from sworn enemy of imperialism to trusted ally of Queen Victoria’s heir is obvious in this plot synopsis. Yet, the writers maintain that this was only one of the many extraordinary developments behind the “high politics” of independence and Partition. The phrase “high politics” has become shorthand for the constitutional negotiations between British and Indian leaders during the 1940s. Historians of “high politics” typically analyse the dynamic between the Viceroy, the British Cabinet, the Congress Party and the Muslim League – the four most powerful parties involved in these negotiations.¹ This synopsis also shows how FAM represents the constitutional handover of power as a process built from friendships and trust between Mountbatten, Gandhi and his successor Nehru.
What remains unresolved, according to Lapierre and Collins, are the conflicts arising from the enmity between the Congress leaders and their counterparts in the Muslim League. Like many other British historians, and Indian nationalist historians, FAM blames communalism and Jinnah’s intransigence as forces which compelled Mountbatten and the Congress Party to accept the division of the subcontinent.\(^2\) Also, in line with many Indian nationalist accounts, FAM replays the “triumph and tragedy” appraisal of 1947 which juxtaposes the achievement of Indian independence against the horrific outcomes of Partition.\(^3\) In doing so, Lapierre and Collins endorse eminent British historian Sir Reginald Coupland’s assertion that the perennial problem with the subcontinent is its lack of unity.\(^4\)

This chapter considers how FAM represents Partition as a metaphor for the lack of unity in the subcontinent. It then examines how the text depicts Mountbatten and Gandhi’s actions as part of a humanitarian government during the crises of Partition. FAM was published in 1975, after three Indo-Pakistan Wars which demonstrated to the world that the legacy of the British transfer of power and Partition had not been nonviolence, but rather decades of animosity and war in South Asia. Yet, FAM has been translated into multiple languages as a bestseller in Europe, the United States, Latin America and India. In the 1997 edition of FAM, which commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of India’s independence, Lapierre even asserts that screenwriter John Briley had attributed much of his Academy Award-winning script for Richard Attenborough’s film Gandhi to this text’s inspiration (xlv). Clearly, readers worldwide have found the writers’ favourable account of Britain’s “divide and quit” policy acceptable, if not appealing. Furthermore, the geopolitical context in 1975, when the book was published, was marked by the Cold War, the “Oil Shock” of the early 1970s, and the emergence of new sovereign states in the global South as a consequence of decolonisation. In an era where respect for state sovereignty was sacrosanct and foreign intervention was viewed with great distrust, FAM’s popular rendition of the white man’s burden, a central tenet of imperial humanitarianism, was a significant rhetorical achievement. This chapter demonstrates how FAM depicts humanitarian government as the outcome of Mountbatten’s ability to influence, and co-opt, Gandhi and the other Congress leaders into his responses to the challenges and crises in South Asia. Gandhi, in particular, is depicted as a flawed but sage-like leader whose ideals
and spiritual authority transcend all divides of religion, caste, race and nationality. Mountbatten’s effective interventions are partly attributed to his recognition of Gandhi’s greatness, and his role in the spectacular revival of the Mahatma’s moral and political influence in the last year of his life. Thus, in their eulogy to the British-Indian Empire and the father of India’s nationalist movement, the writers imagine a humanitarian government effected by a reconciliation between the colonial administration and the men who dedicated their lives to breaking it down.

### Partition and the Lack of Indian Unity

Territorial divisions in the name of conflict resolution are often accompanied by heightened levels of the violence they had intended to stop. Besides British India, other examples of twentieth century territorial divisions – such as the turbulent histories of Irish and Palestine end-of-empire partitions – have also been well documented. Studies on the division of the Indian subcontinent, however, often imply that it had been a unique event which continues to defy comparative historical and conceptual analysis. Like the Holocaust, its very name is often capitalised. In the opening chapter of *The Partition of India*, Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh give an overview of the historiography of Partition literature and highlight that academic studies typically treat Partition as a unique historical phenomenon. They also stress that the division of the Indian subcontinent is seldom featured in comparative studies of ethnic conflict, forced migration and state downsizing. This trend is indicative of Partition’s *sui generis* status, and how it has been essentialised and rendered, much like the Holocaust, beyond comparative study.

Indeed, the Holocaust is frequently invoked as the only other historical phenomenon that can be related to Partition, particularly by scholars and writers seeking to convey the gravity of its events and their significance. In their respective histories, *The Sole Spokesman* and *Remembering Partition*, Ayasha Jalal and Gyanendra Pandey both describe Partition as “a holocaust” (1; 15). In the field of literary studies, some South Asian writers and literary scholars also propagate this association between the events of 1947-1948 and World War II. For example, Saros Cowasjee and K.S.
Guddgal, editors of *Orphans of the Storm* and well-known writers themselves, avow in this anthology of Partition stories that the Partition Plan was implemented “with neither foresight nor preparedness”, leading to “a holocaust” (xii). This anthology is one of several texts that were published in the mid-1990s to mark the fiftieth anniversary of India and Pakistan’s independence. In a more recent example, Rituparna Roy in her 2011 study *South Asian Partition Fiction in English* uses the heading “Partition: the Holocaust” for a chapter on representations of violence, Hindu-Muslim differences and communalism (33). Invoking the Holocaust implies there is something irreducible and unique about the history of Partition, and that these events are retained in popular memory in the manner of a trauma. These examples suggest that Partition is viewed as a historical singularity.

In addition, the complexity of this history is illustrated by the different ways in which the birth of modern India and Pakistan are remembered. First, many “high politics” histories focus on the political machinations behind the constitutional arrangements hammered out in 1947 which effected “freedom at midnight” on August 15. In these narratives, Partition is remembered as a top-down political drama about the transfer of power between ruling elites and their hasty and controversial division of land, assets, communities and institutions. Second, the events of 1947 are remembered in terms of violence – how it irrevocably destroyed or traumatised countless lives. In her recent authoritative history, *The Great Partition*, Yasmin Khan gives an overview of the human dimension of Partition to explain why it constituted a pan-continental disaster “difficult even for the most hardened and dispassionate reader to digest”.

Even by the standards of the violent twentieth century, the Partition of India is remembered for its carnage, both for its scale – which may have involved the deaths of half a million to one million men, women and children – and for its seemingly indiscriminate callousness. Individual killings, especially in the most ferociously contested province of Punjab, were frequently accompanied by disfiguration, dismemberment and the rape of women from one community by men from another. Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus suffered equally as victims and can equally be blamed for carrying out the murders and assaults. The killings bridged the barbaric and the calculatedly modern, they were both haphazard and chillingly specific. A whole village might be hacked to death with blunt farm instruments, or imprisoned in a barn and burned alive, or shot against walls by impromptu firing squads using machine-guns. Children, the elderly and the sick were not spared and ritual humiliation and conversions from one faith to
another occurred, alongside systematic looting and robbery clearly carried out with the intention of ruining lives. It seems that the intention was not only to kill, but to break people. A scorched earth policy in Punjab, which would today be labelled ethnic cleansing, was both the cause and the result of driving people from the land. All this both preceded and accompanied the migration of some twelve million people between the two new nations of India and Pakistan (6).

Third, the history of Indian and Pakistani independence is recounted as the story of how two antithetical states were formed. Given their history of ideological and armed conflicts, the vast amounts spent on nuclear weaponry and the restricted trade and interaction between their citizens, the ongoing feud between both states is often seen as another bitter legacy of Partition. Hence, accounts of the territorial division, migration and resettlement of millions of people, as well as the violence which deliberately targeted minorities and refugees, are narrated as part of a broader story of the founding of both nations and their subsequent international rivalry.

Clearly, these different perspectives on the history of Partition are permeated by violence and misfortune. Since 1947, there has been a ceaseless flow of research and narratives dealing with the history and human experiences of Partition; they represent various disciplines, genres, methodologies and ideological orientations. Talbot and Singh observe that as a result of “immense human suffering in a peacetime situation”, accounts and histories of Partition – especially early state-commissioned narratives – can be characterised by the need to “displace blame” for the onset of violence (62-63). In these accounts, Partition constitutes both the humanitarian disaster and the moral crises it precipitated. The latter continue to discursively inform, and colour, all representations of events and peoples in South Asia during the late 1940s. While Partition contested the meanings and boundaries of community, ethnicity, religion and locality, the calamities associated with its events have also generated difficult moral questions about the notion of humanity altogether. Ironically, however, in their attempt to account for Partition and the accelerated transfer of power, Lapierre and Collins’ explanations end up solidifying the very categories of “humanity”, “nation”, “religion” and “community” that were historically destabilised. This section discusses how the writers represent the lack of unity in the subcontinent as the cause for Partition and its accompanying violence. In their defence of Mountbatten’s actions as “humanitarian government”, the writers displace blame on
other leaders and the people of the subcontinent by perpetuating colonial and nationalist constructs of South Asians.

*FAM* is consistent with the historiography just sketched in its insistence upon the historic singularity of Partition. Partition and South Asia’s decolonisation are represented in the opening chapter as constitutive of a unique moment in global history. After stating that the newly-elected Labour government decided “to quit India in good time rather than be driven out by the forces of history and rebellion”, Lapierre and Collins paraphrase Attlee’s briefing to Mountbatten in Downing Street.

The Indian situation, the Prime Minister began, was deteriorating with every passing day. It was one of the sublime paradoxes of history that at this critical juncture, when Britain was at last ready to give India her freedom, she could not find a way to do so. What should have been Britain’s finest hour in India seemed destined to become a nightmare of unsurpassed horror. She had conquered and ruled India with relatively little bloodshed. Her leaving threatened to produce an explosion of violence that would dwarf in scale and magnitude anything she had experienced in three and a half centuries there (8). This introduction to India in 1947 recalls Coupland’s opposition between its freedom and unity. Here, Lapierre and Collins suggest a reversal of liberal imperial ideology: it is not South Asia that is “ready” for independence but the British Empire that is “at last ready to give India her freedom”. They emphasise that this decision “should have been Britain’s finest hour in India”. This assertion implies that the dissolution of the Raj in 1947 is a voluntary, noble and momentous decision made by Britain. More importantly, it is ironically stalled by the volatile and rapidly deteriorating “Indian situation”, thus suggesting that South Asians’ actions have impeded their freedom struggle. Attlee is cast as a “Socialism don” who is “disparaged” by Opposition Leader and staunch imperialist Winston Churchill. The dissolution of the Raj is portrayed as the outcome of a new and more liberal British government: Attlee is not only the head of the Labour Party which “had come to office publicly committed to begin dismemberment of the Empire”, but also a Prime Minister ushering great political and ideological change in postwar Britain (6). These examples reflect Attlee’s political views and allude to the geopolitical context after the Second World War, when the right to political self-determination was propagated by anti-imperialists in the global North and nationalists in the global South.
This vignette also juxtaposes Attlee’s anti-imperialist ideals with his assessment that Indians in 1947 are not ready for self-governance. In the account given by Lapierre and Collins, Attlee is troubled by an ethical dilemma: if dissolving the Raj unleashes “an explosion of violence that would dwarf in scale and magnitude anything she had experienced in three and a half centuries there”, the end of British rule would effectively become its most tragic “hour” in the subcontinent. Rhetorically, the writers suggest that this moment in history is a “sublime” paradox because Britain’s anti-imperialist Prime Minister is morally obliged to withhold Indians’ right to self-determination in order to save lives.

This appeal to the sanctity of human life over political freedom is reinforced by the idea of a humane colonial administration. The writers first depict British rule as benign by asserting that it “had conquered and ruled India with relatively little bloodshed” compared to other imperial situations. Attlee’s concern that decolonisation would result in more deaths than British rule is predicated on an implied fear of Indians’ propensity for violence. This image of the British Empire, as a civilisation less violent than other imperial nations and the peoples of South Asia, depicts the colonial administration as a morally-superior government essential to the region’s stability. FAM downplays the colonial government’s history of using security forces, especially the Army, to quell Indian dissent. While acknowledging that British rule had not been imposed without violence, Lapierre and Collins simultaneously diminish the deaths and brutalities that historically accompanied centuries of territorial conquest, political subjugation, economic exploitation and dispossession across the subcontinent.

Even more crucially, by using violence as a moral yardstick to depict the history of the British India in a favourable light, and portraying the events of 1947-1948 as turning points in world history, the writers highlight an implied Indian savagery that alludes to events after South Asia’s independence. Attlee’s prediction of “a nightmare of unsurpassed horror” will be proved correct given the “Holocaust” of Partition. As mentioned earlier, FAM was published in 1975, after the Indo-Pakistan Wars of 1947-1948, 1965 and 1971. It was also published the year after India’s well-publicised, and critiqued, emergence as an atomic power following its refusal to sign The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 1968. By referring to Attlee’s ethical dilemma
as “one of the most sublime paradoxes of history”, the writers suggest that Indian independence had been historic also because of its violent circumstances, subsequent decades of Indo-Pakistani conflict and South Asia’s nuclear armament. They imply that decolonisation brought about a more turbulent South Asia compared to an imagined and more peaceful colonial past. Through the trope of violence, they suggest that Attlee’s doubt in South Asians’ capacity to self-govern is well-founded.

The idea of a paternalistic but humane British administration is highlighted again when Lapierre and Collins state Attlee’s view that the current Viceroy, Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell, should be replaced.

Britain and India were moving toward a major disaster. The situation could not be allowed to continue. Wavell was a man of painfully few words, almost hopelessly inarticulate, and had been unable to establish any real contact with his loquacious Indian interlocutors. A fresh face, a new approach, was desperately needed if a crisis was to be averted. Each morning brought a batch of cables to the India Office announcing an outburst of wanton savagery in some new corner of the subcontinent. It was, Attlee indicated, Mountbatten’s solemn duty to take the post he had been offered (9).

This explanation cites Indian violence as the reason why South Asians and their nationalist leaders are in need of a firm governing hand at this critical juncture. “Mountbatten’s solemn duty” to go to India and preside over negotiations for a peaceful transfer of power is framed as a kind of civilising mission. Clearly, Lapierre and Collins associate the Viceroyship with the ideology of trusteeship, which is referenced by the first epigraph of FAM.

“The responsibility for governing India has been placed by the inscrutable design of providence upon the shoulders of the British race” - Rudyard Kipling

By quoting the most famous literary proponent of Empire, the man who encapsulated this ideology in his poem “The White Man’s Burden”, the writers highlight the colonial belief in the moral superiority of the British which entailed a sacred duty to govern South Asia.

In Civilised Savagery, Kevin Grant discusses how this ideology, which morally justified colonial governance as “humanitarian”, evolved from Edmund Burke’s stirring Parliamentary speeches in 1783 and was later upheld by the formation of the League of Nations early in the twentieth century. By asserting the sacred duty of imperial
governments to help “backward” peoples prepare for political sovereignty, this ideology historically supported colonialism by portraying imperial powers willingly taking on the responsibility to administer overseas territories and peoples “in trust”. While morally supporting the political domination and commercial privilege of imperial nations from the global North, this ideology neither claimed sovereignty over other lands in question nor completely denied the peoples’ right to self-determination (152-153). Since the white man’s burden incorporates themes of civilising and conversion, Lapierre and Collins suggest that both are integral to Mountbatten’s “solemn duty” to manage the “loquacious” nationalist leaders and stop their followers’ “wanton savagery”.

This reference to the white man’s burden explains why Lapierre and Collins earlier contrast Indian savagery against a relatively more “civilised” British rule. The ideology of trusteeship was underpinned by the notion of a stratified humanity, where humanity existed in a spectrum from primitive dark-skinned races to civilised Caucasian Europeans. In his classic Ideologies of the Raj, Thomas Metcalf discusses how the notion of a universal humanity during the imperial age posited both similarities and differences amongst peoples. Although all races were united by a shared humanity, they were nonetheless split into a hierarchy where dark-skinned people were deemed not quite fully human and could be treated differently from Caucasians. More importantly, white Christian races had the moral duty to rescue backward races from depravity, destitution and disease (4-6).

Owing to these constructions of white superiority, Michael Mann highlights in Colonialism as Civilising Mission that the basic contradiction of the civilising project was “the fear of the colonisers that the colonised might become civilised, and hence, equal” (24). The ideology of the white man’s civilising mission hinged upon the assertion of fundamental differences between the coloniser and the colonised, so that the latter was deemed morally inferior and the former duty-bound to intervene and lead. Since this notion of a stratified humanity still recognised the humanity of non-Europeans – that they came from a Christian Creator God and were worthy of salvation – it posited the moral imperative to save Indian lives but subordinated them to European civilising rule. In Empire of Humanity, Michael Barnett establishes “humanitarian government” as actions that seek to alleviate or prevent suffering
which fit three criteria: they are organised in the form of governance, directed at other lands, and directly or implicitly appeal to universalising notions such as that of a global “humanity” or a benevolent divinity (20-21). Inasmuch as Mountbatten’s trusteeship is framed as a mission to manage backward and violent South Asians, his Viceregal rule can be characterised as a humanitarian government in the sense given by Barnett.

Exalting colonial governance and its racist construction of a stratified humanity may appear odd since this 1975 text was published in the era of decolonisation and the Cold War, when the prevailing notion of humanity upheld racial equality and state sovereignty was held sacrosanct. It also seems to contradict the text’s idealisation of Gandhi as the apostle of nonviolence and his call for equality and unity amongst humankind. Lapierre and Collins’ representation of a stratified humanity, however, can be interpreted as a rhetorical strategy to account for the moral crises associated with Partition-related violence. On the notion of humanity, which is integral to humanitarian discourses, Barnett explains

Communities also tell stories about themselves, how they define material and moral progress and how they are loving and compassionate and good. There are, though, events that violently disrupt such self-conceptions, moments that compel the recognition of a breach between who they say they are and what they do. One of the shocks of World War II was that “civilised” people committed such barbarity towards civilians, not only because they were in the path of war but also because they were seen as inhuman and thus could be cruelly treated and disposed of (27).

In this explanation, Barnett suggests that the revelation of mass atrocities committed against civilians during the Second World War was shocking because of the breach of humanity they signified. As for Lapierre and Collins’ account of decolonisation and Partition, their revelation of the violence accompanying these events simultaneously seeks to minimise that which may be shocking or traumatising to the implied European or North American reader. They recall colonial constructions of South Asians as primitive peoples not on par with Europeans in terms of humanity/civilisation. By appealing to the idea of a stratified humanity in colonial discourse, FAM conveys this perceived breach of humanity in South Asia and mitigates it at the same time.

In addition, FAM also adopts the trope of madness already established in Partition literature, which likens communal hatred and sectarian violence to spontaneous bouts of madness so as to explain the ethnic cleansing that took place in
in 1947. Well-known South Asian fictional stories, such as Toba Tek Singh (1955) by Saadat Hassan Manto, depict people’s responses to Partition, and Partition itself, as madness – a spontaneous and temporary aberration. Some political scientists and historians also equate Partition violence with mass insanity. For example, in “Remembering Partition”, a dialogue with Suresh Sharma published in Seminar, Indian political scientist and activist Javeed Alam argued that the massacres had been carried out by people “at a moment of loss of judgement, of a sense of proportion, at a moment of frenzy”. To Alam, this kind of violence “should be left behind, should be forgotten, so that people may live in peace, socially normal everyday life, politically and individually” (98-103).

In Translating Partition, a well-known compilation of stories, essays and criticism of Partition narratives, its editors Ravikant and Tarun K. Saint have surmised that the “the term ‘madness’ itself has a privileged status in the discourse on Partition” (xiv). More importantly, both scholars argue that madness can be interpreted as a metaphor “used as conventional shorthand to communicate a sense of incomprehension” as well as something which “could denote a refusal to understand” (xiv). Those who deploy this trope/metaphor can be viewed as taking “a comfortable way out, for having consigned to the irrational the domain of madness, the speaker/writer could preserve the domain of the rational for himself/herself” (xiv). Hence, Partition “could be dismissed as an aberration, and the responsibility of owning up to its ugly reality, denied” (xiv). This view that the speaker/writer of Partition can use “madness” as a rhetorical strategy to sidestep or deny its events/tragedies/violence is echoed by Pandey in Remembering Partition when he discusses the ideal of Indian national unity. Pandey critiques Alam’s remarks on the need to forget Partition’s violence in the interests of peace and unity in the present day, observing that “it is ... the question of Indian unity, and the need to forget in the interests of that unity” that Indians are asked to take (and to a large extent have taken) as a guide in their scholarship on the Partition of 1947” (60). As a rhetorical strategy, the trope of madness in Partition narratives and scholarship can be interpreted as that which offers a way to remember, and recount, tragic events of inter-religious and inter-communal conflict in 1947 whilst simultaneously diminishing the threat posed by this written history to the nationalist ideal of Indian unity.
Lapierre and Collins follow this rhetorical strategy outlined by Pandey. They highlight sectarian conflict in Punjab – the divided province Talbot and Singh call “the epicentre” of violence in 1947 (65) – and attempt to explain these tragic events as the outcome of temporary insanity overtaking Punjabi society in Chapter 13, which is titled “Our People have Gone Mad”. Before supplying a range of eyewitness accounts of violence in different locations, the chapter begins with a lengthy exposition framing these events in Punjab as “unique”, “a cataclysm without precedent”, “a spontaneous, irrational, unpredictable slaughter” and the “sudden shattering collapse of a society” caused by “a mania for murder” (329-330). In subsequent chapters, Lapierre and Collins depict survivors of massacres becoming refugees as well as aggressors when they encounter followers of other religions in the turbulent months following Partition. During this period, millions of South Asians fleeing persecution left their ancestral homes, trekked across immense distances and stayed in refugee camps en route to either India or Pakistan. In line with many histories of Partition, the writers assert that inter-communal attacks and massacres in 1947 were so intense, prevalent and mutual that it was not easy to distinguish between perpetrators and victims of violence. This moral ambiguity concerning the communities uprooted by ethnic cleansing and other forms of violence reflects how widespread death and destruction historically violated the moral ideals associated with humanity in ways that are not easy to understand, or represent.

Although Lapierre and Collins, as well as many Indian writers and scholars, use the trope of “madness” to describe Partition-related violence as something unique and beyond comparative and rational analysis, some scholars have undertaken empirical and comparative studies on this subject. Paul Brass, Ian Talbot and Yasmin Khan, for example, argue that sectarian riots accompanying Partition were often marked by organised planning and execution. Their studies demonstrate how riots can be classified in many instances as campaigns led by paramilitary groups such as Sikh jathas and Muslim tribal war parties. They are among the scholars who, at the turn of the century, have undertaken broader, and more exhaustive, inquiries into the historical formation and actions of organised groups involved in Partition-related violence in various parts of India. Their work can be seen as a valuable counterbalance to the “high politics” approach which dominated earlier studies of South Asia’s
decolonisation and Partition and limited this history to the story of the ruling elites’ decisions and experiences. While Lapierre and Collins’ 1975 account depicts riots in Calcutta and the invasion of Kashmir as events instigated by the Muslim League, and suggests that much of the violence was carried out by organised groups (35-36; 402-403), this text follows an established tradition of “high politics” Partition histories exemplified by Penderel Moon’s *Divide and Quit* (1961) and H.V. Hodson’s *The Great Divide* (1969). It dwells on the actions, biographical anecdotes and perspectives of Mountbatten, Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah and other political elites. This approach clearly reflects the writers’ fascination with twentieth-century statesmen and famous personalities which has resulted in earlier works such as *Is Paris Burning?* (1965), *Or I’ll Dress You in Mourning* (1966) and *O Jerusalem!* (1972). This 1975 text’s “top-down” approach to history exemplifies Lapierre and Collins’ tendency to depict heroic leaders in line with the “Great Man” approach to historical narratives famously associated with Thomas Carlyle. 6

In particular, the writers suggest that Mountbatten’s story is the story of a great (white) man’s valiant efforts to save South Asia in 1947-1948. *FAM* condemns Partition-related violence as madness and perpetuates colonial images of Indians in need of civilising to construct Mountbatten’s political actions and decisions as a form of humanitarian government. The writers review the endgame of Empire through the lens of the last Viceroy’s mission to subdue warring Indian leaders and their followers, restore law and order, and effect a dignified and peaceful transfer of power. This rhetorical justification of the white man’s burden, and the emphasis on Mountbatten as an imperial outsider sent to govern India in crisis, also demonstrates how foreign intervention and governance was self-legitimised by colonialists. In his classic study *Orientalism*, Edward Said has discussed how “the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” and noted that the image perpetuated of the Westerner in British India upholds the ideal of “a vigorous, rational, ever-alert young Raj” (42). In his discussion of the dichotomies between European “Self” and non-European “Other” outlined by Said, Mann also cites Gyan Prakesh’s elaboration of Said’s argument

The writ of rationality and order was always overwritten by its denial in the colonies, the pieties of progress always violated irreverently in practice, the
assertion of the universality of Western ideals always qualified drastically. Paradoxes and ironies abounded, as did the jurisdiction of the gap between the rhetoric and practice on the grounds of expediency and the exceptional circumstances of the colonies (24).

According to Mann, paradoxes, inconsistencies and contradictions – such as the spreading of civic values by military power, or propagating the text of *The Rights of Man* while simultaneously setting up the system of indentured labour – were not discounted, but rather integrated into the rhetoric of Britain’s civilising mission. It was this adaptability of colonial ideology which enabled the British to react flexibly to changing colonial parameters and to “improve” the means and mechanisms of self-legitimation. Mann draws an analogy between capitalism and colonialism. Just as capitalism did not collapse as Karl Marx had predicted but mutated to mitigate its contradictions, the colonial ideology of the civilising mission endured for centuries because it was able to rhetorically situate its paradoxes and contradictions within the Orientalist binary of Civilised/Self and Primitive/Other (24). *FAM*’s pro-British stance, particularly its affirmation of the imperial humanitarian ideology of trusteeship, illustrates Prakesh’s argument that colonial authorities invoked special circumstances and exceptions in the colonies to justify the ironies and paradoxes inherent in the imposition of their rule.

In *FAM*, the theme of communalism encapsulates the special circumstances and exigencies that justify Mountbatten’s firm leadership. Lapierre and Collins reinforce enduring colonial and nationalist constructs of communalism in South Asia, which was regarded as the cause of riots and conflicts between ethnic and religious communities. They suggest that the sectarian violence in 1947-1948 became widespread because of the existence of communal hatred between South Asians, and that this uniquely Indian problem warranted the urgent, though tragic, solution offered by Partition. In his influential *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, Pandey notes how the concept of “communalism” applied to India carries “intellectual baggage that has been inherited from the colonial experience”. It encompasses many “familiar concepts acquired in Orientalist usage in order to capture the Otherness of life – and politics – in the ‘East’” (7). Communalism also conveys Orientalist assumptions about native Indian traits, including irrationality, savagery and excessive religiosity. By the end of the nineteenth century, “the dominant strand in colonialist
historiography was representing religious bigotry and conflict between people of different religious persuasions as one of the more distinctive features of Indian society” (23). The writers’ representation of communalism perpetuates what Pandey calls the “communal riot narrative” in his seminal study (32). Pandey dissects a “master narrative” that serves as “a form of representation of communal riots” and “acts as a sort of model for all descriptions, and hence evaluations, of communal riots in official ... prose” (32). According to Pandey, the communal riot narrative, which was embedded in colonial reports of sectarian violence between Hindus and Muslims, reflects colonial officials’ tendency to classify violence and riots as “communal” in nature, attribute them to essentialist assumptions about Indians’ violent tendencies and describe an eternal animosity between followers of the two dominant religions in the subcontinent (43-45). In FAM, the communal riot narrative is voiced by Attlee during his briefing to Mountbatten on New Year’s Day, which explains the violence threatening 1947 British India.

The root of the Indian problem was the age-old antagonism between India’s 300 million Hindus and 100 million Muslims. Sustained by tradition, by antipathetic religions, by economic differences subtly exacerbated through the years by Britain’s own policy of divide and rule, their conflict had reached a boiling point. The leaders of India’s 100 million Muslims now demanded that Britain destroy the unity she had so painstakingly created and give them an Islamic state of their own. The cost of denying them their state, they warned, would be the bloodiest civil war in Asian history.

Just as determined to resist their demands were the leaders of the Congress Party, representing most of India’s 300 million Hindus. To them, the division of the subcontinent would be a mutilation of their historic homeland, an act almost sacrilegious in nature (8).

One defining feature of the master communal riot narrative is to attribute Hindu-Muslim conflict to an imagined pre-colonial past to absolve the British administration of any responsibility for the riots and other conflicts. While Lapierre and Collins acknowledge that colonial rule “subtly exacerbated” Hindu-Muslim differences, they clearly perpetuate this construction of communal passions by identifying an “age-old antagonism” between both communities as “the root of the Indian problem”. Later in the text, the writers reinforce the lack of unity by asserting that “fraternal bloodshed” had “for centuries rivalled hunger for the honour of being India’s sternest curse” (28). The writers’ emphasis on the existence of “two-antipathetic religions” and traditions
also reinforces the British belief that religious affiliation in India is regarded as a fundamental category marking an Indian’s membership into a larger community with a distinct culture and way of life. This suppresses the diversity of religious practices, ethnicities, cultures across peoples of the subcontinent, essentialising Hindus, Muslims and followers of other religions into respective monolithic religious communities. Respected scholars such as Romila Thapar assert that Hinduism did not exist historically as a monolithic religion, but rather as a collection of castes and sects. Thapar’s argument is supported by Thomas Metcalf’s *Ideologies of the Raj*, which traces how British colonisers developed the notion of distinct and fixed “Hindu” and “Muslim” communities and worked to establish a coherent definition of Hinduism. Metcalf also argues that “the centrality of religious community, along with that of caste”, was the theory used by the British to mark out India as a fundamentally different polity to those found in Europe (133-134). By the early nineteenth century, authoritative conceptions of both religions, and the character of their followers, were firmly entrenched: Muslims were seen as violent, despotic and masculine whereas Hindus were indolent, passive and effeminate. Lapierre and Collins’ assertion that the Muslim League threatened to wage “the bloodiest civil war in Asian history” to obtain their Islamic State clearly reinforces this colonial construction of Muslims to depict communal politics as a dire threat to Indian unity (8). As mentioned, *FAM* blames the Muslim League and its leader Jinnah for instigating significant conflicts such as The Great Calcutta’s Killings in 1946 and the war over Kashmir in 1947 (35-36; 401-403). Conversely, the Congress leaders are represented as less violent, politically-inexperienced and unable to deal with such crises. *FAM*’s representations of the Muslim League and Congress Party will be discussed later in this chapter.

Lapierre and Collins’ account of Attlee’s briefing also notes that the conflict between Hindus and Muslims reached a “boiling point” in January 1947 (8). This is another defining feature of the communal riot master narrative: the description of tensions escalating until violence occurs as a “rupture” or “convulsion”. While this breaking point can be attributed to either a specific incident or something irrational, communal riot narratives consistently depict riots as sudden, often unpredictable occurrences. They claim that long-term communal passions are expressed in explosive and highly disruptive acts of violence. This adoption of the communal riot narrative
early in *FAM* sets the context for Lapierre and Collins’ graphic accounts of violence between religious communities in Chapter 13. Having established the enduring antipathy between Hindus and Muslims, the publication of Sir Cyril Radcliffe’s *Boundary Award* – which details the boundary lines dividing the provinces of Bengal and Punjab – is depicted as the ultimate breaking point later in *FAM*. As discussed earlier, the writers’ narration of massacres in Punjab is framed by a lengthy exposition characterising them as outbreaks of madness – “the sudden shattering collapse of a society” (329). This suggests that territorial division of the subcontinent served as the literal and metaphorical rupture of society.

Finally, Pandey states that the communal riot narrative represents a riot as an event in a “continuum, a tradition” of violent conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. He states that “throughout the nineteenth century and for long afterwards”, the colonial narrative of sectarian conflict tends to identify the initial major riot – usually the earliest incident recorded after the establishment of British rule in a region – as the starting point (44). This narrative then traces a straight line through to the most recent riot at the time of writing to depict a history of violent confrontations between Hindus and Muslims. This has the tendency of implying that Indian society is bound, as if by nature, to sporadic and intense outbreaks of violence and disorder. Indeed, the social climate of the subcontinent can, in Orientalist discourse, be as deadly as its tropical climate, which is also described in the first chapter as “India’s cruel climate”, filled with “peculiar hazards, her epidemics of malaria, cholera, jungle fever” (19). In their description of Attlee’s briefing to Mountbatten, the writers adapt the riot narrative by substituting riot with war. Amplifying the confrontation between Hindus and Muslims from riot to “the bloodiest civil war in Asian history” suggests that the “Indian” situation in 1947 is the perennial “Indian problem” writ large. The Prime Minister’s briefing to Mountbatten thus achieves what Pandey has identified as the outcomes of colonial riot narratives: they “describe the ‘native’ character, establish the perverse nature of the population and the fundamental antagonism between Hindus and Muslims” (39).

Framing the political context of 1947 using the communal riot narrative undermines the history and achievement of nationalist struggle in the subcontinent. Lapierre and Collins draw a progression from an ancient land steeped in pre-colonial
“tradition” and “antipathetic religions” to a subcontinent on the brink of civil war in 1947. Reducing the political situation in 1947 to a confrontation between Muslims (Muslim League) and Hindus (Congress Party) emphasises conflicts between Indians. This effectively downplays their collective agitation against British rule. More crucially, instead of being an antagonist, the writers portray the colonial government as a frustrated, paternalistic mediator, “trapped between those two apparently irreconcilable demands” (8). Since civil war is represented as “the cost” of denying the Muslim League its Islamic state, Lapierre and Collins exculpate Attlee’s surrender to the forces of violence, and by extension, the prospect of Partition. This assessment of the Indian situation consequently sets the context for the writers’ subsequent representation of British departure and Partition as pragmatic choices made to try to contain sectarian violence to certain provinces and prevent a civil war from breaking out across the subcontinent.

In later chapters, Lapierre and Collins continually depict a “civil-war atmosphere” in India to refute Churchill’s derisive view that a hastened transfer of power is a “shameful flight, a premature, hurried scuttle” (97) and a “tattering down of the British Empire with all its glories and all the services it has rendered mankind” (64). Of the various rebuttals of Churchill’s stance in FAM, the most striking is that voiced by General Lord Ismay, Churchill’s former chief-of-staff from 1940 to 1945 and the new Viceroy’s chief-of-staff.

India was a ship on fire in mid-ocean with ammunition in her hold. The question was, he told Mountbatten, could they get the fire out before it reached the ammunition? (97)

Clearly, the decision to hasten the transfer of power in 1947 and give the Muslim League a “moth-eaten Pakistan” is seen as a decisive move to extinguish the fiery threat of civil war instead of a cowardly desire to abandon the Indian ship (188). Although the writers also note that Partition created a Pakistan that was economically unviable – for example, by locating natural resources and the factories that process these resources in different countries – they suggest that the Viceroy’s actions were historically taken to save lives in 1947. A territorial division of the subcontinent was made to prevent the Muslim League from igniting the explosive “ammunition” of Hindu-Muslim antagonism and the Indian savagery in other provinces. In doing so,
Lapierre and Collins imply that Mountbatten, and by extension, the British Empire, did not abandon its duty to protect and govern.

While colonial discourse highlights religious bigotry and conflict between people of different religious persuasions as one of the more distinctive features of Indian society, Pandey emphasises that this trend in colonialist historiography was later accepted and propagated by Nehru and other Congress politicians. In his study of nationalist historiography, Pandey shows how Congress leaders tended to portray communalism as “primordial” and defined nationalism mainly in opposition to this concept. With the exception of Gandhi, a devout Hindu, Nehru and many Congress leaders sought, since the 1920s, to define India’s freedom struggle as a secular and democratic movement. They propagated a discourse exalting nationalism as a “pure” political movement above, and untainted by, the primordial pulls of religion and caste (236).

Their condemnation of communal ideology intensified in the 1940s in response to the sectarian violence and the growing popularity of political organisations which championed causes such as a “Hindu India” or the creation of the Islamic state of Pakistan. As mentioned earlier, Indian nationalist historians often discredit Jinnah’s demand for Pakistan as “Muslim communalism” and blame it for weakening the genuine nationalist struggle for a free India. While blaming the British for the development of Muslim communalism, nationalist historians often highlight how Nehru and Patel resigned themselves to Partition as the cost of independence and averting civil war. In addition, they depict how Nehru was appalled by sectarian violence and condemned communal passions in ways which reflect his agreement with colonial constructions of Indian society. Hence, the ideas of religious bigotry and savagery associated with the “Indian problem” persisted into the 1940s – and beyond – because they were also perpetuated by South Asians in their ideological struggles over competing ideas of nationhood. Despite the Orientalist assumptions in their representation of communal politics and Indian society, Lapierre and Collins’ 1975 text represents communalism in ways that are consistent with that of conservative British and pro-Congress nationalist histories. This explains the consistent vilification of Jinnah and Muslim communalism in FAM and, perhaps, why this text was commercially successful in India.
In their defence of an accelerated transfer of power and Partition, the “Indian problem” suggested by Lapierre and Collins recalls well-established fears of what Sara Suleri calls “Indian alterity”. In her influential study, *The Rhetoric of English India*, Suleri points out that “a mere cursory knowledge of the trials of English India makes evident the obsession of that idiom, and that era’s, engagement with transfer of power”. Suleri also argues that “the key term of transaction imposed by the language of colonialism is *transfer* rather than *power*.

For Suleri, the rhetorical circulation around the concept of “transfer” betrayed the fact that English fears of the colonised subcontinent’s unreadability and intransigence had already discursively transferred power to an Indian alterity. This Indian Other was thus already discursively storing its transferred power, and lay ready to unleash it in the form of intransigence or primal violence (5-6). In *FAM*, Indian alterity is represented by the communal-crazed mobs in Punjab described in the chapter “Our People have Gone Mad”. It is also represented by the city of Calcutta and Jinnah, the vilified Muslim League leader the writers depict as the instigator of The Great Calcutta’s Killings on August 16, 1946.

Calcutta, the setting for this tragedy, is described in the Orientalist’s trademark garish terms. It is “a metropolis whose reputation for violence and savagery was unrivalled”; a city whose hellish slums contained “the densest concentration of human beings in the world, fetid pools of human misery” (35). Yet, the suffering and violence which overwhelmed the city during The Great Calcutta’s Killings far surpassed that of other riots in its past. According to Lapierre and Collins

Never, in all its violent history, had Calcutta known twenty-four hours as savage, as packed with human viciousness. Like water-soaked logs, scores of bloated cadavers bobbed down the Hooghly River toward the sea. Other corpses, savagely mutilated, littered the city’s streets. Everywhere, the weak and helpless suffered the most. At one intersection, a line of Muslim coolies lay beaten to death where a Hindu mob had found them, between the poles of their rickshaws. By the time the slaughter was over, Calcutta belonged to the vultures. In filthy gray packs, they scudded across the sky, tumbling down to gorge themselves on the bodies of the city’s six thousand dead (35-36).

By holding up Muslim coolies as examples of the “weak and helpless”, Lapierre and Collins reinforce their earlier point that the majority of Muslims in India were “descendants of Untouchables who had fled Hinduism to escape their misery” (31). In *FAM*, as well as his other texts on India, Lapierre continually condemns the caste
system and depicts the piteous abjection of the Untouchables and other groups which make up the most marginalised castes in Indian society. As victims of a “diabolical scheme employed by Hinduism’s Aryan founders to perpetuate the enslavement of India’s dark, Dravidian populations”, the lowest castes are portrayed as miserable groups whose occupations have been limited, for centuries, to unsavoury occupations associated with wretchedness, filth, disease and death. Although “Britain’s conquering presence had forced its Pax Britannica over the warring subcontinent ... the distrust and suspicion in which the two communities dwelt remained” because the stigma associated with Untouchability caused Hindus to shun, and look down upon, Muslims for fear of polluting the purity of their own caste (31). As mentioned earlier, the centrality of religious community and caste is critical to the colonial production of knowledge about Indian society as fundamentally different to that of Britain. *FAM*, by continuing the colonial construction of a deeply divided Indian society, thus displaces blame for sectarian violence on South Asians. More importantly, the writers affirm the ideology of the white man’s trusteeship because the imposition of colonial rule on “a warring subcontinent” is presented as a moral and unifying governance.

*FAM*’s emphasis on caste differences, socioeconomic oppression, and the suffering this created for many Muslims also implies that suffering begets violence in India. Lapierre and Collins state that the “Muslim masses, because of the deeply ingrained patterns of Indian society, rarely escaped in the faith of Mohammed the role the caste system has assigned their forebears in the faith of Shiva” – they were “usually landless peasants in the service of Hindus or Muslims in the country, labourers and petty craftsmen in the serve of Hindu employers in the city”. Because economic rivalry “accentuated the social and religious barriers between the two communities”, “communal slaughters” were “regular occurrences” (32). The writers suggest that the pent-up anger and misery of the Indian poor, especially the Muslim masses, made them vulnerable to the communal ideologies of organisations such as the Muslim League in the late 1940s. Their account of sectarian violence in Calcutta follows the communal riot narrative by depicting these twenty-four hours as both “the riot” (the consequence) and “the breaking point” (the cause).
The Great Calcutta’s Killings, as they became known, changed the course of India’s history. They triggered bloodshed in Noakhali, where Gandhi was, in Bihar, and on the other side of the continent, in Bombay.

The threat that the Muslims had been uttering for years, their warnings that a cataclysm would overtake India if they were denied their state, took on a terrifying reality. Suddenly, India was confronted by the awful vision that had sickened Gandhi and sent him to the jungles of Noakhali: civil war.

To another man, to the cold and brilliant lawyer who had been Gandhi’s chief Muslim foe for a quarter of a century, that prospect now became the tool with which to pry India apart (36).

According to Pandey, the communal riot narrative in colonial reports traces the riot in question to back to a catalytic major riot, usually the earliest incident recorded after the establishment of British rule in a region (44). The passage above shows how Lapierre and Collins creatively use this feature of the communal riot narrative to imply that the 1946 conflict in Calcutta constitutes the catalyst for a series of violent incidents marking the beginning of the end of British rule. By describing Jinnah as the man “who held the key to India’s future on New Year’s Day, 1947”, the writers hold Jinnah responsible for inflaming the communal hatred of marginalised Muslims in Calcutta. Hence, the second chapter’s reports of sectarian strife in 1946 offer historical context for the “wanton savagery” discussed during Attlee’s briefing to Mountbatten (9). Lapierre and Collins emphasise that it was Jinnah who historically urged India’s Muslims to wage war on what he termed “Direct Action Day”, the date of The Great Calcutta’s Killings. They depict intercommunal killings beginning at dawn by Muslim mobs “bursting forth from their slums” and “responding to a call issued by the Muslim League”. Hence, they suggest that riots that day began with Muslim aggression, which led to Hindu retaliation against Muslim coolies. Because suffering gave way so easily to violence in Calcutta, and this city’s riots sparked the chain of massacres elsewhere, socioeconomic differences and Direct Action Day are presented as the causes of civil war. Jinnah is depicted as the war-monger who “flung down the gauntlet to Congress, to the British ... his piercing eyes alight with repressed passion” (35-36). The Muslim League leader therefore personifies both sectarian violence and civil war. As a metonymic figure of Indian alterity, he embodies the reasons why Attlee tells Mountbatten Britain and India “were moving toward a major disaster” (8).
In *Whose India? The Independence Struggle in British and Indian Fiction and History*, Teresa Hubel points out that conservative British historians, assisted by Anglo-Indian fiction writers such as Kipling, tend to diminish the nationalist struggle by focusing on the division of the Indian people and how this division translated into divergent nationalisms. Like Pandey, Hubel argues that nationalism is often assumed as something of “western origin” and so it tends to go awry when transplanted onto foreign, Asiatic soil. In contrast, Indian nationalist historians “tend to focus on the solidarity that the Congress leaders were able to achieve in spite of or, some would argue, because of India’s immense heterogeneity (17-18). Lapierre and Collins’ account contains aspects of both traditions by emphasising the cat-and-dog enmity between nationalists, the socioeconomic divide between Hindus and Muslims, the civil war atmosphere in India as well as Gandhi’s distinct and genuine nationalist movement. Throughout *FAM*, the writers exploit differences between a violent, Muslim Jinnah and a nonviolent, Hindu Gandhi to effect a binary opposition. According to them, Gandhi has been the “Congress’ conscience and its guide, the unquestioned leader of the independence struggle” since 1920 (59). In 1947, the elderly Mahatma is frail but still devoutly spiritual and determined to teach his political successors and fellow Indians that the nationalist movement is a moral crusade based on *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (nonviolence). The Muslim League leader, on the other hand, “drank, ate pork, religiously shaved his beard each morning, and just as religiously avoided the mosque each Friday”. The writers claim Jinnah was a vainglorious dictator who used communal ideology and violence to effect the formation of Pakistan because he believed that “he and the Muslim League would never get a fair deal from a Congress-run India” (121). Compared to Gandhi’s activism, Jinnah and Muslim communalism are depicted as nationalism gone awry.

In their historiographical overview, Talbot and Singh emphasise that the traditional Pakistani approach to the “high politics” history of Partition tends to avoid acknowledging the historical fact that it was a seceding power from an Indian state which had inherited sovereignty from British India (10). Pakistani nationalist writers uphold the two-nation theory historically propagated by Jinnah and the Muslim League when they argue that the demand for a separate state originated because Indian Muslims’ identity is defined by religion and Islam has led to the formation of a
distinctive social order which was fundamentally at odds with Hindu society. In contrast, Lapierre and Collins’ pro-British, pro-Congress account portrays Partition as a tragedy. They first highlight the fallacies of the two-nation theory and later predict the disastrous outcomes of partitioning the subcontinent along communal lines. Both are illustrated through Mountbatten’s negotiations with Jinnah. These negotiations, presented from Mountbatten’s point-of-view, show inherent contradictions in Jinnah’s arguments for Pakistan. On one hand, Jinnah argued that Indian Muslims “were a nation with a distinct culture and civilisation”, and asserted that “India’s Muslim minority should not be ruled by its Hindu majority” (123). On the other, his proposed Pakistan included the entire provinces of Punjab and Bengal, together with their “enormous Hindu populations” – which would mean subjecting these Hindu minorities to majority Muslim rule. Jinnah objects to Mountbatten’s assertion that the application of this communal ideology logically entails the territorial division of both provinces to separate Hindus from Muslims. Lapierre and Collins depict the Muslim League leader predicting the tragic consequences of Partition when he insists that Pakistan should be awarded the provinces as they are.

A man is a Punjabi or a Bengali before he is Hindu or Muslim. They share a common history, culture and economy. You must not divide them. You will cause endless bloodshed and trouble (124).

In response, Mountbatten makes the convincing rebuttal that Jinnah has “presented the unanswerable argument for Indian unity”, for this perspective also means that a man “is not only a Punjabi or Bengali before he is a Hindu or a Muslim, he is an Indian above all else” (124). At the end of his negotiations with Jinnah to keep India united, the Viceroy concludes that he is “a psychopathic case, hell-bent on his Pakistan” and that nothing could be done because he is the “absolute dictator of the Muslim League” and “as long as Mohammed Ali Jinnah was alive”, the other Muslim leaders who “might have been willing to negotiate a compromise” would “hold their silence” (123-124).

This, and other encounters with Jinnah, lead Lapierrre and Collins to conclude that “all of Mountbatten’s hopes” for a unified India “had foundered, finally, on the rock of Jinnah’s determined, intransigent person” (142). Hence, while communal madness is represented as the problem which necessitates the firm governance of a
paternalistic colonial administration, it is simultaneously depicted as a symptom of the
dangerous and unyielding Indian alterity which justifies Partition. Although the Indian
leaders agreed to join the Commonwealth if Mountbatten transferred power as early
as possible, their offer is made only after the ruling elites had decided on Partition.
FAM portrays communalism and Jinnah – the instigator of communal riots and the
Viceroy’s political opponent – as unsurmountable forces which compel the Englishman
to accede to this “speedy surgical operation” (123).

As mentioned, the writers appeal to what Suleri describes as the “long-standing
tradition of discursive fear”, the colonial terror of an imagined Indian alterity, when
they describe the Englishman hastening British withdrawal and Partition to prevent his
country from “becoming hopelessly entrapped in an India collapsing in chaos and
violence” (125). Suleri has argued that from “early travelogues in the seventeenth
century to the proliferation of Anglo-Indian literature in the nineteenth”, colonial
terror of the “ostensible unreadability of the subcontinent” has been translated in
different ways, including “a spatial intransigence, or a geography” like the metaphor of
the Marabar Caves from E.M. Forster’s A Passage to India. Moreover, this fiction of
intransigence “fetishes a colonial fear of its own cultural ignorance into the potential
threats posed by an Indian alterity”: this dreaded cultural ignorance, which points to
the lack of colonial power/knowledge, is rhetorically masked by “the fiction of
intransigence” defined in opposition to English power “to protect the myth of colonial
authority” (6-7). Mountbatten’s summation of his negotiations with Nehru, Patel and
Jinnah illustrates how he seeks to protect the myth of a colonial authority. The writers
quote the Viceroy’s official submission to the British Parliament on May 2, 1947 for a
plan to divide India.

Partition, Mountbatten wrote, “is sheer madness” and “no one would induce
me to agree to it were it not for this fantastic communal madness that has
seized everybody and leaves no other course open … The responsibility for this
mad decision,” he wrote, must be placed “squarely on Indian shoulders in the
eyes of the world, for one day they will bitterly regret the decision they are
about to make” (142).

By equating Partition with “communal madness” amongst “everybody” in the
subcontinent, the Englishman condemns communalism and the entire Indian body
politick while asserting his own rationality at the same time. He also assigns to the
British government this position of rationality and moral superiority when he emphasises that “in the eyes of the world”, the responsibility “must” be placed “squarely on Indian shoulders”. The submission of this report is represented as the first official step Mountbatten takes towards the historic transfer of power. As Lapierre and Collins’ excerpt from this report focuses solely on Partition and its cause, the independence of the subcontinent is attributed not to nationalism but to communalism and its defining tropes of madness and disease. By emphasising that the Indian body politic is already infected with the disease/madness of communalism, Mountbatten’s words rhetorically minimise the violence about to be inflicted by the territorial division of India and its peoples.

Hence, FAM discursively displaces blame from Mountbatten onto the threat of civil war in 1946-1947, South Asians’ unpredictable and irrational communal hatred and Jinnah’s “psychopathic” exploitation of communal ideologies. Although FAM also emphasises how Gandhi initially denounces Partition by saying that he would “offer his own body for vivisection, rather than accept his country’s division”, the writers nevertheless present the rationale for Partition through the Englishman’s colonial perspective (193). Since Mountbatten’s administration is portrayed as a humane and paternalistic government forced to divide the subcontinent because of Jinnah and other communal-crazed Indians, Partition is represented as an illogical yet moral solution. The writers perpetuate the view that Partition was a unique phenomenon by suggesting that its causes were just as singular as its tragic consequences. By appealing to popular representations of Partition, they portray Mountbatten proposing it as a last resort in response to the violence and intransigence of irrational, uncivilised South Asians. As India’s trustee, Mountbatten is able to cite exceptional circumstances in this colony as reasons for the breakdown of order and the need for Partition.
Post-Partition Crises and Political Saviours

In The Rhetoric of Empire, David Spurr discusses how the white man’s burden was continually asserted by colonial authorities as “demonstrations of moral superiority” over the colonised (110). This phenomenon, part of what he terms the “rhetorical economy of self-affirmation”, pervades colonial discourse to self-legitimise the colonisers’ moral mandate to rule. FAM locates this self-legitimisation precisely at the juncture where the British Parliament dissolved the Raj, by quoting British lawmakers taking pride in their “dignity and restraint” as they “voluntarily” transfer power and approve the Indian Independence Bill. The approval of this Bill, according to the writers, is praised by Viscount Herbert Samuel who noted: “It may be said of the British Raj ... as Shakespeare said of the Thane of Cawdor: ‘Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it’” (235). This reference to the Thane of Cawdor from Macbeth, whose manner before death is seen as something more honourable and admirable than anything he had done in life, praises the peaceful and swift dissolution of the Raj as an exemplary and historic act by the British Parliament. It reinforces the writers’ earlier praise of Britain as a nation extraordinary because it had been “the last European nation to embark on the imperial adventure” but “sailed more seas, opened more lands, fought more battles, squandered more lives, drained more exchequers, administered more people and administered more fairly than any other imperial power” (234 – 235). Such statements can be taken to mean that this 1975 text praises British leaders for giving up India in recognition of its peoples’ right to self-determination – a decision which historically marked the start of postwar decolonisation worldwide as well as the end of imperialism.

This reference to Macbeth, however, can also be taken to mean that the peaceful and constitutional manner in which Britain dissolved the Raj shows the 1947 British Parliament living up to the very ideals that justified European supremacy and imperialism. Before this reference to Shakespeare and their description of the approval of the Indian Independence Bill, the writers assert the moral superiority of the English race.
Indeed, something in their island-people’s character seemed to have fitted them for that brief moment in history when it was a self-evident moral imperative that white, Christian Europeans should ‘hold dominion over palm and pine’” (235).

Clearly, while recognising the rhetoric of the white man’s burden, the writers describe the dissolution of the Raj in ways that validate the English race’s “self-evident moral imperative” to govern others. Instead of recognising the success of Indian nationalism, South Asia’s independence is remembered by an English peer as a noble and collective act of political hari-kiri by British lawmakers. Hence, FAM’s representation of the ending of the imperial adventure constitutes both a remembrance and symbolic re-enactment of British imperialism. The writers’ praise for British imperialism and the British people also celebrates, albeit refracted through an allusion, their mastery of nature, disease, base human instincts and technology. This is encapsulated in the words “dominion over palm and pine”, a memorable phrase drawn from Kipling’s poem “Recessional” which commemorated Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897. As the word “dominion” also alludes to India and Pakistan retaining their ties to the Crown by joining its Commonwealth, Lapierre and Collins imply that the death of the British-Indian Empire did not signal the end of “white Christian” Britons’ significance and leadership in global politics. Instead, they affirm that trusteeship endures in the form of Britain’s influence over the nations in its Commonwealth. This section discusses how FAM represents the continuation of the white man’s burden in South Asia after decolonisation. Besides the self-affirmation of the white man’s burden, Lapierre and Collins continually depict a “rhetorical economy” of affirmation by Indians. While Nehru asks Mountbatten to help him govern in the first few months of independence, Gandhi approves of Mountbatten’s intervention. The Mahatma is also portrayed as an ally co-opted into the Englishman’s humanitarian government to help stop sectarian conflict and the escalating Indo-Pakistan war. Mountbatten is credited with helping to revive the aged leader’s political and moral influence in the last months of his life. This resurgence of Gandhian ideals is represented as a salvific phenomenon which not only brings peace but also redeems the humanity of South Asians.

Overwhelmed by the political and humanitarian crises accompanying Partition – especially after the unexpected flood of refugees destabilise order in New Delhi – Nehru and Patel seek Mountbatten’s help. They ask the Englishman, who earlier
accepted the honour of becoming India’s first Governor-General after transferring power, to take over the reins of government again. Stating that they “are just not up to facing an absolute collapse of law and order”, the Indian Prime Minister and his deputy “looked, to the Englishman, ‘like a pair of chastened schoolboys’” (364). Lapierre and Collins clearly cast Nehru and Patel as imperial wards, infantilised by Mountbatten’s paternalistic gaze. Moreover, they also explain through Nehru’s words that this colonial gaze, and the sense of superiority behind it, is justified.

Our experience is in the art of agitation, not administration. We can barely run a well-organised government in normal circumstances. ...

You are a professional, high-level administrator. You’ve commanded millions of men. You have the experience and knowledge that colonialism had denied us. You English can’t just turn this country over to us after being here all our lives and simply walk away. We’re in an emergency and we need help. Will you run the country? (364)

This meeting is an uncanny repetition of the scene in Downing Street because it depicts an Indian Prime Minister impressing upon Mountbatten the moral imperative of his leadership given the state of emergency and extent of violence in the subcontinent. It suggests that the colonial civilising mission has been internalised to some extent by Nehru who admits that the new Indian government cannot self-govern, in spite of his earlier insistence that the British transfer power as quickly as possible. Mountbatten, however, accepts this offer not merely out of duty but on account of “the Englishman’s personal esteem for Nehru” and “his affection for India” (365). Following this rhetorical affirmation of the white man’s burden by India’s first Prime Minister, Lapierre and Collins end the chapter on a triumphant note

After three decades of struggle, after years of strikes, mass movements, after all the bonfires of British cloths, above all, after barely three weeks of independence, India was once again, for one last moment, being run by an Englishman (366).

The writers’ conclusion celebrates Mountbatten’s re-appointment as India’s trustee in two ways. First, the man Nehru identifies as the expert in governance has agreed to save India. Second, Lapierre and Collins suggest that the Indian Prime Minister’s request ironically reverses the entire nationalist movement’s history of resistance to British rule. They imply that the subcontinent, in spite of the independence struggle, still needs the firm governing hand of an Englishman, for on their account of the
encounter, Nehru and Patel offer their voluntary and full submission to Mountbatten’s lead. The reference to the burning of British cloths is an allusion to Gandhi. FAM refers to the fact that the Mahatma famously denounced the English monopoly of the textile trade and describes the leader struggling “with tenacious energy to force all India to forsake foreign textiles for the rough cotton *khadi* cloth spun by millions of spinning wheels” (58-59). Lapierre and Collins’ validation of Mountbatten’s burden thus posits English trusteeship as something which prevails despite the leadership of India’s other parent, Gandhi. Since Nehru, who has a “father-son relationship with Gandhi”, turns to Mountbatten instead of the Mahatma, the Englishman is represented as the most influential statesman in the subcontinent—in short, the truer, more legitimate, father of India (103).

In his essay, “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi”, Homi Bhabha has argued that “colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference” (150). FAM’s reiterations of Mountbatten’s leadership and his humanitarian government can also be read as statements that serve as a rhetorical counterpoint to the glaring failure of his Viceregal rule, which is depicted as the inability to predict South Asians’ responses to Partition. This failure is represented as the leading cause of the crisis of governance after August 15. Mountbatten’s ignorance, which led him to endorse Partition as a way to avert civil war and effect a quick and dignified British exit, is represented as him being misled by nationalist leaders and his advisors upon his arrival in India. Contradicting their initial demonisation of Jinnah as a fiery intransigent leader who openly encouraged Muslim communal violence, the writers assert after their descriptions of the carnage associated with Partition that these tragic outcomes took Jinnah and Nehru wholly by surprise.

Tolerant, unbigated themselves, Nehru and Jinnah each made the grave error of underestimating the degree to which communal passions they did not share or feel could inflame the masses of their subcontinent. Each man genuinely believed that Partition would cool, not provoke violence. Reasonable and rational men, they assumed that their people would react to events with the same reasonableness that they would. They were both grievously wrong. Swept up in the euphoria of their coming independence, however, they took their
desires for reality and communicated them to the relative newcomer in their midst, the Viceroy (251).

Hubel argues in *Whose India?* that nationalist leaders and historians including Nehru tend to make South Asians out to be “homogenous”, “uneducated” and “unthinking masses” subordinate to “the small thinking minority” constituted by their well-educated and nationalist leaders. By imagining the freedom struggle as the coalition of “the small westernised group at the top and the masses”, Nehru depicts his colleagues, particularly Gandhi, as fathers of Indian nationalism, paternalistic teachers and saviours who successfully mobilised Indians to achieve Swaraj or independence (77). *FAM* clearly perpetuates this construction of Indian nationalism by imagining it as a movement comprising two categories of people, simple masses on the one hand, headed by a few university-educated leaders on the other. This rhetorical tendency (typical of nationalist historiography in the sub-continent) reinforces, for Hubel, “the imperialist image of the Indian people as a mob” and smooths “over any dissenting voices that might exist within either group” (78). Lapierre and Collins, by insisting that Jinnah and Nehru’s “reasonable and rational” legal minds tragically prevented both Anglicised men from understanding the pathological communalism that afflicts the Indian masses, again essentialise South Asians as Orientalised, irrationally religious and violent hordes. They exonerate Mountbatten and reassert the moral and rational authority of these two English-educated lawyers-turned-nationalists.

In addition, the writers stress that the experienced British provincial governors and the apparatus of colonial intelligence were also “grievously wrong” in their predictions (251). According to the writers, all the ruling elites, except Gandhi, failed to comprehend the “one-fifth of humanity” they governed. Hence, as the outsider, Mountbatten’s error of judgement is therefore excused. The blame is put on other leaders and the rest of the colonial administration who collectively failed to underestimate the communal madness endemic to South Asians – both the cause and sign of their inferior state of humanity. This interpretation of historical events explains why the writers adhere to the communal riot narrative, which stresses Indian savagery and how the unpredictability of sectarian violence makes it a great threat to law and order. It also explains why, as demonstrated in the previous section, Lapierre and
Collins appeal to colonial discourse by depicting sectarian strife as the sudden convulsion of society – a symptom of Indian alterity’s unreadability and violence.

Although the Englishman is only offered the executive control of the Indian government, with no power to legislate, this trusteeship is portrayed as a humanitarian government benefiting both states. For example, Mountbatten leads organised campaigns to contain the refugee crisis and protect the millions migrating between both states in the months following Partition. According to the writers, it was “as though some extraordinary turn of the wheel of life had delivered Mountbatten back to an earlier incarnation” – he “was the Supreme Allied Commander again, energetically filling the role he knew best”. Turning his residence at Government House into a sophisticated control centre, the well-decorated naval commander led the Indian government’s Emergency Committee like “an army headquarters in wartime” (367). Besides communalism, Mountbatten also wages war on another figurative enemy – the suffering posed by the spontaneous and irreversible tides of migration between both new states. He is depicted as a military leader who deploys technology, the Armed Forces and intelligence services to assess the extent of this humanitarian crisis, execute relief operations and protect the millions “braving heat, hunger and the threat of violence en route to either India or Pakistan (371). This way of treating the refugee problem as though it is a military campaign is part of a new response to the problem of the refugee that emerged during and after the Second World War. In Humanitarian Reason, Didier Fassin argues that for humanitarian government, refugees are treated as “large and often undifferentiated populations – typically in poor countries – for whom “mass initiatives are set in place”. The discursive rationale for saving these massive groups, according to Fassin, is the concept of humanity which “presupposes that all human beings are of equal value because they belong to one moral community” (252). Humanitarian discourses, by instituting “the equivalence of lives” and the “equivalence of suffering”, minimises differences between peoples in poor and relatively wealthier countries to portray refugees as human beings whom the international community is obliged to assist (253). The example of the refugees is one of many references in the second half of FAM which highlights the humanity of South Asians. In spite of the writers’ initial demonisation of Jinnah and the Muslim League – and their emphasis on South Asians’ propensity for violence and seemingly
insurmountable communal differences – their subsequent representations of victims of sectarian strife appeal to the notion of humanity and minimise the differences between peoples. While suffering refugees are depicted as migrating between India and Pakistan in order to flee violence, Mountbatten’s humanitarian and militant governance over their precarious lives is depicted, figuratively and literally, as border-crossing aid.

In particular, Lapierre and Collins highlight Mountbatten’s use of airplanes to establish his superior knowledge and authority during the refugee crisis. First, he orders dawn-to-dusk reconnaissance flights to conduct aerial surveillance of the seemingly endless columns of refugees traversing the landscape. Second, the information gained by these reconnaissance flights is used to educate the Indian leaders. Mountbatten is described as “exposing the Indian leaders to the terrifying reality” of this crisis using “the maps and charts ringing his intelligence centre” while Nehru and Patel’s reaction was “one of dazed bewilderment and aimlessness before the unknown” (368). Having argued that the Partition Plan came about as a result of the political elites’ failure to know the Indian masses, they portray Mountbatten’s response to Partition as the reassertion of colonial knowledge, or at least they revive the assumption of colonial discourse that only it could know the oriental Other. Mountbatten is depicted as the one leader who knows the Indian situation in September 1947 and it is he who must educate the hapless Indian Prime Minister and his deputy.

The Englishman’s supreme mastery over this crisis and his embodiment of warfare and modernity are symbolised by his deployment of military assets (surveillance aircraft, transport vehicles, temporary accommodation). Through these means the refugees are followed, monitored and administered food and medical aid. According to Lapierre and Collins, the location of red pins on Mountbatten’s maps marked out the “tortuous progress of each column’s advance” every day. Each pin represented “800,000 people” and they collectively “symbolised an enormity of anguish and suffering almost beyond imagining and beyond the human capacity to endure”. Although the writers note that it “would take weeks before” Mountbatten’s Emergency Committee “would have their impact on the cataclysm overwhelming northern India”, they surmise that by taking over the executive control of the
government, the Englishman shifted its progress radically – “from the pace of the bullock cart to the speed of a jet airplane” (369).

As a metaphor for Mountbatten’s leadership and humanitarian government, airplanes serve as a rhetorical counterpoint to the loss of control and order symbolised by railway trains in FAM and other Partition narratives. In his introduction to the edited collection Colonialism as Civilising Mission, Michael Mann emphasises how railways linking India’s major cities were hailed by colonial administrators as symbols of their contribution to the improvement of the country and to the civilisation of its people (14). Ravi Ahuja’s essay from this collection, “‘The Bridge-Builders’: Some Notes on Railways, Pilgrimage and the British ‘Civilising Mission’ in Colonial India”, also discusses how Rudyard Kipling’s short story “The Bridge Builders” is a literary rendering of a late nineteenth-century ideology that celebrated the colonial engineer as the practical incarnation of Britain’s civilising mission (95-116). It is this nineteenth-century association between railways and the civilising mission that makes the meanings tied to the trope of railway trains in twentieth-century Partition narratives more poignant. In South Asian Partition Fiction in English, Rituparna Roy has noted that Partition narratives turn trains from symbols of imperial rationality to motifs signifying the collapse of law and order, the fragility of life and the uncertainty of reaching one’s destination. The most enduring images of Partition are that of trains overloaded with refugees “pasted on to every possible part of its body” and silent trains arriving at stations, packed with the mutilated bodies of refugees killed by the violent assailants who had waylaid the trains (35-37). Like Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan – one of the first English-language novels to be written on the theme of Partition – FAM depicts trains as harbingers of death, disorder and destruction. More importantly, FAM juxtaposes images of dead bodies against symbols of imperial rationality, rule of law and progress under colonial governance. In Chapter 13, “Our People Have Gone Mad”, following the end of a passage describing these “trains of death”, the writers focus on the reaction of Richard Fisher, an American employee of a tractor company. According to this eyewitness, he sat watching in horror as Muslim assailants massacred Sikh passengers on board his train to the city of Lahore. At Lahore, another “startling image” awaited the American: the destination he reaches is a chilling subversion of the image of a crowded railway station in India. Fisher is stunned by the sight of bodies scattered
on the station platform, below a suspended sign reminding him of “happier days” when Punjab was “a model of order and prosperity”. The collapse of administrative government and law and order in the Punjab is ironically conveyed by this sign, which invites travellers to go to the stationmaster’s office to lodge “any complaint about the services encountered during his journey” (350).

Although the stationmaster’s office is empty in Lahore, signalling the collapse of law and order, the following chapter represents Mountbatten’s dynamic presence in Government House in New Delhi as the reinstatement of imperial authority and control. Because the naval commander combats violence and suffering using military aircraft, his civilising mission is associated with twentieth-century symbols of progress and discipline to counter images of anarchy and violence symbolised by the “trains of death”. Furthermore, Lapierre and Collins make reference to the fact that many of the train massacres can be attributed to their security guards’ cooperation with communal assailants. They depict Mountbatten commanding his staff to round up the security guards of each attacked train to court-martial and shoot those who are not wounded, for they were presumably either implicated in the attacks or not protecting the passengers. This assertion of government control over the railway staff, according to Mountbatten, “would have a salutary effect on the guards’ discipline” (369). Towards the end of Chapter 14, which is devoted to the refugee crisis as well as Mountbatten and Gandhi’s leadership, Lapierre and Collins state that “a semblance of order ... began to emerge from the chaos”. Discipline in both Indian and Pakistani armies improved and “effective tactics for protecting trains and refugee columns were devised” (394).

In addition, the situation in New Delhi, which was earlier rocked by political instability and sectarian violence because of the tremendous influx of refugees, is brought under control. The writers note that owing to “troop reinforcement in the city, a twenty-four hour curfew” and “a series of arms searches”, “the tide of violence in the capital began to ebb”. More importantly the ordeal of those days brought Mountbatten and Nehru even closer together. Nehru met with the former Viceroy two or three times a day, often, as Mountbatten noted at the time, “simply and solely for company, to unburden his soul and obtain what comfort I can give him” (384).
This description, which names Mountbatten not as Governor-General to Nehru’s Prime Minister, but as “former Viceroy”, reinforces again the dynamic between the weak and emotional colonial ward and the rational, paternalistic imperial figure. A grateful Nehru also praises the Emergency Committee as “the best lesson in administration a new government ever had” (394). Hence, in the process of saving lives and alleviating refugees’ suffering, Mountbatten fulfils his duty as a trustee to prepare India’s Prime Minister – and by extension, India – for self-governance.

*FAM*’s exceedingly favourable representation of the lengths to which Mountbatten helped independent South Asia goes against the “divide and quit” criticism levelled against him and Britain. This text sits prominently amongst the pro-Mountbatten accounts published between the 1950s and 1980s, written by authors who personally knew the Englishman. They include his press attaché Alan Campbell-Johnson’s *Mission with Mountbatten* (1951), John Terraine’s *The Life and Times of Mountbatten* (1970) and Philip Zeigler’s biography *Mountbatten* (1985). Since the turn of the twenty-first century, Mountbatten’s reputation has undergone a critical reappraisal. Andrew Roberts’ essay “Lord Mountbatten and the Perils of Adrenalin” in his book *Eminent Churchillians* (1994), Alex von Tunzelmann’s *Indian Summer* (2006) and Sir Stanley Wolpert’s *Shameful Flight* (2006) contain scathing critiques of Mountbatten’s actions. They suggest that he was an impatient, and ignorant, Englishman who oversimplified Partition as an expedient administrative exercise. In addition, von Tunzelmann and Wolpert’s histories depict Gandhi’s pivotal role in quelling violence in the months prior to his death but do not mention any deliberate cooperation between Mountbatten and Gandhi.

In *FAM*, the writers depict Mountbatten and Gandhi as allies and the highest praise for the Englishman’s humanitarian intervention is offered by the Mahatma. After “being shown around the new headquarters” of the Emergency Committee, Gandhi “was impressed by the air of purpose and decisiveness with which Mountbatten infused Government House”. Retracting his previous advice urging the Governor-General to move into modest lodgings and convert the Government House into a hospital, Gandhi told Mountbatten

God must have told you not to listen to old Gandhi, who’s a fool when he urged you to give up this house. ... Now I see this is the heart of India. Here is where
India is governed from. This is the sanctuary in the storm. We must keep it up and all your successors must live here (370).

This anecdote represents nonviolent Gandhi – who was not only a staunch anti-imperialist but also renowned for his opposition to flying and other forms of modernity and warfare – praising Mountbatten’s militant governance of India. As the Mahatma suggests that the Englishman’s leadership during the “storm” of Partition is something ordained by God, he recalls FAM’s epigraph quoting Kipling’s view that “[t]he responsibility for governing India has been placed by the inscrutable design of providence upon the shoulders of the British race”. It also recalls the writers’ earlier comment that “Gandhi the pacifist would find in the soul of the professional warrior ‘the echo of certain of the moral values that stirred in his own soul’” (106). Having depicted the violence of Partition using the communal riot narrative, FAM portrays Mountbatten’s militant governance and intervention as a morally legitimate response to these exceptional circumstances: Partition is a historic singularity so unique that Gandhi himself, the apostle of nonviolence, historically endorsed the need for state force.

In the final chapter, shortly after Gandhi is killed, Mountbatten joins other members of his inner circle for a private viewing of his body. As he offers flowers, the Governor-General states that “Mahatma Gandhi will go down in history on par with Buddha and Jesus Christ” (510). This quote, which sums up his admiration for Gandhi’s stature as a spiritual teacher, reinforces the writers’ belief in the mutual respect and admiration between both leaders. As mentioned, the idea of the militant English royal and the India’s most famous nationalist leader becoming friends and allies may seem incongruous. This relationship between the two main characters, however, rhetorically supports two aspects of the ideology of trusteeship. On one hand, this ideology affirms disciplinary measures by the state, including capital punishment and use of force to stop riots, as part of a civilising mission. On the other, it posits the universal validity of Christian values that will engender the religious and moral improvement of Indian society. Although Gandhi was a devout Hindu, his doctrine of nonviolence is depicted by the writers as something that originated from Christianity. Lapierre and Collins first introduce nonviolence in the context of the retaliatory sectarian massacres in the communal riot narrative. Gandhi appears at the beginning of FAM as a heartbroken old
man, devastated by the chain of massacres sparked by The Great Calcutta’s Killings, and lamenting that his fellow Indians “had followed him on the road to independence but they had not understood the great doctrine he had enunciated to get them there, nonviolence” (26). The source of this doctrine is attributed to the Gospel of Matthew. After emphasising that it was “a passage from the Bible that had first set Gandhi meditating on nonviolence”, the writers describe how Gandhi “had been overwhelmed by Christ’s admonition to his followers to turn the other cheek to their aggressors” (54). This representation of Gandhi’s doctrine of nonviolence clearly omits the fact that *ahimsa* is one of the ancient tenets of Hinduism. Even Gandhi’s later fasts for the cessation of communal hatred in Calcutta and New Delhi, and impassioned speeches for Indian unity and peace to great crowds, are paralleled with Christ delivering his Sermon on the Mount to his disciples.

By comparing Gandhi to Jesus, *FAM* suggests that the Mahatma historically quelled sectarian conflict in India because he was a transcendental figure who could inspire and lead humanity towards revolutionary change. This appeals to established and often hagiographical images of Gandhi as a “Great Soul”, which originated from his Indian admirers and alludes to his teachings on *satyagraha* – his term for “soul force”, “truth force” or the moral strength that fuels nonviolent means of resistance (24). During his lifetime, favourable representations of Gandhi in fiction flourished. Harish Trivedi’s essay “Literary and Visual Portrayals of Gandhi”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, discusses how Gandhi has been featured in numerous dramas, novels, stories and poems worldwide. During the 1930s and 1940s, when he was already a dominant force in politics, there was a perceptible trend in Indian novels where writers grappled with Gandhian ethics and ideals such as truth, nonviolence and inter-religious, inter-communal harmony. He also notes that there was a shift of emphasis in Indian literature “from the rich to the poor, from the intellectual to the man of character and inner culture, from the educated to the illiterate and voiceless”. Inherent in these literary explorations is the sense of social reform attributed to Gandhi’s influence on public Indian discourse during this period. In addition, novels with Gandhi as a character are exceeded in number by those which feature a local Gandhian figure. In Partition literature, as well as narratives composed prior to independence, such
characters often serve as authoritative moral figures who espouse or embody Gandhian ideals (202).

Yet, scholars such as Kate Marsh in *Fictions of 1947* have also noted how Gandhi can be regarded as an enigma because of the “inherent flexibility of his thought” and his many contradictory and controversial acts (47). Gandhi historically claimed that his actions were led by his inner guiding voice. He believed that his never-ending experiments with truth and personal purification helped him to set a moral example for others. Historians and biographers, in particular, try to interpret the Mahatma’s actions, his ideas for India and humanity, and how these contributed to a growing rift between him and his Congress successors in the twilight of his life. Amongst other disagreements, the latter neither shared his vision for an agrarian India nor approved of his practice of sleeping naked with several young female members of his ashram to test and strengthen his vow of *brahmacharya* (chastity). Although such developments are not easy to account for, Gandhi’s well-documented role in preventing sectarian conflict in the months following Partition is something many scholars hold up as proof of his enduring moral authority and political significance. For example, Judith Brown’s *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope* (1989), Dennis Dalton’s *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action* (1993) and Stanley Wolpert’s *Gandhi’s Passion: The Life and Legacy of Mahatma Gandhi* (2001) praise Gandhi for inspiring entire communities to maintain peace as a result of his nonviolent activism in Calcutta and New Delhi.

While Lapierre and Collins describe Gandhi’s eccentric and often controversial actions – from his belief in the necessity of regular saltwater enemas to his practice of sharing his sleeping quarters with his grandniece Manuben – they follow the approach of these pro-Gandhi scholars by dwelling at length on the Mahatma’s triumphs in Calcutta and New Delhi. The writers represent his time in both cities as trials through which the aged leader’s self-sacrificing fasts combatted the madness of communalism to effect peace and reconciliation. Lapierre and Collins’ account, however, deviates from other narratives by suggesting that Gandhi’s nonviolent activism was partly motivated by Mountbatten. Gandhi’s presence in Calcutta while the transfer of power took place on midnight of August 15 is credited with maintaining peace in this city and the rest of the divided province of Bengal. According to Lapierre
and Collins, Mountbatten, who believed that “no amount of troops would be able to control” Calcutta if riots broke out in the “fetid, pullulating slums and congested bazaars” of “the world’s most violent city” (252), took a “wild gamble” by urging Gandhi to go to Calcutta and dispatching armed personnel to Punjab instead (268). Mountbatten’s request, together with the plea of Calcutta’s Muslim leader Shaheed Suhrawardy, leads Gandhi to travel to Calcutta. FAM then alternates between scenes of brutality in divided Punjab and scenes of Gandhi (the “soft-voiced archangel of nonviolence”), Suhrawardy and Calcuttans keeping prayerful vigil in a rundown house in the slums. Gandhi’s actions in Calcutta are depicted as martyr-like by the writers, in particular his nonviolent strategy of fasting unto death in response to sectarian violence. To prevent a repeat of both The Great Calcutta’s Killings of 1946 and the retaliatory massacres in Noakhali, Gandhi and Suhrawardy stake their lives as the guarantee of a “contract” for Hindus to protect Muslims in Calcutta in exchange for Muslims in Noakhali protecting their Hindu neighbours.

The profound effect of this nonviolent strategy is evident during India and Pakistan’s birth at midnight of August 15, when

the unfathomable alchemy of that strange old man with his prayers and spinning wheel was somehow casting its spell over the slums in which everyone had expected an explosion to dwarf in dimension and horror the worst of the happenings in the Punjab (316).

After midnight, Hindus and Muslims “pilgrims” came in a ceaseless stream to take darshan from Gandhi in “a kind of mystic communion engendered by being in the presence of a great spirit” (316). In this description, the Calcuttans’ interaction with Gandhi is likened to the Hindu practice of receiving blessings from a holy person. The word “communion” carries a heavy weight in Christian tradition, encompassing both the fellowship of believers, and the sacrament of the Eucharist. Since FAM earlier quotes Gandhi’s historical assertion that he would “offer his own body for vivisection, rather than accept his country’s division”, Lapierre and Collins clearly equate the Mahatma with the Indian body politic (193). They compare his threat to fast unto death to save Calcuttans and Noakhalis with the passion of Christ who willingly sacrificed his body and suffered for humanity’s salvation.
The transformation of Calcuttans from communal-crazed, colonial subjects to a peaceful fraternity of “pilgrims” in communion with Gandhi – on the midnight of South Asia’s independence – suggests that the “alchemy” of the Mahatma’s presence saved them from the madness of communalism and helped to redeem their humanity. According to the writers, “the most miserable city dwellers in the world had heard the message of the frail messenger of love and mastered their ancestral urge for violence and hate” (350). Hence, this passage develops the idea of Indians’ humanity further to suggest that it can be fully realised with moral guidance and leadership. It also likens national solidarity to Christian fellowship. Given that FAM explicitly attributes Gandhi’s nonviolent ideals as something he had learned from reading the Bible, this passage can be taken to mean that Christian values are universal and salvific. In addition, since Gandhi saves innumerable lives by stopping sectarian violence in Calcutta and New Delhi, the religious metaphors used to represent this moral conversion of Indians suggest that he is a Christ-like civilising figure. The idea of Gandhi being co-opted into Mountbatten’s humanitarian government is reinforced when the writers represent the Englishman writing to Gandhi from New Delhi.

“In Punjab, we have 55,000 soldiers and large-scale rioting on our hands,” Louis Mountbatten wrote to his “dejected sparrow”. “In Bengal, our force consists of one man and there is no rioting”. As a military leader and administrator, the last Viceroy humbly asked “to be allowed to pay tribute to my One Man Boundary Force” (350 – 351).

This passage highlights Mountbatten’s respect and regard for the frail and aged leader as well as his deference to Gandhi’s moral authority. The references to Gandhi as “his dejected sparrow” and “my One Man Boundary Force”, however, show a certain presumption of ownership. Mountbatten, again, is portrayed as the Viceroy who lived up to the ideology of trusteeship: he deploys disciplinary forces to manage unpredictable and violent Indians and assists the moral improvement of their society by partnering with Gandhi who preaches the Christian value of nonviolence.

When violence does break out in Calcutta at the end of August, Gandhi honours his vow by undertaking a fast unto death until riots stop. To highlight both the extent of his suffering and his strength, Lapierre and Collins compare his three-day fast to “the slow crucifixions” he willingly endured against the British Empire and emphasise that peace only resumes after Gandhi’s pulse reaches the point where death is “an
imminent possibility” (356). This martyrdom is repeated again during Gandhi’s five-day fast in New Delhi. It culminates in a celebration of his victory over violence using images that compare the Mahatma’s “Soul Force” to an almighty strength. After the government and leaders of religious and political organisations capitulate to his charter of conditions for ending the fast, “diminutive” Gandhi is hoisted on the shoulders of supporters – “like a triumphant boxer who’d just knocked out his foe to become the heavyweight champion of the world” (461).

According to the writers, Gandhi’s victory in New Delhi also reflects Mountbatten’s shrewd political leadership and the strength of their alliance. Prior to this fast, Lapierre and Collins depict the Mahatma confiding in Mountbatten, not Nehru and Patel, his reasons for this undertaking.

He hoped Mountbatten would not be angry, he told the Governor-General, but he had decided to undertake a fast unto death until there was “a reunion of hearts of all the communities in Delhi”, a reunion provoked not by “outside pressure, but by an awakened sense of duty” (431).

This conversation, which takes place on January 12, first suggests that Gandhi respects the Englishman’s leadership and views. According to the writers, “much had changed” since “the spring of 1947” when “Louis Mountbatten and Mahatma Gandhi had seemed to hold the destiny of 400 million people in their hands” (430). At this point in the narrative, the “Emergency Committee with which Mountbatten had given India her rapid and secret return to English rule had been dissolved” and the Governor-General is merely serving as “a constitutional head of state”. Realising that what “Nehru and Patel could deny to him, they could never deny to Gandhi dying in the agony of a fast”, Mountbatten reminds Gandhi that the Indian leaders refuse to pay Pakistan the 550 million rupees owing from partitioned British imperial balances, and emphasises that this might “drive a desperate and bankrupt Jinnah to war”. According to the writers, the Englishman’s reminder gives Gandhi’s nonviolent strategy “a new dimension”. The Mahatma then decides to fast for the peace of New Delhi and for “the honour of India”, because it is “intolerable to him that so soon after her birth India should be guilty of taking so immoral an action” (431). Hence, Gandhi’s historic last fast is portrayed by the writers as a disciplining strategy devised in consultation with Mountbatten, so India learns to respect “the letter of her international agreements”. While the success of this fast later proves Gandhi’s moral authority and his belief that “true Indians” can
replace “bestiality with humanity” (436), the Indian government’s swift payment of the 550 million rupees also suggests that Gandhi and Mountbatten succeed in making India’s government and people demonstrate the kind of “international behaviour” expected of sovereign states (431). This anecdote appeals to imperial and colonial discourses by recalling the belief that backward nations need to be guided by the firm paternalistic hand of their colonial masters because they cannot abide by the civilised rules of engagement within the international community of nations. Clearly, Gandhi’s historic success in New Delhi is discursively appropriated by the writers who depict him functioning as an indispensable arm of the imperialism enacted by Mountbatten’s trusteeship. Given that both Dominion States are embroiled in the first Indo-Pakistan War over Kashmir during this time, FAM’s reiterations of unity, Gandhi’s nonviolence creed and Mountbatten’s civilising authority downplay the historic severity of this conflict, which has since endured as one of the most critical legacies of Partition.

In addition, Lapierre and Collins depict Gandhi’s murder as a sacrifice which united the subcontinent in grief. They even claim that it put a halt to sectarian riots amongst civilians – an important achievement in spite of further Indo-Pakistani armed conflicts after 1948. This claim is factually inaccurate as sectarian violence broke out in India as early as 1950. In relation to the mourning of Gandhi as a martyr who died for his people, the writers represent the occasion of his death as inspiring widespread remorse and condemnation of violence. They quote, for example, the *Hindustan Standard*’s tribute which states that “Gandhiji has been killed by his own people for whose redemption he lived” (514). This representation is consistent with the Indian state’s reaction to his death as well as that of Indian nationalist histories. Historians such as Yasmin Khan have studied how Indian’s leaders and nationalist historians regard the date of Gandhi’s death as the turning point in relations between religious communities after Partition. In her article “Performing Peace: Gandhi’s Assassination as a Critical Moment in the Consolidation of the Nehruvian State”, Khan explains how Gandhi was mourned in many hagiographical accounts as a martyr to the cause of “communal peace”. She also notes that many state-endorsed narratives assert that the public only “returned to their senses” through his death which united South Asians in epic and public outpourings of grief. This martyrdom helped to justify the Nehruvian
government’s ban on extremist Hindu parties and arrests of terrorists as well as its insistence on the secular identity of the modern Indian nation (57).

FAM’s representation of Gandhi’s martyrdom deviates from Indian nationalist accounts in one regard: it frames the Mahatma’s death as another national crisis which warranted Mountbatten’s trusteeship. The writers depict the Governor-General stepping to make executive decisions because Nehru and other Congress leaders are too distraught to organise the state funeral for the following day. It is Mountbatten who heroically, and rationally, presides over this final tragedy by commandeering the military to quickly organise and maintain order at Gandhi’s funeral. The writers note that the Mahatma’s funeral procession dwarfed the recent celebrations of the subcontinent’s independence, serving as the “ultimate and pathetic darshan” for “the largest crowd ever to gather on the face of the earth” (517). When the innumerable “mass of humanity” spontaneously surges toward the burning pyre “in a wave of uncontrollable hysteria”, Mountbatten’s “foresight” leads him to get “the crowd of diplomats, dignitaries, and ministers” to create a human barrier around it. This prevents “dozens of women weeping hysterically” from throwing themselves into the flames, and their movements from pushing the Indian and foreign dignitaries forward in “a massive and involuntary suttee” (518-519).

This image of Mountbatten uniting Indian and foreign leaders and government officials to stop grief-stricken Indian women from immolating themselves on Bapu’s funeral pyre is both striking and symbolic. It praises not the self-sacrificing actions of the Indian women but that of the political elites who form a human barrier under Mountbatten’s orders and subject themselves to the risk of a stampede, and possible incineration, to maintain order at Gandhi’s funeral. This anecdote in the last chapter of FAM recalls Mountbatten’s earlier efforts to protect irrational South Asians from themselves by creating the armed Boundary Force in Punjab and co-opting Gandhi as his “One Man Boundary Force” in Calcutta (350). While the political leaders’ actions mirror Gandhi’s nonviolent and self-sacrificing leadership, the Indian masses’ attempt to immolate themselves in their remorse over Gandhi’s demise can be seen as a pathetic mimicry of the Mahatma’s martyrdom.
The Englishman’s actions also associate him with an earlier imperial humanitarian and Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck. Bentinck banned *suttee* in 1829 after the vigorous campaigning of Christian missionaries, the British public and English politicians who called upon the colonial government to carry out its civilising mission and stop barbaric Hindu customs advocating human sacrifice. Lapierre and Collins also recall fictional images of compassionate colonisers saving Indians from a cruel Hinduism. Amal Chatterjee has analysed in *Representations of India, 1740 - 1840* how *suttee* “provoked more than just moral outrage” – it also inspired the storylines of eighteenth and nineteenth-century plays and novels as well as magazine articles in England. In these texts, British characters are morally superior and chivalric figures saving Hindu widows from becoming human sacrifices and victims of a barbaric religion (113-123). These narratives helped propagate the idea that *suttee* was proof of the immorality of the idolatrous Hindu religion and “that India was in desperate need of firm, humane and civilised intervention in form of British conquest and administration” (111). Hence, the mass hysteria of these women not only reinforces the opposition between backward Indian masses and their rational, paternalistic political leaders but also justifies the humanitarian intervention of Mountbatten who teaches his Indian protégés how to govern.15

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how the writers present a pro-Congress and pro-British “high politics” account of decolonisation and Partition. This text’s worldwide popularity can be attributed to its constructs of Mountbatten and Gandhi as friends and allies working valiantly together to put out fires of communal hatred across the subcontinent. Mountbatten is continually affirmed as the political saviour who refused to “divide and quit”: he is a charismatic leader who divided, and figuratively conquered, the governance and hearts of India’s leaders who valued his assistance and friendship during the humanitarian and political crises that accompanied Partition. This heroic image of Mountbatten, together with the writers’ displacement of blame onto communal-crazed Indians, portrays the end of the Raj as a pivotal time when Queen Victoria’s great-grandson realised the ideals of imperial humanitarianism. Lapierre and Collins, however, reserve their highest praise for
Gandhi. They suggest that Mountbatten’s leadership and militant rule, while noble and admirable, were not as effective as the Mahatma’s seemingly miraculous impact on irrational South Asians. Unlike Jinnah, the vilified leader of the Muslim League, Gandhi is depicted as a Christ-like figure whose nonviolent ideals are attributed to Jesus. The historical resurgence of Gandhi’s influence in the months preceding his assassination is portrayed as the validation of a unique spiritual and political leader’s answer to South Asia’s equally unique communal problem. While Mountbatten is viewed as a shrewd and heroic naval commander who offers border-crossing aid and leadership, Gandhi is exalted as a transcendental figure whose moral authority inspires peoples of all religions, ethnicities and nationalities.

Lapierre and Collins also relate sectarian violence to colonial constructs of Indian communalism and South Asian writers’ trope of madness to mitigate the horrific outcomes of Partition and posit the possibility of Indian unity. This unity, which is realised by Gandhi’s nonviolent sacrifices and singular moral authority, reinforces established hagiographic portrayals of the Mahatma in nationalist literature. Although the writers recognise Indians’ right to self-determination and the neo-humanitarian principle of state sovereignty, they mourn the demise of Gandhi and Empire to imply the need for foreign mediation and intervention in South Asia.
Chapter 2

The City of Joy

We have seen in our discussion of Freedom at Midnight (FAM) that Dominique Lapierre’s first text on India is a “high politics” account of the formation of modern India and Pakistan. Its protagonists, Lord Louis Mountbatten and Mohandas Gandhi, are portrayed as founding fathers of modern India. While the decolonisation of the subcontinent marked a momentous turning point in South Asian and world history, FAM also changed Lapierre’s literary career and personal life. Having spent considerable time in Calcutta researching Gandhi’s efforts to quell sectarian violence in 1947, the writer returned to the city to donate some of his royalties to charity after the successful launch of this text in 1975. This trip, according to his memoirs, A Thousand Suns and India, My Love, was made to express his gratitude to India. It also led to The City of Joy (1985), an account of life in one of Calcutta’s most impoverished slums. The experience of returning to Calcutta in the late 1970s also turned Lapierre into a passionate philanthropist and spokesperson for India’s marginalised communities. In both memoirs, Lapierre explains that it had been Mother Teresa herself who directed him to European humanitarians organising aid for the city’s slums.¹ The City of Joy was borne of the writer’s memorable encounters with humanitarians and the slum community with whom they worked and lived. This text, along with subsequent works such as A Thousand Suns (1999), It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal (2001), India, My Love (2013) and the teleplay for Mother Teresa: In the Name of God’s Poor (1997), all feature Europeans (Mother Teresa, James Stevens and Gaston Grandjean) who dedicate their lives to the Indian poor. Moreover, the commercial success of these texts and the outpouring of letters and donations from readers worldwide have enabled Lapierre to finance the operations of over twenty humanitarian organisations in Calcutta, rural Bengal, the Ganges Delta, Madras and Bhopal.

This chapter examines The City of Joy (TCOJ), which is the first and most popular text among Lapierre’s writing on the Indian poor and their humanitarian friends. Published in 1985, the book quickly became a bestseller and was honoured
with the Christopher Award (a literary award inaugurated in 1949 to books, films and television series that “affirm the highest values of the human spirit”) the following year. By 1992, it had sold more than six million copies in thirty-one languages (510). That year, a film adaptation starring Patrick Swayze was released, although it did not live up to the considerable reputation forged by the book. The book provides an account of life in Pilkhana, one of Calcutta’s oldest slums, during the 1970s and 1980s. Like its predecessor, this text features both an Indian and a European protagonist: Hasari Pal, a Bengali peasant-turned-rickshaw wallah in Calcutta, and Stephan Kovalski, a Polish priest who fulfilled his spiritual calling to serve the poor. Pal and his extended family are introduced as peasants bankrupted by successive droughts and famines. Leaving his ancestral village and farming community, he brings his wife and children to Calcutta to find work. There, they join the “thousands of other luckless families” who stray through “the same labyrinth” of Calcutta, “hoping for the same miracle”. Pal alternates between being an odd-job labourer and unemployed squatter who resorts to selling his blood and foraging in the streets of Calcutta (26-28). Finally, he finds work as a rickshaw wallah, a home in Pilkhana and an exceedingly compassionate neighbour in Kovalski.

The experience of the Polish Roman Catholic priest in Calcutta is a fish-out-of-water story that mirrors Pal’s in certain respects. But unlike the Indian protagonist, Kovalski deliberately seeks out ways to eat, sleep and suffer with the poor, for he sees in their trials and tribulations the passion of Christ. As both men learn to endure starvation, malnourishment and the filth and squalor of their surroundings, they are also confronted by the suffering of their new friends and neighbours. The Pole, in particular, is struck by the solidarity between the slum residents who take turns to help each other. They even save his life when he is taken ill. He calls Pilkhana “The City of Joy” in honour of his neighbours’ exemplary values and tries to find ways to help improve their quality of life. After Kovalski restores the eyesight of a teenage girl by using pomade to cure her eye infection, the priest gains messianic status in the slum. He is later approached by a few Indians to form an aid committee. The Listening Committee for Mutual Aid surveys the slum residents and initiates several projects. These include a night school, a mobile leper clinic with transport sourced from Mother Teresa and a free medical dispensary. When Max Loeb, a wealthy American medical
student, reads a magazine article about “a white apostle who had come from the West to live among the world’s disinherited people”, he responds unhesitatingly to the priest’s call for volunteers and flies to Calcutta to become Kovalski’s aide in the dispensary (272).

Together with the priest, Loeb assists Pal who battles tuberculosis – and time – in the latter chapters of the text. The Indian is determined to earn enough money for his daughter Amrita’s dowry before dying. Because of the support and medical care offered by these humanitarians, Pal’s condition stabilises long enough for him to work throughout the monsoon season when heavy rains put a halt to all forms of transport except the rickshaw. During this brief but triumphant time, terminally-ill Pal ceases “to be a despised, insulted animal” in the urban jungle and raises more funds by selling his skeleton to a company exporting human bones to overseas medical institutions. On Amrita’s wedding day, Pal rejoices in her bridal glory. This is “a magical scene that wiped out so many nightmare images in a single stroke: Amrita crying of cold and hunger on the winter nights … foraging with her little hands through the refuse from the Grand Hotel, begging under the Chowringhee arcades … a moment of triumph, of apotheosis, of final revenge on a rotten karma” (482). Before the banquet, Pal is overtaken by sudden seizures and dies in Kovalski’s arms, unbeknownst to his family and guests. With his dying breath, he implores “Big Brother” to take care of his wife and sons.

After Pal’s death, Kovalski intensifies his humanitarian efforts. In the climactic finale of TCOJ, a cataclysmic cyclone ravages the Indian coast. The priest and his fellow aid workers in the slum are “naturally at the frontline of this humanitarian mission”. They spend four weeks in a flooded delta region and “treated fifteen thousand sick people, vermifuged twenty thousand children, [and] distributed some twenty-five thousand food rations” (502). This disaster, which prompts Calcutta’s most disenfranchised communities to band together with the rest of the city to help cyclone victims, also cements Kovalski’s reputation as a spiritual and humanitarian leader. In the Epilogue, the missionary’s dream of becoming Indian comes true when he is awarded citizenship. He takes on the name “Premanand”, meaning “Blessed is he who is loved by God”. According to Lapierre, “it summed up perfectly the meaning of his
relationship with the humble, the poor, and the broken individuals who were the people of The City of Joy” (508).

In an Afterword published in the 1992 edition of this text, Lapierre states that despite being convinced that he had “written a most inspiring epic”, he was “truly surprised by the degree of its success” (510). He received thousands of letters from readers worldwide, each “a homage of gratitude for having written The City of Joy” (510). In addition, by 1992, almost two million dollars had been sent from his royalties and readers’ donations to humanitarian institutions in Calcutta and its vicinity. But the book’s reception was not without incident, and Lapierre’s attempts to show a seamless progression between the book’s narrative and the extra-textual narrative of humanitarian improvement met with some resistance in India. While a reviewer in the Los Angeles Times had hailed the book as “a positive, uplifting experience … lending hope and joy to us all,” the same newspaper reported two years after its publication that the governing board of the main community organisation in the slum unanimously rejected a donation of nearly $400,000 from the author on the grounds that the book was “an exploitation of poor people”. In this March 19, 1987 report, Rone Tempest quotes the governing board’s President, physician Dr Sushil K. Sen, who states “what has been stated in the book is all fantasy”. This report is also cited by John Hutnyk’s The Rumour of Calcutta, which further notes that other European residents in Calcutta – such as Jack Preger who ran a free clinic for lepers and Jesuit film-school head Gaston Roberge – “condemned the author for cheap sentimentalism, misplaced emphasis and glaring errors of fact” (96).

Such responses indicate that TCOJ represents poverty and humanitarianism in ways that are polarising. While this global bestseller has resulted in an influx of life-saving aid to the city, the criticisms highlighted above suggests many people feel that Lapierre’s writing has, rhetorically, done a disservice to the Indian poor and Calcutta’s image. This chapter explores this tension by considering TCOJ’s portrayal of the city, its slum residents and European humanitarians. The first section discusses Lapierre’s representation of post-independence Calcutta as a site of urban disaster. The second section analyses how TCOJ depicts the misfortunes of rural-urban migrants through the figure of Hasari Pal and how he benefits from the intervention of humanitarians such as Kovalski. The third section explores the relationship between the missionary
and the slum community, and how humanitarianism and mutual aid in the slum are idealised. Collectively, these sections illustrate how Lapierre contrasts Pilkhana against the rest of Calcutta to celebrate the solidarity of the city’s most marginalised communities. Drawing on both imperial humanitarian and neo-humanitarian discourses, the writer suggests that a unique solidarity found amongst the poorest of the poor in India serves as an inspiration for the rest of humanity.

**The Mirage of Calcutta**

The previous chapter has discussed how Calcutta features prominently in *FAM* as one of the cities where Mohandas Gandhi miraculously stopped sectarian violence. This Indian city, which is now called by its Bengali name “Kolkata”, is first introduced in *FAM*’s communal riot narrative as the site of “The Great Calcutta’s Killings” on August 16, 1946. This incident is identified as the historical turning point which signalled the threat of a civil war and precipitated the British decision to dissolve the Raj. Lapierre and Collins counterpose Gandhi’s nonviolent activism with the dangers posed by Calcutta, “the second city of the British Empire, a metropolis whose reputation for violence and savagery was unrivalled”. The writers stress their view that “Calcutta, with the legend of its Black Hole, had been, to generations of Englishmen, a synonym for Indian cruelty” (35). Such statements reference a historical incident in 1756, when Indian fighters under the leadership of Subadar Suraj-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Bengal, allegedly stormed Calcutta’s garrisons and forced 146 English captives into a room, suffocating and killing 123 of them. Imperial and colonial historians, as well as administrators such as John Z. Holwell who survived this incident, tend to represent it as an atrocity against British settlers and traders. These writers use the event to justify the Battle of Plassey where the English seized Calcutta back by force and killed hundreds of the Nawab’s soldiers. Moreover, scholars and historians such as Partha Chatterjee and Geoffrey Moorhouse stress that the Black Hole incident has become one of the founding myths of the British Empire which justifies English rule as heroic and self-sacrificing good governance for uncivilised Indians. Lapierre and Collins later reinforce this colonial image of Calcutta and Indian cruelty by recounting that “Hell, a Calcutta resident once remarked, was being born an Untouchable in Calcutta’s slums”
Thus, FAM introduces Calcutta not as the former capital of the British-Indian Empire but as a suffocating hell for both Englishmen and India’s most disenfranchised peoples. In FAM, Calcutta serves as a symbol for Britain’s worst fears of the precariousness of colonial authority, Indian brutality and cruelty. It functions as a metonymic repository of the most debased constructions of India, especially its oppressive and divisive caste system and Indians’ propensity for sudden and terrifying violence.

In many ways, this infernal image of colonial and Partition-era Calcutta is retained in the setting of TCOJ. Lapierre depicts this city as a metropolis rapidly degenerating because of ongoing misfortune, the influx of refugees, an indifferent and callous national government and poor governance by the Bengal state. According to the writer, Calcutta is best regarded as “a mirage city” because of three paradoxes. First, its wealth and robust trade belie a history of humanitarian and political crises. Second, it is a beacon for millions of refugees seeking a new life but the life they later find in the city is almost unspeakably poor. Third, the chaos of Calcutta’s urban jungle masks the former order and prestige of the city’s colonial past (29). In relation to the first of these paradoxes, Lapierre notes that, although Calcutta is “situated at the heart of one of the world’s richest” regions, it is also one of the “most ill-fated” (30). Nicknamed the “Ruhr of India”, Calcutta

drained into its factories and warehouses all the material resources of this vast territory: copper, manganese, chromium, asbestos, bauxite, graphite, and mica as well as precious timber from the Himalayas, tea from Assam and Darjeeling, and almost 50 percent of the world’s jute (29-30).

In addition, “vast quantities of other items and materials also fed one of the most diversified and lively trading centres in Asia, making the city “a mecca of industry and commerce” (30). Despite its rich natural resources and importance to Asia’s economy, Lapierre suggests that Calcutta and its people are victims of a disaster-prone natural environment and turbulent political history.

The metropolis was situated at the heart of ... an area of failing or devastating monsoons causing either droughts or biblical floods. This was an area of cyclones and apocalyptic earthquakes, an area of political exoduses and religious wars such as no other country’s climate or history has perhaps ever engendered. The earthquake that shook Bihar on January 15, 1937, caused hundreds of thousands of deaths and catapulted entire villages in the direction
of Calcutta. Six years later a famine killed three and a half million people in Bengal alone and ousted millions of refugees. India’s independence and the Partition in 1947 cast upon Calcutta some four million Muslims and Hindus fleeing from Bihar and East Pakistan. The conflict with China in 1962, and subsequently the war against Pakistan, washed up a further several hundred thousand refugees; and in the same year, 1965, a cyclone as forceful as ten three-megaton H-bombs capable of razing to the ground a city like New York, together with a dreadful drought in Bihar, once more sent to Calcutta entire communities (30).

With the words “biblical”, “apocalyptic”, “political exoduses” and “religious wars”, Lapierre introduces Calcutta, and by extension India, as a place which has experienced natural and political disasters so epic they can only be compared to those in biblical stories – “no other country’s climate or history” is as ill-fated. It is this misfortune which makes Calcutta and its surrounding territories’ wealth seem illusory. By making references to “H-bombs” and “New York”, Lapierre appeals to an implied European or North American reader and suggests that Calcutta, like India itself, cannot be fathomed in its own terms. This region, because of its climate and history, is therefore reimagined as a unique and dangerous Oriental setting, recalling the epithet “The City of Dreadful Night” given to Calcutta by Rudyard Kipling.

Second, Calcutta is a “mirage” because its residents are not quite human. Upon their arrival, Pal and other migrants realise that it contains such “an enormous concentration of humanity” that it is almost impossible to find work amongst the millions already starving and unemployed. In addition, they soon discover that Calcutta is an “inhuman” metropolis where people can “die on the pavements surrounded by apparent indifference” (32). Within days of his arrival, Pal learns this harsh lesson and profites from it. His first temporary job arises when he sees a coolie vomit blood and collapse in the street. Instead of stopping to help the man, the starving peasant rushes forward to offer his services, joining the band of coolies who fight “like beasts” to pull a heavy handcart laden with iron bars (27). This incident is the first of many references to blood in TCOJ, all linking survival, backbreaking toil and exploitation to the inhumanity of employers and workers in Calcutta. It is after this first reference to blood that Lapierre calls Calcutta “a mirage city, to which in the course of one generation six million starving people had come in the hope of feeding their families” (29). He proceeds to describe the vast array of goods continuously travelling through Bengal and its surrounding regions to this “mecca of industry and commerce”. This
abundance consequently gives “millions of small peasants” making “a desperate living out of infertile patches of land” false hopes: “How could those poor not dream, each time disaster struck, to take the same road as those goods?” (30)

To emphasise that Calcutta reveals itself to be the Black Hole deplored by colonial writers – instead of a beacon of opportunity to these peasants – Lapierre relies on descriptions of the cityscape.

In many respects, the city resembled the goddess Kali whom many of its inhabitants worship – Kali the Terrible, the image of fear and death, depicted with a terrifying expression in her eyes and a necklace of snakes and skulls around her neck. Even slogans on the walls proclaimed the disastrous state of this city. “Here there is no more hope,” said one of them. “All that is left is anger” (32).

Clearly, Calcutta is personified as a nightmarish Orientalist space. The slogans proclaiming its population’s hopelessness and anger reinforce this idea of Calcutta turning out to be a mirage to its migrants. This introduction to the cityscape therefore sets Calcutta up as a space which is not life-sustaining, but terrifying, for the millions who relocate there. This also forebodes Pal’s sorry fate.

The writer’s references to Kali also evoke colonial stories alleging the practice of human sacrifice in Kali temples. In *Representations of India, 1740-1840*, a study of both fiction and nonfiction texts on the subcontinent, Amal Chatterjee observes that Orientalists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries tended to judge Hinduism as either a “primitive” or a “degenerate” religion.

The “primitive” school would argue that whether Hinduism was ancient or not, it was and always had been an immoral, heretic, barbaric creed. The “degenerate” school, on the other hand, would argue that Hinduism was definitely ancient and that at some time in its past it had been more moral, even “glorious”. Of course, these two broad schools contained a range of opinions: there were those in the “primitive” school who were convinced that Hinduism was as old as the Romans, or that it had borrowed from Rome (or Greece or Egypt) and there were others who argued that it was barely older than the advent of Muslim rule, and in the “degenerate” school there were those who felt that the religion had been set back by the influence of Islam while others felt that the degeneration had been caused by stagnation of an excess of influence on the part of the Brahmins (88-89).

What is interesting about Lapierre’s introduction to Calcutta is that by likening the city to its Hindu patron deity, he renders it both primitive and degenerate. These
associations are set up, in particular, by relating the notion of human sacrifice to employment through stories of wretched workers dying on the job and desperate bystanders like Pal taking their place. After Pal’s first assignment as a temporary coolie, he learns a “harsh lesson” and realises “Since men in this inhuman city die on the job, I’ll be damned if I can’t manage one day to replace one of these dead” (28). This statement foreshadows Pal’s subsequent replacement of a rickshaw puller and his eventual death from overwork and tuberculosis. Given that TCOJ is replete with stories of migrants like Pal who take on hazardous jobs that cause their demise, labour is represented as a kind of human sacrifice. This association between Calcutta and “Kali the Terrible” is reinforced through the blood motif as Lapierre relates stories of Pal and his neighbours in the slum putting their families’ survival ahead of their own safety and welfare to earn income from unscrupulous Calcuttans. As the setting for these stories of self-sacrifice and exploitation, Calcutta is continually depicted as a barbaric and macabre temple dedicated to bloodthirsty Kali.6

Lapierre’s colonial gaze also draws a contrast between the seething poverty of contemporary Calcutta and the once-glorious British city.

Yet on what a prestigious past this metropolis, now judged inhuman by many of its inhabitants, could pride itself! From the date of its foundation in 1690 by a handful of British merchants until the departure of its last British governor on August 15, 1947, Calcutta, more than any other city in the world, epitomised the imperial dream of the white man’s domination of the globe. For nearly two centuries it has been the capital of the British-Indian Empire (32).

It is this nostalgia for the Raj which makes the city a mirage in the third sense: in the midst of its disastrous cityscape, there are indelible signs of order and glory representing its history as a prized British capital. Lapierre constructs Calcutta as the former home of English colonisers living “the imperial dream of the white man’s domination of the globe”. He attributes its “prestigious past” not to Indians but to the powerful masculine colonial regime.

Furthermore, it is the dramatic contrast between colonial and late twentieth-century Calcutta that makes the latter seem “degenerate” (32).

It was from here that until 1912 its Governor-Generals and its Viceroy's had imposed their authority on a country with a population greater than the United States of America today. Calcutta’s avenues had witnessed the passing of just

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as many parading troops and as many high society ladies in palanquins or barouches as the Champs Élysées of Paris or the London Mall. Even now, dilapidated by decades of monsoons, its public buildings, its monuments, its business centre, its beautiful residences with their baluster and colonnades still bore witness to that heritage. At the far end of the avenue along which, in 1911, George V and Queen Mary had processed in a gold-studded carriage … there rose from the heart of a thirty-acre park, the imposing 137-room building in which the Empire had lodged its Viceroy. Raj Bhavan, the royal palace, was a replica of Kedleston Hall, one of the most beautiful castles in England. The Viceroy, Lord Wellesley, had decorated its great marble drawing room with busts of the twelve Caesars. Before becoming, after Independence, the residence of the Indian governor of Bengal, Raj Bhavan had hosted festivities and celebrations of a sumptuousness beyond the wildest imagination (33).

In this passage, Lapierre’s colonial gaze actively seeks out landmarks that recall how Calcutta was once a civilised and magnificent colonial metropolis. When describing these landmarks, which “still bore witness to that heritage”, Lapierre narrates scenes of “parading troops”, “high society ladies in palanquins” and the King and Queen of England in grand procession towards Raj Bhavan, the Viceroy’s royal palace. The repeated references to Governors-General and Viceroy who “imposed their authority” on the vast Indian subcontinent not only celebrate the masculine, military prowess of the British Empire but also exalt ideologies of imperialism and their enduring influence. After describing the English sovereigns, Lapierre turns to the Viceroy, whose duty to govern India as representatives of the English Crown is explored in FAM. Raj Bhavan is not only home to the “busts of the twelve Caesars” but also the regal residence of a succession of Viceroy. This palace itself is also a reproduction: it is “a replica of Kedleston Hall, one of the most beautiful castles in England” and thus an architectural embodiment of the discursive structures of Empire (33).

Clearly, Lapierre’s construction of post-colonial Calcutta is structured through a comparison with its colonial past. He posits a dichotomy between a primitive, degenerate, Hindu-dominated and feminised city under Indian governance and a civilised, imposing capital of the British-Indian Empire. Lapierre’s reference to Lord Richard Wellesley, brother of the famed Duke of Wellington, recalls the early Viceroy and Governors-General who led massive military and political offensives to annex territories and compel India’s rulers to accept vassal status. By suggesting that these Empire-builders had aspired to make England as powerful and influential as the Roman Empire, Lapierre evokes a particular imperial ideal which became established by the
end of the nineteenth century and was very much in force by the time of the 1910
coronation of George V, the monarch named in this passage. In *Ideologies of the Raj*,
Thomas Metcalf discusses how this imperial ideal was shaped by Benjamin Disraeli’s
government during Queen Victoria’s reign. According to Metcalf, Disraeli “shifted the
focus from settlement colonies to India, from colonial self-government to Empire as a
source of national pride” so that imperial ideology took the manner of “a Roman
imperial vision”. Although it challenged “the ideals of mid-Victorian individualism and
the liberal industrial order”, this imperial vision served to differentiate England from
her European rivals. Queen Victoria’s Empire was presented as a different imperialism
to that of the “hated imperialisms of Napoleon III and the new German Empire”. The
English imperial ideal was “that of the union of Britain with its own kin, and their
descendants around the globe. It connoted loyalty and liberty, the ‘happy Englands’ of
Britain’s settler colonies, not the despotisms of continental states” (62). In addition,
India was regarded as the “Jewel in the Crown” of Queen-Empress Victoria who, like
the Mughal Emperors of the past, was recognised as South Asia’s sovereign. The cult of
Victoria became the centre of this imperial image, ornamented with countless neo-
classical marble monuments to evoke the empires of antiquity. From 1877 onwards,
every great royal occasion, culminating in the Diamond Jubilee of 1897, focused on the
Queen as a “unifying symbol of permanence and unity” (62-65).

The previous chapter discussed how *FAM* quotes Kipling’s affirmation of the
moral mandate of British imperialism. Lapierre and Collins, quoting the phrase
“dominion over palm and pine” from the poem “Recessional” written in honour of the
Diamond Jubilee, suggest that British imperialism endured after 1947 as India and
Pakistan become Dominion States within the British Commonwealth (234-235). In *TCOJ*,
Lapierre continues to depict post-independence India as an imperial subject by
illustrating Indians’ respect for their Queen-Empress. In his extended description of the
Victoria Memorial in Calcutta, the writer stresses that this marble structure was built
to symbolise the longevity and unity of her reign.

Many other no less glorious vestiges, often engulfed by the chaos of
construction and contemporary slums, bore witness to the past majesty of this
former jewel in the crown ... Of all these symbols of former glory, however,
none was more striking than the huge set piece in white marble which rose
from the far extremity of the Maidan Park. Erected with funds given by the
Indian people themselves to commemorate the sixty-three year reign of the Empress who believed she incarnated best the vocation of the white man to look after the well-being of the earth, the Victoria Memorial conserved, at the very heart of the modern urban jungle, the most fabulous collection of treasures ever assembled within the confines of a colonial epic. All the mementos were there, piously preserved for the incredulous scrutiny of present generations: statues of the Empress at all the various stages of her splendour, together with all the royal envoys who succeeded each other here; a portrait of Kipling; sabres with pommels inlaid with gold and precious stones, worn by British generals during the battles which gave India to Britain; parchments confirming these conquests; manuscript messages from Victoria conveying her affection to her “people beyond the seas” (33-34).

This passage draws upon the monument to emphasise the lasting power of British imperialism at the level of the imagination. Moreover, this imperial vision is represented as one internalised by the colonised, for this memorial was “erected with funds given by the Indian people themselves” to commemorate her long reign. Hence, the permanence and unity Lapierre sees in the cityscape represents Indians’ affirmation of the bonds of fealty to their benevolent English sovereign. Furthermore, Lapierre suggests that Indian people believed, and even welcomed, the advent of this imperial humanitarianism and its accompanying rhetoric and architectural effusions. Hence, “the colonial epic” was “glorious” not just because of the bejewelled artefacts “confirming” the white man’s “conquests” of Indian territory, or documents conveying Queen Victoria’s affection to “her people beyond the seas”. It was “glorious”, Lapierre suggests, because the Indian people themselves erected this shrine to the Queen-Empress to express their respect and affection for her. Since “the very heart of the modern urban jungle of Calcutta” still beats for Queen Victoria, Lapierre’s description of this memorial reimagines the colonial encounter and Indian fealty as a kind of romance.

The previous chapter cited Sara Suleri’s suggestion that European texts writing about India were symptomatic of a certain colonial anxiety concerning the unreadability and unpredictability of its peoples and cultures. In The Rhetoric of English India, Suleri argues that such fears were mitigated by transmuting the seemingly unreadable differences of India/Indians into a fetishised “intransigence”. Thus it is the enduring image of the intransigent Indian that informs FAM’s vilification of Jinnah, the leader of the Muslim League. On representations of differences between the Orient
and European countries and cultures, especially in nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian writing, Suleri argues that

the structure of national difference is transcribed into a literary genre most attuned to the necessities of absence. “India” becomes the absent point towards which nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian narrative may lean but which it may never possess, causing both national and cultural identities to disappear in the emptiness of a representational mirage (11).

In addition, when nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian narratives negotiate between “the idioms of empire and the idioms of nation” they fall back on the mystifications of romantic sentiment. That is, they “decode the colonised territory through the conventions of romance, reorganising the materiality of colonialism into a narrative of perpetual longing and perpetual loss” (10). In TCOJ, Lapiere follows this tradition by remembering Calcutta as a former colonial capital marked by priceless monuments and artefacts that metaphorically narrate this perpetual longing and loss. While a benevolent Queen Victoria expresses affection for her “people beyond the seas”, this fondness is reciprocated by Indians who venerate her regal image and her humanitarian ideals. In this we can see that Lapiere remains consistent with nineteenth-century literary representations of the Anglo-Indian “romance” outlined by Suleri. Moreover, by highlighting that various mementoes of the “colonial epic” have been “piously preserved for the incredulous scrutiny of present generations”, Lapiere depicts the Victoria Memorial as a site of negotiation between Calcutta’s once powerful “idiom of empire” and the impoverished, degenerate “idiom of nation” in the 1970s and 1980s. The writer uses the phrase “incredulous scrutiny” to emphasise how the loss of “the materiality of colonialism” would later be so seemingly total that it is scarcely believable to the people of the independent Calcutta (34).

This description of the Victoria Memorial as a key sign of the “mirage” of colonial Calcutta is immediately followed by a lengthy reconstruction of the “supremely easy and pleasurable lifestyle” the city once offered to its colonial masters (34). Metaphors of romance dominate this recollection of the city once known as “The Paris of the East”: for “nearly half a century, the most sought-after rendezvous amongst ... privileged ladies was with Messieurs Malvaist and Siret, two famous French hairstylists whom an astute financier had brought over from Paris”; in the city’s Garden of Eden, “one viceroy, in love with Oriental architecture, had had a pagoda transported
plank by plank, from the lofty plateaus of Burma”; Firpos, an Italian restaurant regarded as the “Maxims’ of the Orient”, had built a dance floor which “formed the cradle of romance for the last generation of white men in Asia” (34-36). These descriptions, which liken the white man’s domination of India to a romance between Europe and the Orient, also highlight the finite, historical end of this love. Collectively, they posit India as an alluring land to which Europeans had flocked but failed to possess, reinforcing the idea of India’s fundamental unreadability and elusiveness. This ineffability constitutes the “representational mirage” of India that Suleri sees in nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian narratives.

These constructions of Europeans romancing India/Asia/the Orient may appear to contradict Lapierre’s earlier mention of “the battles which gave India to Britain” and the Memorial’s display of “the parchments confirming these conquests”. Although such references clearly point to the violent acquisitions behind the formation of British India, Lapierre also highlights preserved images of royal envoys and Kipling, the famous advocate of Empire and the white man’s burden, to evoke the ideology of trusteeship which rhetorically justifies imperialism and colonialism. While trusteeship is affirmed by Indian leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru in FAM, the writer’s construction of TCOJ’s setting suggests that Britain’s paternalistic rule is affirmed and cherished by “the Indian people themselves” (33-34). Moreover, the word “piously” implies Indians’ veneration of Queen Victoria. This further supports the ideology of trusteeship which entails the spread of Christianity and Christian morals. Given the earlier references to Kali worship, this word can also be taken to suggest that the cult of Victoria historically rivalled the cult of Kali. This idea that the people of colonial Calcutta were receptive to Christian civilising influence helps Lapierre subtly set the scene for Kovalski’s missionary humanitarianism.

This nostalgic view of the British Empire in TCOJ extends to the basic topography of the city, at least in the way that it is represented in official discourse. In Representing Calcutta: Modernity, Nationalism and the Colonial Uncanny, Swati Chattopadhyay explains how the “standard urban history” of Calcutta often makes colonial buildings and monuments markers of an imperial domain and history to illustrate how it flourished as a British city (9). Historically, Calcutta was organised as a city with a “white” centre and “black periphery”: the British were based at the heart of
the metropolis in and around Fort William, surrounded by “native” towns and shanties which were organised along caste and occupational lines. An understanding of this centre-periphery cityscape reveals the vantage points from which historians, scholars and administrators traditionally represented Calcutta. In particular, imperial and colonial writers, such as Brigade-Surgeon Henry Elmsley Busteed, author of *Echoes from Old Calcutta* (1882) and British politician, administrator and barrister H.E.A. Cotton’s *Calcutta: Old and New* (1907), tended to narrate from the point-of-view of the European standing within the confines of the “white” centre. Lapierre, by locating the Victorian Memorial at the “very heart of the urban jungle”, perpetuates this imperial view of the cityscape.

The significance of Calcutta’s “white” urban centre is emphasised by Lapierre in his description of Fort William as “one of the most impressive citadels ever constructed by man” and as the “cradle for Calcutta and for the British conquest of its enormous empire in Asia” (35). These phrases, especially the word “cradle”, suggest again that Britain’s imperial dominion of Asia was a civilising rule. More importantly, Calcutta is defined as a British creation; the importance of its history is anchored to the momentous beginning of the English civilising mission in the whole of Asia. Such descriptions also recall what Chattopadhyay describes as an established “narrative of heroic British efforts to build a city in the marshes of Bengal, in the face of native hostility, amid festering jungles and tropical heat” (7).

Against this narrative of British heroism and imperial humanitarianism, Moorhouse argues in his historical study *Calcutta* that “there is an indictment of the British to be made out of the relative living and other conditions in Calcutta”. Moorhouse quotes Lord Curzon, India’s former Viceroy and Governor-General, who famously praised the city in a speech to Calcutta’s businessmen in 1903.

To me, Calcutta is the capital, not merely of the province, great as that province is, but of the Indian Empire. As such, it appears to me fitly to symbolise the work that the English have done, and are doing, in this country. ... Calcutta, is in reality a European city set down on Asiatic soil, and ... it is a monument — in my opinion one of the most striking monuments, for it is the second city to London in the entire British Empire — to the energy and achievements of our race (283).

While Curzon depicts colonial rule as beneficial and progressive in India, emblematic of the might of the British Empire and the English race, Moorhouse stresses that the
Viceroy’s praise for Calcutta’s imperial elegance and cosmopolitanism was predicated on an “indifference and incomprehension” towards the “relative living and other conditions of the native population”. This includes workers who laboured in conditions often “indistinguishable from slavery” and poor, squalid housing in non-European parts of the city (282). Jan Morris and Simon Winchester, in Stones of Empire: The Buildings of the Raj, have similarly argued that “almost until the end of the Raj, British Calcutta managed to insulate itself from this reality” though there were Englishmen who recognised the “horror and injustice” of “laissez-faire civic planning”. According to these writers, “laissez-faire” is one of the Victorian Empire’s closest approximations to an ideology: if the starving millions of Ireland, during the 1847 famine, were to be left to the mercies of the market economy, the Indians who flocked in search of livelihood to the great emporium of Calcutta must arrange their own social affairs (209-210).

Although Moorhouse’s Calcutta is singled out in TCOJ’s “Acknowledgments” as “a book that was especially informative about Calcutta’s past”, the writer’s historical account appears to show the same “indifference” to the plight of natives under British rule (520). Lapierre clearly glorifies monuments in “British Calcutta” and the white man’s burden. More importantly, he does not discuss the role historically played by the colonial government in the growth of slums, mills, factories and shanty towns in “Indian Calcutta” as well as the tragic Bengal Famine of 1943 which led to the “three and a half million” deaths recounted in TCOJ’s introduction to Calcutta (30).7 Distancing the colonial government from the region’s misfortunes and tragedies, according to Hutnyk’s analysis of TCOJ, is one of the ways Lapierre’s second text on India “further lionises the Raj”. He critiques Lapierre’s representations of Calcutta’s woes, including its “dreadful famines, partition and war, without mentioning the responsibilities of the British in these matters” (95).

On the cityscape and history of post-colonial Calcutta, Lapierre highlights how natural disasters, and conflicts such as the Indo-Pakistan Wars, brought waves of refugees and “transformed Calcutta into an enormous concentration of humanity”.

In a few years, the city was to condemn its ten million inhabitants to living on less than twelve square feet of space per person, while the four or five million of them who squeezed into its slums had sometimes to make do with barely three square feet each. Consequently, Calcutta had become one of the biggest
urban disasters in the world ... a city consumed with decay ... With their crumbling facades, tottering roofs, and walls eaten up with tropical vegetation, some neighbourhoods look as if they had just been bombed. A rash of posters, publicity and political slogans, and advertisement billboards painted on the walls, defied all efforts at renovation ... In the absence of an adequate garbage collection service, eighteen hundred tonnes of refuse accumulated daily in the streets, attracting a host of flies, mosquitoes, rats, cockroaches and other creatures (31).

Such descriptions, again, distance the colonial regime from the problems of 1970s and 1980s Calcutta: its urban disaster is attributed to post-independence crises which led to overpopulation. Unlike the cosmopolitan and proud Empire-building settlers of the colonial era, the residents of independent Calcutta are associated with tropes of death, filth and disease tied to the Orient.

In summer the proliferation of filth brought with it the risk of epidemics. Not so very long ago it was still a common occurrence for people to die of cholera, hepatitis, encephalitis, typhoid, and rabies. Articles and reports in the local press never ceased denouncing the city as a refuse dump poisoned with fumes, nauseating gases and discharges – a devastated landscape of broken roads, leaking sewers, burst water pipes and torn down telephone wires. In short, Calcutta was a “dying city” (31).

This description compares the smell of refuse in Calcutta to the “fumes” and “discharges” of a decomposing corpse. The city’s broken networks of “roads”, “sewers”, “water pipes” and “telephone wires” are likened to blood vessels and other networks linking up the human body. Apart from the faded grandeur of the colonial monuments, Lapierre reduces the cityscape more generally to a helpless, diseased and dying Indian body.

According to David Spurr in *The Rhetoric of Empire*, classic colonial discourse highlights the body because it is the trope “most proper to the primitive, the sign by which the primitive is represented”.

The body rather than speech, law or history, is the essential defining characteristic of primitive peoples. They live, according to this view, in their bodies and in natural space, but not in a body politic worthy of the name nor in meaningful historical time (22).

While independent Calcutta does bear signs of a body politic – “a rash of posters, publicity and political slogans, and advertisement billboards” – what Lapierre highlights is the decaying and devastated cityscape which mirrors the primitive state of
its population. This idea that the Indians were not ready for sovereignty when the British transferred power constitutes one of the political crises in FAM. Since TCOJ’s narrations of the cityscape reduce independent Calcutta to the rotting corpse of a once glorious imperial capital, Lapierre suggests that the only meaningful history worth elaborating upon is that of the colonial period. This text affirms, again, FAM’s construction of the Indian nation as a failed polity. It implies that the end of colonialism spelt the end of what Spurr terms “meaningful historical time” for Calcutta and the start of its degeneration: the “mirage” of this city can be surveyed and pitied but it is not explicable in terms of speech, law or history. Lapierre likens the degeneration of Calcutta to a sick and dying Indian body captioned only by its own graffiti – bleak slogans on walls that proclaim “Here there is no more hope” and “All that is left is anger” (32).

The Rural-Urban Migrant

Having resurrecting colonial tropes of diseased, dying Indians and the rhetoric of imperial humanitarianism in the beginning of TCOJ, Lapierre sets the scene for humanitarian encounters between the two protagonists. Before Pal and Kovalski meet, however, the writer emphasises that the Indian and other rural-urban migrants are victims of misfortune and injustice who deserve assistance. This section discusses how Lapierre differentiates between Calcuttans and the migrants who constitute the city’s poorest inhabitants. It also explores the construction of Pal’s exemplary qualities and illustrates how he is assisted by Kovalski and other members of his aid committee.

TCOJ opens with descriptions of Pal’s family in their ancestral village in West Bengal.

Hasari’s wife, Kamala, blew into a conch shell to greet the goddess of the night. One of her sisters-in-law rang a small bell to chase away the evil spirits, especially those who lived in the hundred year-old Banyan tree at the end of the road. ... Then his mother performed a ritual as ancient as India itself – she filled the oil in the lamp which burned before polychrome pictures of the tutelary gods: Rama and his wife Sita, goddess of the fruits of the earth; Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity seated on a lotus blossom; and Ganesh, the elephant-headed god of good fortune. Two other pictures, discoloured by the
years, showed the childlike face of Krishna, greedily swallowing a bowl of butter, a popular representation of the Cowherd god most dearly loved by the Hindu people; and the Monkey god, Hanuman, a legendary hero of some of the most prodigious adventures of Indian mythology (5).

This description clearly locates Pal’s family within a rural farming society ordered by timeless Hindu traditions and way of life. The deities they worship show this family’s aspirations towards plentiful harvests, prosperity, good fortune – desires that are shown to be continually frustrated by the cruel climate and oppressive socioeconomic structures in their village. In the early chapters of TCOJ, Lapierre depicts these agriculturalists existing at the bottom rung of a rigidly stratified caste system and how they are continually victimised by other castes. They are forced into paying the village Brahmin to conduct pujas for rain. They mortgage their land and the proceeds of future harvests to the village usurer to pay for seeds and, later, water pumps when monsoon rains fail to come. They then have to borrow more money to pay for Pal’s sister’s wedding. Consequently, the Pals decline from prosperous farmers to sharecroppers, and finally, to a starving and unemployed family seeking better prospects in Calcutta. Like Padmini Nadar, the Indian protagonist of It Was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal (2001) who moves from the countryside to a bustee (slum) in Bhopal, Pal’s family are

victims of that endemic phenomenon known to economists as the cycle of poverty – the unavoidable process of descending along the social ladder by which the farmer became a sharecropper, then a peasant without land, then an agricultural labourer, then, eventually forced into exile (8).

This 1984 text’s definition of poverty appeals not to classical liberalism’s belief that individuals are ultimately responsible for their poverty – the ideological foundation for laisse-faire policies – but to postwar Keynesian and neo-Marxist economics which highlight poverty as the involuntary outcome of unemployment caused by macroeconomic forces. In Empire of Humanity, Barnett argues that the age of neo-humanitarianism was dominated by Keynesian economic thought which, because of the global depression of the 1930s, put moral obligations on the state to be the caretaker of its citizens and institute policies to protect their welfare during economic downturns.

This ideology of morally-responsible economic governance, in turn, contributed to the discourse of development which united governments, non-governmental
organisations (NGOs) and international bodies in assisting the decolonising global South. But also, as Barnett points out, wealthier donor states tied development to security interests during the Cold War era, when there was a fear that starvation and desperation would drive people of the so-called “underdeveloped” countries to communism (99-100). Thus, by framing the Indian protagonist’s plight in terms of neo-humanitarian economic definitions of poverty, he is cast as the victim of drought and inept economic governance by the Bengal state.

The neoliberal fear of poverty-stricken states becoming fertile breeding grounds for communism is later affirmed by Lapierre when he describes Calcutta upon the Pals’ arrival in the city. Noting that “seven out of ten families had to survive on no more than one or two rupees a day, a sum that was not even enough to buy a pound of rice”, the writer concludes

Calcutta was indeed that ‘inhuman city’ where the Pals ... discovered people could die on pavements surrounded by apparent indifference. It was also a powder flask of violence and anarchy, where the masses were to turn one day to the saving myth of communism. To hunger and communal conflicts must be added one of the world’s most unbearable climates. Torrid for eight months of the year, the heat melted the asphalt on the roads and expanded the metal structure of the Howrah Bridge to such an extent that it measured four feet more by day than by night (32).

This observation foreshadows the 1977 electoral victory of the Left Front and its formation of a communist West Bengal government between 1977 and 2011. It not only validates neoliberal constructions of the imagined threat posed by poor people in the global South but also recalls the colonial fears of Indian alterity and communalism highlighted by Lapierre and Collins in FAM. Furthermore, it appeals to the colonial construct of a treacherous Indian climate, which is shown to condemn Pal and many other drought-stricken Bengali peasants to eventual exile in Calcutta.

Besides natural disasters, Lapierre’s account suggests that Pals are trapped in the cycle of poverty as they are oppressed by Hindus of other castes. This oppression is depicted in the text through a series of victim-exploiter relationships. In Bodies for Sale: Ethics and Exploitation in the Human Body Trade, Stephen Wilkinson discusses how the concept of “exploitation” has moral and non-moral uses. The verb “exploit” in general means “to use, to take advantage of, to not waste”. One can thus speak of “exploiting” a resource, an opportunity, even someone’s physical body and talents, without
expressing or implying moral judgement. In order for exploitation to be associated with immorality, Wilkinson proposes that it usually involves wrongful use – generally of people – in a context without “other (sufficiently strong) countervailing moral considerations” (12). Such distinctions about the meaning of “exploitation” explain why TCOJ consistently highlights the greed of secondary characters who exploit Pal’s desperation, and often his body, in ways that are immoral. Such characters include zamindars who bribe judges to seize the Pals’ land and Brahmins who make them pay exorbitant fees to pray for rain and calculate marriage horoscopes. Later in the narrative, the medical staff at Calcutta’s blood banks empty Pal “like a goatskin bottle” when he sells blood (58). These Indians are depicted as nameless scheming figures with no empathy or compassion. In addition, Lapierre represents Pal and other peasants as determined individuals with strong moral reasons for volunteering to exploit their bodies or resources. Because of their simple nature and unexpected misfortune, they fall prey to cruelty, deceit, corruption or physical harm.

The ultimate sacrifice Pal makes to raise money for Amrita’s marriage is to sell his skeleton for five hundred rupees. A terminally-ill man’s decision to let his bones be sold to overseas medical institutions to help his daughter can be viewed as a practical decision to exploit the fact of his impending death and this financial opportunity. In order to represent this decision as the immoral exploitation of a poor and dying man, Lapierre offers a lengthy exposition on his recruiters who are Doms, members of “an extremely low caste” also “looked upon as footpads, pillagers of corpses” because they often steal bones from Christian and Muslim cemeteries and hospital mortuaries. These “traffickers” provide the stock for “a singular trade that made India the prime exporter of human bones in the world”, an “extremely lucrative business” centred in Calcutta. Having highlighted that Doms are thieves who violate the dignity of the dead, the writer asserts that they are immoral in the way they regard the dying poor.

The idea of buying a man while he was still walking about, in much the same way you might purchase an animal for slaughter, in order to secure the right to dispose of his bones when he died, was as diabolical as it was ingenious. It made it possible to accumulate unlimited stock for there was certainly no shortage of poor moribund people in Calcutta (432).
The book’s condemnation of this practice continues the pattern by which Calcutta is shown to be an “inhuman” city. This view is endorsed by Pal, who states: “Even a fellow with his back against the fall doesn’t just sell his body like a piece of khadi” (432).

The immorality of this exploitation is later illustrated from religious perspectives when he debates whether to honour his sacred duty as a Hindu parent to marry off his daughter, or adhere to the Hindu tradition of being cremated with an intact body for his soul to incarnate. When Pal confides in Kovalski, Lapierre notes that “the Christian idea of resurrection implied the existence of an intact body to take its place alongside its Creator in its original state of wholeness”. Since “years of living in the poverty of a slum, however, have led Kovalski to accept occasionally compromises between the ideals of faith and the imperatives of survival”, the priest beckons to Amrita and “reluctantly” advises his neighbour to “take this opportunity to further the completion of your mission here below” (433). This conversation clearly depicts Pal’s decision as the sacrifice of his soul’s incarnation/resurrection according to Hindu and Christian beliefs, so he can ensure his daughter’s marriage before dying. When Pal later coughs up “a jet of foaming blood” and dies in Kovalski’s arms on Amrita’s wedding night, it is the missionary who resuscitates him long enough to hear the Hindu’s last words entrusting his wife and sons to Kovalski’s care. The priest also recites prayers over Pal’s dead body and reverently envelopes it in a white khadi shroud before it is claimed by Doms. In this way, the text suggests that although Pal did not get a traditional Hindu cremation, this is symbolically mitigated by the last rites lovingly administered by his Christian neighbour. Given that Kovalski prays by a picture of the Shroud of Turin, the white shroud he uses for Pal’s body functions as a metaphor which likens the Hindu’s self-sacrifice to Christ’s martyrdom.

Indeed, the Christian protagonist is represented as the only holy man who cares for Pal and his family. Kovalski’s interaction with Pal is represented as a series of events where the priest intercedes to help him deal with Hindu exploiters such as the Brahmin officiating at his daughter’s wedding. He also offers Pal free medical care and counsels him. Their friendship highlights how Christianity and Christian humanitarians are represented as salvific forces assisting the Indian poor who are oppressed by others in the caste system. Lapierre’s exceedingly negative portrayal of Hinduism, developed through the opposition between Kovalski’s Christian compassion and the
immorality of Pal’s Hindu exploiters, recalls the Hindu-Christian binarisms propagated by imperial humanitarians. Scholars like Amal Chatterjee and Barnett, as well as Brian Stanley in *The Bible and the Flag* (1990), describe how British colonisers, missionaries and abolitionists historically condemned Hinduism as an idolatrous religious system which promoted inhumanity, moral degradation and fostered a multitude of cruelties including *suttee* and infanticide. Stanley, in particular, has emphasised that the caste system was regarded as an inhumane regime that appeared to inculcate social divisiveness and racial hatred. He also discusses how it was seen by Christian Europeans as a clear sign of Indians’ primitiveness and barbarism to justify the colonisers’ civilising mission (104). While *FAM* makes reference to *suttee*, and attributes Hindu-Muslim conflict to the fact that Hindus distance themselves from Muslims because many of them are descendants of Untouchables who had converted to Islam, *TCOJ* dwells on the victimisation of peasants and rural-urban migrants by other Hindus.

The immoral exploitation and endemic discrimination traditionally fostered by the caste system is shown to be something which infects modern India’s government and economy. Besides corrupt judges, unscrupulous blood banks and the export of stolen skeletons, Lapierre depicts Calcutta’s transport system as an example of immoral and systemic exploitation. According to the writer, the rickshaw is one of the most potent symbols of Calcutta’s highly divided society and its oppression of the poor. This mode of transport is salient particularly because of its ties to the colonial past.

All the cities of the former colonial world have banished them from their roads, as one of the most degrading aspects of man’s exploitation of his fellow man. All, except Calcutta, where even today some hundred thousand slave horses harnessed to their rickshaws run up more miles per day than the thirty Boeings and Airbuses of the Indian Airlines, India’s domestic airline (101).

While this description clearly associates British colonialism with the immoral exploitation of natives, the phrase “the former colonial world” implicates all other colonies and colonial governments to downplay the British colonisers’ role in the historical growth of this trade in Calcutta.

More importantly, the writer also associates this trade with refugees and migrants, stating that “for many former peasants among the millions of men who had sought refuge in Calcutta since Independence”, rickshaws have “provided a
providential means of earning a living”. Despite the official cap on the number of licensed vehicles in Calcutta, the writer states that there are at least fifty thousand legal and illegally operating rickshaws (102). Clearly, by asserting that rickshaws are colonial symbols of degradation and exploitation, and that many rickshaw wallahs are disenfranchised peasants and new migrants, Lapierre criticises the people of Calcutta for treating the poor like “slave horses”. As the writer also dwells on the rampant government corruption and bribery tied to the illegal rickshaw trade, he indicts the city’s officials, transport ministry and police forces in the exploitation of rickshaw wallahs. He implies, again, that the real urban disaster of Calcutta is not overpopulation but rather the systemic cruelty and discrimination directed at the refugees and migrants who are its poorest residents. Similar to FAM, which portrays nationalism having gone awry so as to condemn Indian violence and morally justify Mountbatten’s trusteeship, TCOJ depicts the city’s modernity as something skewed to condemn the cruelty of Calcutta’s governance, economy and society. In this, it appeals to a well-established narrative which depicts the city as a cautionary tale for other post-colonial states. Chattopadhyay describes how the urbanisation of Calcutta is often depicted as a vision of failed modernity, and how its name has become “a by-word for underdevelopment” – it serves as “a convenient case for demonstrating that some Third World ex-colonial cities avoided its unsightly fate” (2).

Since the urban poor are disenfranchised, TCOJ implies the urgent need for foreign aid. Through the relationship between Pal and Kovalski, Lapierre illustrates how the provision of simple medical care can make a great impact. After Pal confides in the priest that he “cannot die” before earning enough money for his daughter’s dowry, the Pole assigns him to Loeb, the American medical student who helps him with the medical dispensary in the slum. According to Lapierre, the effect of antibiotics and vitamins “on a virgin metabolism, totally unaccustomed to medicines, was spectacular”.

The attacks of coughing became less frequent and he recovered enough strength to start pulling his carriage again in the humid heat of the weeks that preceded the monsoon. The imminent arrival of the annual deluge enhanced his prospects of increased income since rickshaws were the only vehicles that could get about the flooded streets of Calcutta (429).
Given that Pal’s family is bankrupted at the beginning of the text partly because of monsoon rains that failed to come, the advent of Calcutta’s monsoon season towards the end of his life is represented as a particularly poignant event. As Pal explains:

What a joy it was to survey the spectacle of disaster presented by the proud double-decker buses of Calcutta, the blue-and-white street cars, the Sadarji Sikhs’ arrogant yellow taxis, and the privately owned Ambassador cars with their uniformed drivers. With their engines flooded, their chassis up to the doors in mud, abandoned by their passengers, deserted by their crews, they looked like wreckage from the boats on the banks of the Hooghly. What a glorious opportunity we had been given at last to avenge the brutality we had taken from the drivers and all the humiliating haggling the clients had inflicted on us. For once we could ask for the fares our efforts warranted. Our carts with high wheels and our legs were the only vehicles that could get about the flooded streets. To my dying day, I shall hear the desperate appeals of people wanting me to carry them in my rickshaw. All of a sudden, I had ceased to be a despised, insulted animal, whose sides people pummeled with their feet to make me go faster, and from whom people lopped ten or twenty paisas off the agreed price once they reached their destination. Now people fought with each other, offered two, three or even four times the usual price just to be able to sit on the drenched seat of the only boats still afloat on the sea of Calcutta (462).

Pal’s recollection suggests that Calcutta’s transport system functions like an oppressive caste system. This highlights, again, the city’s divisive society and endemic antipathy to its most marginalised residents. Hence, the ascendance of the city’s “human horses” during the monsoon season is remembered, without hyperbole, by terminally ill Pal who states: “To my dying day, I shall hear the desperate appeals of people wanting me to carry them in my rickshaw” (462).

While Kovalski and Loeb’s medical assistance played a large role in Pal’s triumph, it is important to note that both foreigners limit their aid to medicine and counsel: they do not give him money, directly condemn the caste system, or lobby against the rickshaw operators and corrupt government officials. Unlike humanitarians of the imperial era, these two foreigners and the aid workers they train do not agitate for political or social reform. Appealing to the apolitical ideals Barnett identifies with the age of neo-humanitarianism, Lapierre suggests that the white man’s burden in post-colonial Calcutta is not about intervening in its politics. Through Kovalski’s trials with communist government officials in Bengal, he depicts how aid workers need to maintain their apolitical stance and respect state sovereignty given the geopolitics of this time. Following references to violent confrontations and beheadings of landlords
after “the leftist government took power” and then “invited landless peasants to take possession of the properties of the zamindars” (203-204), Lapierre describes how Kovalski is interrogated by the Bengali police. To them, foreigners seeking residents’ permits may well be agents of America’s Central Intelligence Agency (211). As a result, the priest’s permit and subsequent citizenship application take years to be approved (508). Lapierre’s characterisation of Kovalski and Loeb as apolitical figures in this 1985 text thus appeals to the neo-humanitarian ideal that humanitarians should adhere to the principles of impartiality, independence, neutrality and humanity.

Moreover, Lapierre’s representation of Kovalski and the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid suggests that they are confronting inequality, poverty and disease by helping Indians meet their most urgent needs and “take charge of themselves” (165). When Loeb’s father Arthur springs a surprise visit to the slum, he is taken aback by “all the pitted faces, the skeletal babies in their mothers’ arms, the protruding chests of tuberculosis sufferers coughing and spitting as they waited for their consultation” with his son (415-416). The wealthy American surgeon later offers to buy up Pilkhana, “raze it to the ground, rebuild it anew with running water, provide the whole lot with drains, electricity … and give the residents their homes as a present” (418). He changes his mind later when his son, sadly, tells him Kovalski’s stance that “our help serves only to make people more dependent unless it is supported with actions designed to wipe out the actual roots of poverty” (419). Moreover, the medical student states emphatically his view

I’ve come to learn the validity of a strange reality here … In a slum an exploiter is better than a Santa Claus. An exploiter forces you to react, whereas a Santa Claus demobilises you (419-420).

Through the young man’s words, Lapierre suggests to the implied European and North American reader that humanitarians should refrain from paternalistic approaches that deny and erode the recipients’ agency. While TCOJ offers many examples of Kovalski, Loeb and their volunteers giving life-saving aid, particularly to the weak, the infirm and the young, the text also depicts these humanitarians and aid workers striving to help the slum community in ways that empower them to decide what projects can best help them address their poverty. In line with Kovalski’s view that Jesus’ rebellion “against the injustices that repress the poor and the weak” does not advocate violence
– he tells his police interrogators that it had been nothing like the revolution sought by
the murderous communist Naxalites in Bengal – Lapierre shows the missionary and his
committee empowering their neighbours to change with love instead of brute
domination (209). The writer dwells on the fact that Kovalski’s team first conducts a
survey to determine what the slum community sees as their most urgent need. This
turns out to be a night school set up for children as many of them work during the day
to help support their families. According to Lapierre, it “was not their living conditions
that they wanted to change”. The “sustenance they sought was not directed at their
children’s frail bodies but their minds”, so that they will learn how to read and write
(165).

This example and other instances of resident-initiated aid and development
projects in TCOJ collectively appeal to the concept of participation which originated in
development discourse during the 1980s. In the field of development, scholars such as
Robert Chambers in his well-known Rural Development: Putting the Last First (1983)
and Aram Ziai in Development Discourse and Global History (2016) have discussed how
this concept supports the rejection of top-down development approaches: agencies
should let people decide what kind of development and aid projects are best for them.
According to Ziai, this concept directly opposes the ideology of trusteeship which
assumes the universal superiority of expert knowledge from the global North, and that
only these external experts are competent enough to decide on behalf of the
recipients. While in practice, the concept of participation is “often fraught with
ambiguity and contradiction” in development policies, it has rhetorically helped
representatives in recipient countries complain against donor-driven development
policies and top-down decision-making processes (78). In TCOJ, this appeal to the
ideology of participation helps explain why Kovalski and his helpers are so popular
amongst the slum community, who initially does not believe that “there are actually
people willingly to listen to the poor”. According to Lapierre, the idea of seeking
consensus and feedback from the poor on their needs is “so revolutionary” that the
priest decides to christen “his little team the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid” in
honour of this approach (165).

It is evident that Pal’s victorious season against all the other brutal drivers and
cruel passengers in the urban jungle is only partly attributed to the medical care he
receives from Kovalski’s committee. While the fortification of his strength – which enables this human horse to triumphantly power through the monsoon rains and redress the injustices he has endured – literally illustrates the younger Loeb’s view that aid workers should mobilise the poor, this triumph also serves as a testament to Pal’s determination, resourcefulness and self-sacrificing love for his family. Given that Pal’s family only moves to the slum and meets Kovalski in the final quarter of TCOJ, the majority of this text chronicles their evolution from homeless beggars, foragers and odd job labourers to a family living in “a four-star compound where slum houses were built of mud and bricks, and topped with proper roofs” with regular income from Pal’s job as a rickshaw wallah (413-414). In spite of his simple character, poverty and tragic demise, Pal’s story is one of resilience, heroism and undeterred agency. Like several other characters, this protagonist illustrates how many disenfranchised rural-urban migrants do not fatalistically accept their low caste, social status and poverty. They work hard to exploit all avenues available to them to survive, and thrive, in spite of the misfortune, discrimination and exploitation they face. In addition, there are other migrant characters whose lives constitute tales of rags-to-riches, such as Son of Miracle, Pal’s generous taxi driver friend and Bipin Narendra, the owner of the largest fleet of rickshaws in the city.

In the Afterword, Lapierre states that he wrote TCOJ because “this wretched inhuman slum” is also “one of the most extraordinary places on our planet”. His desire was to tell an epic of “heroism, love and faith, a glorious tribute to the human capacity to beat adversity and survive every possible tragedy (420). By appealing to colonial images of a Kali-esque Calcutta and an oppressive caste system, the writer posits Pilkhana and its residents as the moral “Other” to an inhuman metropolis where the inequalities and exploitation entrenched in India’s highly stratified society are heightened by a ruthlessly competitive and mercantile population. Furthermore, by suggesting that these pariahs in Calcutta embody the most aspirational qualities of humanity, Lapierre posits them as the moral “Other” to all of humankind. While violence and tragedy in FAM are predicated on the inhumanity of backward and communal-crazed South Asians, TCOJ’s justification for humanitarian action praises the Indian beneficiaries’ exemplary values.
The Missionary in the Slum

In *Slumdog Phenomenon: A Critical Anthology*, Mitu Sengupta’s essay “A Million Dollar Exit from the Slum World: *Slumdog Millionaire*’s Troubling Formula for Social Justice” discusses the notable disparity between Indian politicians’ responses to this 2008 film and the 1992 film *City of Joy*. While “Jai Ho”, the former’s globally popular theme song was adapted by the Congress Party as its campaign anthem for the May 2009 national elections, the latter had been “summarily condemned by West Bengal’s Minister of Information, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, who thundered that it ‘smack[ed] of apartheid’ and was an ‘insult to every self-respecting Indian.’” In addition, while Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan’s adaptation of Vikas Swarup’s *Q & A* was well-received by the Indian public, Roland Joffé’s adaptation of Lapierre’s *TCOJ* had been beset with problems even during the production process. Besides the disapproval of the Bengal state government, it was filmed under extraordinarily trying circumstances with unforeseen delays such as riots and invasions of the set. According to Sengupta, one reason for this disparity is that Joffé’s representation of slum poverty in Calcutta, “with its blunt dialogue and caricatured vision of the native”, is “reminiscent of dated ‘white saviour’ films such as David Lean’s epic, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962)”. While the slum settings in both films constitute “an anarchic wasteland untouched by formal authority, devoid of functioning governing structures, and bereft of expressions of political agency and community power”, *City of Joy* can offend many Indian viewers because it “easily fits into the grammar of imperialism”. The Irish nun Joan Bethel—the film’s feminised version of Kovalski—tells American surgeon Max Lowe: “In the beginning it was really frustrating trying to convince them not to be so bloody passive … then I realised I was fighting a thousand years of passive acceptance”. It is up to Lowe to shake “Pal out of his complacency, awakening him to the spirit of enterprise” so that by the end of the film he can afford an extravagant wedding for his daughter. Moreover, Sengupta notes how the doctor-turned-social worker also intends to kindle a spirit of cooperation among the slum dwellers (“I’m just here to get you organised”), and to teach the locals to “stand up” (he scolds the rickshaw puller Hasari for being a “little brown illiterate gutless victim” when Hasari buckles under pressure from the slum’s gangsters). Towards the end of the film, Hasari tells Max, “I’m glad you came to my country … you made feel things I have never felt before” (82-83).
This introduction to the cinematic adaptation of *TCOJ* draws out some key differences between Lapierre’s text and the film it inspired. The Pal of the film is a rather more insipid version of the Pal in Lapierre’s text, stripped of the unyielding determination, resourcefulness and agency which characterise his literary counterpart. The relationships between Pal and the white humanitarians in the film also recall the dynamic between *FAM*’s overtly paternalistic Mountbatten and Nehru, his infantilised imperial ward. This section discusses how *TCOJ*’s representations of the relationships between white humanitarians and their neighbours in Pilkhana depart from this dynamic. Lapierre not only represents a strong spirit of cooperation amongst the slum residents but also constructs an imagined slum community that is remarkably compassionate and glued together by the solidarity of suffering. In addition, the white man’s romance with India is reimagined as the missionary’s worship of the poor who teach the rest of the world how to face hardship and injustice. Despite these affirmations of the poor’s virtues, however, Lapierre still perpetuates essentialised differences between the white man and his Indian neighbours in his representations of medical aid. Indian bodies are seen through Kovalski and Loeb’s gazes as abject, diseased or malnourished subhumans, appealing to the colonial and Orientalist stereotypes common to humanitarian narratives.

In *Humanitarian Reason*, Fassin highlights that moral sentiments legitimise discourses and practices centred on the disadvantaged and the dominated, and that solidarity is one of the key moral sentiments. Without feeling solidarity with our fellow human beings, we will not be compelled to help others. Yet, this is at odds with the moral sentiment of compassion. Compassion is based on recognising the inequalities between people: it involves marking out differences and making judgements on those deemed to be poorer, more unfortunate and more vulnerable than us. This tension between compassion and solidarity is inherent in humanitarianism. It explains the frequently observed ambivalence of donors and accounts for what is known as “compassion fatigue” – the wearing down of moral sentiments until they turn to indifference, or even aggression, towards victims of misfortune. It also explains the shame felt by the poor, the beneficiaries of aid, and accounts for the resentment and hostility expressed toward those who regard themselves as “benefactors” (3).
Certainly, Lapierre propagates colonial Christian-Hindu binaries in his representations of immoral Brahmins and the compassionate Kovalski. Yet, while he highlights how Kovalski offers life-saving aid through the medical dispensary and mobile clinic, the writer also depicts Indians offering emergency assistance to the priest. For example, shortly after the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid is formed, Kovalski is struck down by cholera. Lapierre stresses that “the Pole might well have died” if not for the attentive care of his doctors in the city hospital and “the bottles of serum, medicines, and food” sponsored by his neighbours in the slum. Margareta, a member of the committee, “had organised a collection in the slum and all the poor people had contributed to the saving of their ‘Big Brother’”.

Mehboub’s children had gone along the railway lines picking up cinders. Surya, the old Hindu from the tea shop, had donated several bags of sweetmeats. The mother of Sabia, the child who had died of tuberculosis in the room next door, had cut out and stitched a shirt for Dada Stephan. Even the lepers had given up the proceeds of several days’ begging. Stephan Kovalski had failed: in his affliction, he had not been able to be a poor man like his brothers of the slum (232).

Discursively, this passage suggests that the humanitarian’s brush with death destabilised the unequal relations between the compassionate priest and his neighbours to turn the needy poor into his exceedingly generous benefactors. The material assistance heaped upon the missionary means he “failed” to honour his vow to share the plight of the poor and experience what marginalised Indians with cholera would have had to endure. The phrase “like his brothers of the slum”, however, suggests that he did succeed in a way, for his neighbours’ actions clearly expressed their solidarity with him. This incident, together with others such as that of Loeb being saved from drowning after falling into a big sewer of “putrefaction”, depict the relationship between the humanitarians and their neighbours as a fluid dynamic where these foreigners are just as susceptible to the perils of living in the slum and need their neighbours’ help (367). The asymmetrical relations inherent in compassionate humanitarians’ work are balanced out repeatedly by acts of solidarity whenever they are in need.

The links between solidarity, hardship and suffering are also developed through Lapierre’s descriptions of the Listening Committee of Mutual Aid. When introducing each member of this committee, Lapierre establishes their backgrounds which show
how, like Pal, they are disenfranchised former peasants entrapped in the cycle of poverty because of natural disasters and oppressors in their village. Having established their victim status, the writer depicts them as heroic individuals whose life experiences have given them much empathy for the plight of their slum neighbours. This noble humanitarian impulse is rendered not only Christian but also Christ-like. According to Lapierre, “Kovalski made it a rule” that each meeting of the group “should begin with the reading of a chapter from the Gospel”.

“No reading could have been more appropriate to the slum”, he was to say, “no example could have been more apt than that of Christ reliving the burdens of his contemporaries. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, all men of goodwill could understand the link between the message of the Gospel and their lives of suffering, between the person of Christ and those who had taken it upon themselves to continue his work” (165-166).

This description equates the volunteer work of these victimised Indians, as well as Kovalski and Loeb’s humanitarianism, with Christ’s ministry. In particular, Lapierre highlights Bandona, whose name literally means “praise God”, as the personification of a Christ-like slum character whose poverty and experiences moulded her into an exemplary aid worker (166). He initially explains that the teenage Bandona used to be the sole breadwinner of her family because her widowed mother suffered from tuberculosis. Kovalski was able to save her from slaving long hours in a factory by raising funds from Europe to employ her full-time in the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid. There is a succession of passages illustrating Bandona’s Christ-like qualities. For instance, Bandona is held to be so empathetic with others’ suffering that she seemed to take on their troubles (166). Kovalski recalls how “[e]verytime some unfortunate person explained his difficulties, her face was transformed into a mark of pain,” adding, “[a]ll suffering was her suffering” (166). We are told that Bandona so shared Christ’s passion for the poor that she was able to assist neighbours of all races, religions and creeds.

No one had better understanding of sharing and dialogue, of respect for other people’s faiths and beliefs, than Bandona. She knew how to listen to the confessions of the dying, how to pray with the families of the dead, wash the corpses … No one ever taught her, yet she knew it all through intuition, friendship, love. Her extraordinary capacity to communicate enabled her to go into any compound, any hut, and sit down among people without encountering any prejudice of caste or religion, and this ability was all the more remarkable because she was not married. Normally it would be inconceivable that a young
single woman would go anywhere at random, especially into a milieu outside her caste. Married women never took a young girl into their confidence, even one belonging to their caste, because tradition required that young girls know nothing about life so that they could come to their marriage innocent, on the pain of being accused of immorality and thereupon rejected (168).

This description suggests that Bandona’s empathy, love and “extraordinary” communication skills enable her to enjoy remarkable rapport and solidarity with other poor Indians. It also reinforces the comparison between her work with the Indian poor and Christ’s ministry. Lapierre suggests that her aid work is carried out in defiance of traditional boundaries of caste, race, religion and even gender. Although the writer depicts poverty, hardship and suffering as symptoms of India’s hierarchical and unequal society, such descriptions portray Kovalski’s committee deepening the solidarity of the slum community.

TCOJ’s construction of the poor and their suffering can also be linked to French Catholic ideas influential in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scholars such as Richard Griffiths, Richard Burton, Paula Kane, Robert Ziegler and Brenna Moore have noted how suffering features prominently in modern French Catholic thought, particularly the doctrine of vicarious suffering which suggests that the martyrdom of innocents could redeem the sins of the guilty. In The Reactionary Revolution: The Catholic Revival in French Literature 1870-1949 (1966), Richard Griffiths discusses how influential Catholic thinkers including J.K. Huysmans, Léon Bloy, Paul Claudel, Charles Péguy, Paul Bourget and Ernest Psichari reacted strongly against the fierce anticlericalism of the Third Republic – which culminated in the separation of the Church and State in 1905 – and resisted secular democracy as well as the materialism of modernity. Griffiths also argues that from 1870 through the end of World War I in France, vicarious suffering “assumed an importance out of all proportion to the other doctrines of the Church” (157). Brenna Moore’s article “Feminised Suffering in Modern French Catholicism” analyses how this doctrine, which is rooted in Christian biblical and medieval sources, privileges Christ as “the primary exemplar of the vicarious sufferer” but often symbolically feminised suffering; “the long-standing association between women and the body that suffers designated them fitting for the roles of vicarious redemption through their physicality and suffering” (51). In addition, the theology of vicarious suffering was revitalised by many nineteenth and twentieth-
century French writers in gendered ways to posit feminised *souffrance* (suffering) as symbols of Christian piety, Christianity and the Catholic Church in opposition to an increasingly laicised, republican and imagined masculine, rational, positivist modern French state.

Through Kovalski’s Christian gaze, Lapierre first depicts the slum community as vicarious sufferers who remind the missionary of Christ, the archetypal saviour and figure of redemptive suffering. On his first night in his windowless hovel, Lapierre describes the priest contemplating his picture of the Shroud of Turin.

The face of Christ imprinted on his shroud, the face of a man with downcast eyes and swollen cheeks, with punctured brow and a torn beard, the man that died upon the Cross was that evening for Stephan Kovalski the very incarnation of all the martyrs of the slum where he had just arrived. “For me, a committed believer, each one of them wore that same face of Jesus Christ proclaiming to humanity from the heights of Golgotha all the pain but also all the hope of man rejected. That was the reason for my coming. I was there because of the cry of the crucified Christ: ‘I thirst,’ in order to give a voice to the hunger and thirst for justice of those who here mounted each day on the Cross, and who knew how to face that death which we in the West no longer know how to affront without despair. Nowhere else was that icon more in its rightful place than in that slum” (67).

Clearly, besides equating the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid’s work with Christ’s ministry, Kovalski also sees the suffering poor as crucified Christ. This passage suggests that the white man’s burden in Calcutta is not just to exercise Christian compassion and help the poor. While Kovalski and other humanitarians condemn (“affront”) the injustices associated with poverty, this Catholic priest also honours the Indian poor as vicarious sufferers wearing “the same face” as crucified Christ. His words invoke the Catholic theological belief in Incarnation, which sees the Divine’s presence in the flesh of fallen creation. They also recall the Missionaries of Charity, the religious humanitarian organisation founded by Mother Teresa in Calcutta. The nuns in every branch of this organisation worship the image of Christ on the Cross with the inscription “I thirst” and sanctify the poor like Kovalski. Since Calcutta is portrayed as the diseased and dying body politic of a once glorious British-created city, Lapierre suggests that the suffering poor in Calcutta’s slums are the Christ-like presence Kovalski sees in this former capital of the British-Indian Empire. Furthermore, given the moral/immoral, victim/exploiter rural/urban and peasant/mercantile binaries set up
between the poor and Calcutta’s ruthlessly exploitative economy and class and caste-conscious society, Kovalski’s Christian gaze posits the former’s suffering and exemplary solidarity as spiritual acts redeeming the latter’s sins.

It is this praise for the salvific suffering of “man rejected” which first links TCOJ’s construction of the poor to that of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century French narratives exalting the redemptive suffering of those marginalised and despised by the bourgeois modernity of an impious French republic. This link is later cemented when Kovalski quotes from one of these narratives, Léon Bloy’s most famous novel *The Woman Who Was Poor* (1897). As the guest of honour at a wedding in Pilkhana’s leper colony – “a ghetto of the damned” shunned even by the slum residents because of the stigma against leprosy (286) – he watches the leper couple’s palms being tied together in a Hindu marriage ceremony and recalls Bloy’s famous praise for the poor.

Kovalski gazed those two mutilated limbs bound together, and what he saw made him think of a sentence he had read one day in a book by a French writer named Léon Bloy: “We do not enter Paradise either tomorrow or in ten years’ time. We enter today if we are poor and crucified” (291).

In Bloy’s novel, this sentence is a pronouncement made by its female protagonist Clotilde to a priest. Clotilde, who is mistreated by other Parisians and lives in the gutters of this city, embodies the spiritual presence and purity of a saint in spite of her abject body and circumstances. The priest, who is struck by Clotilde’s mysterious religious power, is “dazed with Divine Love” after being in her presence (283). Given that Clotilde is mistaken by people in her town as a madwoman and vagrant – after tragically losing her husband, child and home, and later descending into poverty and destitution – Lapierre draws a parallel between her misfortune, marginalisation and sanctified suffering and that of the slum community. Furthermore, he suggests that Indian poor’s effect on missionary humanitarians is something as intense and mystic as Clotilde’s impact on the priest. Besides Kovalski, Sister Felicity, a Scottish missionary “who was to Bhopal what Mother Teresa was to Calcutta” (77), quotes Clotilde’s famous pronouncement on sanctification through suffering as she beholds a gathering in the *bustee* in *It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal* (180).

The blood motif associated with Pal, together with Lapierre’s construction of labour as a kind of blood sacrifice to Calcutta’s Kali-esque economy, recall Bloy’s
famous essay “The Blood of the Poor” as well as his body of work which consistently valorises the poor sacrificing themselves for income in service to the wealthy.\textsuperscript{11} It also alludes to the doctrine of vicarious suffering, which associates blood with sacrifice and suffering. In *Blood in the City: Violence and Revelation in Paris* (1789-1945), Richard Burton notes that Bloy had been one of the “extreme adherents” of this doctrine which is otherwise known as the doctrine of “mystical substitution”. This doctrine posits

The Christian’s willingness to suffer with and for Christ, of which the willingness to shed blood with and for that of his Saviour is the ultimate expression ... [This] combines or co-operates with the real essence of Christ’s body and blood in the mass to bring to its sublime apotheosis the universal principle ... [of] salvation in and through blood: the blood of the innocent redeems, in the strictest etymological sense of pays for, ransoms, buys back, the sins of the guilty, thanks to the mysterious operation of the cosmic principle of reversibility or vicarious suffering (312).

Like Bloy, who propagates the doctrine of vicarious suffering through representations of feminised *souffrance* throughout his writing,\textsuperscript{12} Lapierre describes an Indian woman’s abject circumstances and Christian piety to emphasise the vicarious suffering of the poor. “Every morning after celebrating the Eucharist”, the priest visits his “brothers and sisters of light” in “this haven of suffering” and “nothing raised his spirits more than his visits to a blind Christian leper woman who lived next to the railway lines”.

Incredible as it might seem, this woman too, plunged as she was into unutterable stages of decay, radiated serenity. She would spend entire days in prayer, curled up in a corner of her hovel, without lighting or ventilation. Behind her, hanging from a nail on the wall was a crucifix, and in a niche above the door nestled a statue of a Virgin blackened with soot. The leper woman was so thin that her shrivelled skin accentuated the angles of her bones. What age might she be? Certainly younger than she looked. Forty at the very most. As if her blindness were not enough, leprosy had reduced her hands to stumps and eaten away her face (109).

According to the writer, the priest is continually in awe of this Christian leper’s beatific words and deeds.

He had never heard her complain or utter words of self-pity at her predicament, and on this occasion, again, he was struck by the sight of the joyous expression on her face. She signalled to him to sit down beside her and as soon as he was settled, held out her arms in a gesture of maternal love. The blind leper women caressed the priest’s face as if to feel the life in it. “I was utterly bewildered,” he was to say. “It was as if she were giving me the very thing that she sought in
me. There was more love in the soft touch of that rotten flesh than in all the world’s embraces.”

“Father I do so wish the good Lord would come and fetch me at last. Why won’t you ask him to?”

“If the good Lord keeps you here with us, Grandma, it’s because he still needs you here.”

“Father, if I have to keep suffering, I’m ready to do so,” she said. “Above all, I’m ready to pray for other people, to help them endure their suffering. Father, bring me their suffering” (110).

These descriptions show, again, Kovalski being overwhelmed by the divine presence of an Indian slum resident. Grandma’s motherly and spiritual nature, loving touch and diseased body are symbolised by the “statue of a Virgin blackened with soot” she worships. The priest’s “utterly bewildered” response to her “maternal love” draws a parallel between this Indian figure of feminised souffrance and Clotilde whose Divine love and presence stuns the priest in The Woman Who was Poor. In addition, the conversation between Grandma and Kovalski shows how she welcomes death as a release from her illness but is “ready” to “keep suffering” to help others “endure” theirs. Her association with the doctrine of vicarious suffering is later reinforced by Kovalski, who celebrates Eucharist by feeding her a chapatti “consecrated during his morning mass”. The phrase “her face radiant with joy” describes the old woman’s beatific expression after receiving the Eucharist (111). As this ritual can be taken to symbolise Christ offering up his body for humanity’s salvation, the leper woman’s willingness to prolong her physical suffering in service of others is likened to his vicarious suffering.

The same anecdote is recounted in Lapierre’s memoirs, A Thousand Suns (ATS) and India, My Love (IML). Their descriptions of Grandma’s ravaged body, her hovel with the statue of Virgin Mary, readiness to help others bear their suffering and her beatific response after receiving the Eucharist are almost identical in wording to the examples quoted above from TCOJ. The main differences are the substitution of Gaston Grandjean, the man who inspired the character Stephan Kovalski, for the Polish priest as well as Lapierre’s presence as a silent witness. All three texts end with the same excerpt from Kovalski/Grandjean’s diary entry that evening. The missionary affirms Grandma’s noble existence and that of others in the slum: “That woman knows
that her suffering is not useless ... Her suffering is like that of Christ on the Cross; it is constructive and redemptive. Every time I leave the hovel where my sister, the blind leper woman, lives, I come away revitalised. So how can one despair in this slum of Anand Nagar? In truth this place deserves its name, City of Joy” (111).

This reflection clearly explains the nickname given to Pilkhana, which is also known as “Anand Nagar”. It is clear that TCOJ, as well as Lapierre’s memoirs, continually associate its residents with the doctrine of vicarious suffering. This slum is a community of martyrs whose suffering lives are seen through Kovalski/Grandjean’s Christian gaze as salvific and beatific. The word “despair” recalls the Pole’s reflection on his first night in the slum, which states that Indians can teach those “in the West” how to “affront” the crucifixion of suffering “without despair” (67). Hence, through the humanitarian’s Christian gaze and the souffrance of Christian Indians like Grandma, Lapierre suggests that the poor’s resilience and remarkable capacity to endure hardship can make their suffering spiritually redemptive for their exploiters and humanitarian friends. In TCOJ, Kovalski’s spiritual perspective on the poor also reinforces Loeb’s rational view that the white man’s role is not to play “Santa Claus” (420). Both humanitarians assert the importance of respecting the poor’s resilience, endurance and agency.

In The Rhetoric of Empire, David Spurr praises TCOJ as “a journalistic tour de force” but critiques its tendency to idealise the Indian poor. According to Spurr, idealisation is a rhetorical device in colonial discourse which symbolically compensates for “political and economic processes that have destroyed the traditional fabric of non-Western societies” (132). By exalting the qualities of the noble savage – embodied by the simple and illiterate former peasants compelled by misfortune to leave traditional agrarian societies and end up in city slums – Lapierre’s exceedingly positive representations of mutual aid in the slum presents “an image of non-Western society sufficiently idealised in order to ‘manage’ the burden of the Third World on Western consciousness” (132). In addition, by imagining an extraordinary and equalising solidarity unique to slums, which house an incredible diversity of castes, faiths and peoples, and offering a salvific meaning to their suffering, Lapierre offers a rhetorical counterpoint to his construction of post-colonial Calcutta’s skewed modernity and exceedingly cruel and hierarchical society. As discussed earlier, the problems he
associates with the city include humanitarian crises, corrupt governance, overpopulation, moral degeneration and the desperation of people competing for survival. Through this idealisation of the poor’s capacity for endurance and mutual aid, Lapière imagines that Indians, to some extent, can manage their problems.\textsuperscript{13}

Moreover, since the prevailing ideologies of the age of neo-humanitarianism respected state sovereignty, this 1985 text does not offer support for foreign-initiated political intervention. Hence, besides evoking the moral sentiment of compassion through stories of adversity in Calcutta, Lapière also consistently reinforces the importance of not overriding individual agency and autonomy. By appealing to the moral sentiment of solidarity which is linked to the Catholic doctrine of vicarious suffering, Lapière idealises the poor to rhetorically mitigate the economic disparities between poor Indians and foreigners/humanitarians. He suggests that the Indian poor have their mystical spiritual qualities and are worthy of respect instead of abject pity.

This analysis begs the question: since Lapière also portrays the continuity of the white man’s burden – particularly through his construction of Calcutta’s cityscape – what moral obligations does he assign to Kovalski and Loeb? Their first responsibility concerns leadership and guidance. Lapière’s representation of solidarity and aid workers in this “inhuman” city affirms colonial and Orientalist stereotypes of backward Indians and civilised white Christians. For example, to illustrate how “only the poor may need the help of the poor” (105), Lapière describes an incident when Pal is beaten by a merchant who refuses to pay him and calls him “a lame horse”. A dozen rickshaw pullers rush to form a circle around the protagonist and force the merchant to pay his fare. This anecdote ends with Pal’s statement “As the Bengali peasants say, ‘when the dogs howl, the tiger sheaths its claws’” (160). These animal metaphors reinforce Lapière’s depiction of the fallen creation of Calcutta as an urban jungle. They also portray the poor’s solidarity as a kind of animal-like or primitive instinct. This suggests that Indians, even those in the slum who demonstrate Christ-like qualities, are primitive, not fully-humanised or civilised.

Even the actions of Bandona, who is described as the most extraordinary member of Kovalski’s aid committee, are seen as animalistic.
Two or three times a week, the young Assamese girl would accompany groups of sick and dying people to the hospitals of Calcutta. ... Steering these unfortunates through terrifying traffic, then guiding them through corridors and packed waiting rooms, was quite a venture. In such institutions, a poor person without an escort would have only the remotest chance of actually reaching an examination room. Furthermore, even if given the opportunity, he would never have been able to explain what was wrong or understand the treatment he should follow because nine times out of ten, he wouldn’t speak the Bengali the doctor spoke, but only one of the thirty dialects of the enormous hinterland that exported its millions of poor to Calcutta. Demanding, storming the doors, forcing entry, Bandona fought like a wild beast to have her protégés treated like human beings and to see that the medicines prescribed were properly given to them, a benefit that rarely occurred. In a few weeks, she was to become the pillar and heart of the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid. Her memory was the index card of all the miseries of the slum. Above all, it was the quality of her expression, her smile, and her love that was to earn her a nickname. The poor soon called her “Anand Nagar ka Swarga Dug” – “The Angel of the City of Joy” (168-169).

The actions of this aid worker, whose extraordinary ability to communicate to the poor is attributed to her “intuition” and “love”, are described as fighting “like a wild beast”. This phrase highlights the irony that her charges’ humane treatment is won at the expense of her humanity. Lapierre suggests that Bandona’s fierce assertiveness and animal-like aggression can be read as a sign of her immaturity and need for Kovalski’s leadership. Since Bandona is identified as the “pillar and heart of the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid”, her need for guidance can be extended to her teammates. Although this committee’s solidarity with their neighbours is compared to Christ reliving others’ burdens, Lapierre implies that their solidarity is a non-reasoning, intuitive, and instinctive kind of passion different to Loeb’s rationalism and Kovalski’s gentle and measured approach. The two sahibs’ leadership and expertise are shown to be invaluable as they lead a large-scale “humanitarian mission” after a cyclone ravages the Bengal coastline. They are masculine, rational leaders responsible for liaising with government officials and other aid organisations to secure resources and permits so the committee can reach the survivors (502).

The second obligation of the figurative white man in the slum is medical intervention. Humanitarians and foreign visitors such as Kovalski, Loeb and his father are portrayed as privileged witnesses to what Lapierre calls “the physiological poverty of the Third World at its very worse” (342). On the horrors seen while volunteering at the slum’s medical dispensary, the younger Loeb says
“Most unbearable of all, and something I thought I would never get used to, was the sight of those rickety babies with their inflated stomachs, tiny monstrosities placed on my table by their supplicant mothers ... They were suffering so acutely from deficiency that their fontanels hadn’t closed. Deprived of calcium, the bone structure of their heads had been deformed and their dolichocephalic features gave them all the look of Egyptian mummies. With this degree of malnutrition, the majority of their brains’ gray cells had probably been destroyed. Even if I did manage to pull them through, they would most probably be idiots – medically classified idiots” (344).

Interestingly, very similar accounts are offered by other humanitarians in ATS, IML and It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal (IWFPMIB). In his memoirs Lapierre accompanies Grandjean on his rounds in Pilkhana. In ATS, Lapierre recounts a mother “presenting the big brother with a child with rickets and an inflated stomach”.

Aged about two but looking no more than six months, it was a pathetic little emaciated thing. “Fourth-degree malnutrition,” Gaston established. “He has suffered from such deficiency since birth that his fontanels haven’t closed. His skull has been deformed by lack of calcium. His dolichocephalic features are obvious. With this degree of malnutrition, a large proportion of his gray cells have been destroyed. Even if we manage to save him,” the Swiss muttered, pulling a small bag of vitamin-enriched flour out of his haversack, “he’ll always be mentally retarded” (478).

IML relates the same anecdote.

A mother proffers Dada a baby with rickets and bloated stomach. Though two years old, his small emaciated body makes him look no more than six months. “Fourth degree malnutrition,” Gaston says. “Right from birth, he’s been suffering from so many deficiencies that his fontanels have not closed. Deprived of calcium, his skull is deformed and his dolichocephalic head forms an impressive sight. At this stage of malnutrition, most of his gray cells have probably been destroyed.”

“Even if we manage to save him,” the Swiss nurse mutters to himself as he takes a sachet of vitamin-enriched flour from his bag, “he will always be mentally deficient” (135).

In IWFPMIB, Sister Felicity, who sets up a makeshift clinic in the protagonist Padmini’s home, also comments on malnourished babies in Bhopal’s bustees.

Padmini had tried to sort out the most serious cases to take them first into the hut that her parents had turned into an improvised infirmary. More often than not they were rickety babies with swollen stomachs whom their mothers held out to the nun with a look of entreaty. In all my years of working in Africa, Ceylon and India, I had never seen such cases of deficiency diseases. The fontanels had not even closed in many of the children. The bones of their skulls
had become deformed for lack of calcium and their dolichocephalic features made them look a bit like Egyptian mummies (79).

Such accounts show how Lapierre continually highlights in, TCOJ and subsequent texts, the dire need for medical intervention and foreign aid in slum communities. All but one of these examples depict the figure of the silent yet supplicant Indian mother, who “proffers”/“presents” her malnourished child to the white humanitarian in a plea for help. These recurring images of mothers function not as glorified symbols of Indian feminised souffrance but as muted images of helpless Indian mothers being assisted by white saviours in the slum. Together with descriptions of their deformed children, these voiceless Indian mothers reinforce earlier examples in each text that highlight how impoverished slum residents who need food and medical attention face discrimination and lack support from other Indians and the Indian state. The emphasis on babies and children also conveys to the implied European and North American reader the devastating impact of malnutrition and poverty on the future generations of Indians.

All four texts use the same terms referring to the child’s head – fontanels, skull and dolichocephalic (long) shape – to highlight the appearance of deformity. This recalls a potent image belonging to what is commonly termed “the pornography of poverty” by scholars from various fields, including development, humanitarian, human rights and media studies. They debate issues such as the breach of privacy, the loss of human dignity and confidentiality and the appeal to community/national stereotypes and cross-cultural paternalism. One concern raised in their critique is the decontextualisation of the issues and societies that are the subject of fundraising and advocacy. According to Betty Plewes and Richard Stuart’s article “The Pornography of Poverty”, agencies involved in disaster relief and child sponsorship circulate such images precisely because they can induce the “tremendous emotional and psychological impact that more positive images do not elicit” (29). In the examples highlighted above, Loeb and Sister Felicity’s strong reactions to these babies are proof of these images’ impact. Moreover, the name “Ceylon” in Sister Felicity’s account refers to the colonial name for Sri Lanka. As she surveys “Africa, Ceylon and India” through her imperial and colonial gaze, she infantilises people of the “Third World” as needy colonial subjects. Although the nun states that she “had never seen such cases”
outside of Bhopal’s *bustees*, this assertion of her medical authority and experience in former colonies is undermined by the repetition of the same image in *TCOJ, ATS* and *IML*. Lapierre suggests, through these four texts, that Indian children exhibit what he terms “the physiological poverty of the Third World at its very worse” (*TCOJ, 342*).

Hence, these examples collectively imply the comparatively greater extent of Indian malnutrition and poverty, at the expense of homogenising the subcontinent and its slum communities. In order to assert the greater urgency of humanitarian aid to this country, Lapierre perpetuates the same decontextualised images of malnourished children. Given that Bhopal and Calcutta have very different histories – the former was a Muslim sovereign state with a long history of female rulers unlike the latter – and that Lapierre describes *TCOJ* and *IWFMIB* as historical nonfiction texts borne of exhaustive research and interviews with the residents of Pilkhana and Orya Bustee, this humanitarian appeal can undermine his claim to knowledge and privileged understanding of these two slums and cities.

Anthropologists Jonathan Benthall in *Disasters, Relief and the Media* and Leslie Butt in her article “The Suffering Stranger: Medical Anthropology and International Morality” are among the scholars who have noted how aid agencies have, since the 1970s, have worked symbiotically with the global media to present distorted representations of victims of crisis and stereotypes of poverty in the global South (186-188; 10-13). In spite of its ethical issues, there is an established tradition of humanitarian iconography – featuring stereotypical suffering bodies such as that of malnourished infants and children in certain parts of the world – to highlight hunger and the acute lack of resources for fundraising purposes. Lapierre’s representations of these abject children in Indian slums can perhaps be attributed to the fact that *TCOJ, ATS, IML* and *IWFMIB* are texts which fundraise for NGOs helping the Indian poor.

Although these examples highlight the moral imperative behind the humanitarians’ life-saving scrutiny and intervention, the medicalisation of slum poverty produces knowledge about India in ways that perpetuate colonial stereotypes. In *TCOJ*, Loeb’s recount is immediately followed by Lapierre’s lengthy and scientific exposition on Indians’ inhumanity.
Max was subsequently to learn that all those little victims only represented a small sample of an affliction that was striking the country as a whole. A great Indian scientific authority on the subject, the director of the Nutrition Foundation of India, asserts that India is producing today more and more “subhumans” because of inadequate nourishment. According to this expert, the health of generations to come will find itself in jeopardy. A hundred and forty million Indians at least, that is, nearly half the population of the United States, are likely to suffer from malnutrition. Of the twenty-three million children born each year, only three million, according to this same authority, have a chance of reaching adulthood in good health. Four million are condemned to die before the age of eight or to become unproductive citizens because of mental and physical defects. Because of nutritional deficiencies, 55 percent of all children under the age of five will manifest psychic and neurological problems occasioning behavioural disorders, while several million adults suffer from goiters, causing similar disorders (345).

This exposition extends *TCOJ*’s construction of inhuman Calcuttans to the slum community and the rest of India. Besides the immorality of cruel Calcuttans, even the sanctified slum residents are shown to be less than human from the view of medical science as their chronic malnutrition causes deformities and a range of behavioural, neurological and psychic “disorders”. In addition, the statistics indicate high infant and child mortality to recall earlier images of Calcutta as a “diseased” and “dying” city. The impact of such malnutrition is seen as a grave problem for the Indian state because Loeb later learns that Pilkhana represents merely a “sample” of this nationwide “affliction”.

This medical and scientific homogenisation of India also recalls the stereotype of a dangerously fecund Orient to problematise India as the producer of future generations of “unproductive citizens”. Since Lapiere’s writing on India sanctifies suffering as spiritually salvific, this exposition on chronic malnutrition focuses not on suffering but on the Indian nation’s progress and development, which is “in jeopardy” because of the many disorders caused by hunger and poverty. By linking the number of starving Indians to the population in America, Lapiere appeals to one of the fundamental beliefs underlying the discourse of development – that “First World” nations such as the United States represent the idealised, ideological future of “underdeveloped” states like India. This makes the problem relatable to the implied reader and suggests that people of the “First World” have the obligation to offer aid.
In *Encountering Development*, Arturo Escobar’s influential critique of the discourse of development argues that “the professionalism and institutionalisation of ... the domain of hunger and malnutrition” holds up “the body of the malnourished” – “the starving ‘African’ portrayed on so many covers of Western magazines, or the lethargic South American child to be ‘adopted’ for $16 a month” – as “the most striking symbol of the power of the First World over the Third” (103-110). Lapierre illustrates Escobar’s point on the power of this symbol by comparing the stymied physical development of Indian babies to the jeopardised development of the Indian nation/infantilised “Third World”. In the process, he legitimises the medical intervention and food aid of missionaries and volunteers like Grandjean, Kovalski, Loeb and Sister Felicity. Escobar’s argument that this symbol “encodes a whole economy of discourse and power relations” can be applied to Lapierre’s reduction of Indian malnutrition to a medical problem Grandjean can directly address by “pulling a small bag of vitamin-enriched flour out of his haversack” after each medical examination. Despite Loeb’s view that the white man should not play “Santa Claus”, the association between India and the United States implies that the problems that impede the former’s development can be seen as issues that affect a significant part of the global population. Lapierre thus suggests that slum dispensaries, like the ones depicted in TCOJ, ATS, IML and IWFPMB, constitute forms of heroic humanitarian government where white humanitarians strive to “save” Indian babies and address the “disorders” of the country’s “underdevelopment”.

**Conclusion**

In 2003, an expert committee of well-known historians set up by the Calcutta High Court famously established that no individual could be credited for the founding of Calcutta. This led the court to rule that all textbooks, official documents and websites should remove the name of Job Charnock, the British East India Company administrator traditionally credited for birth of this city. This ruling, reported in both Indian and British newspapers, is described by David Orr in *The Telegraph* on May 18, 2003 as “a victory for those committed to eradicating the last vestiges of British imperial rule in India”. This political and discursive resistance to colonial images of
Calcutta as a prestigious former capital of the British-Indian Empire counters enduring representations of the city as an English creation. This chapter has demonstrated how *TCOJ*, one of the most well-known twentieth-century texts on Calcutta, perpetuates colonial images of this city to legitimise the humanitarian government of missionaries and aid workers. Lapierre’s colonial gaze discursively carves out a space in its cityscape for the white humanitarian’s ongoing presence and contribution to post-colonial India.

In addition, the white man’s burden is predicated on the horrors of Calcutta: refugee crises, natural disasters, endemic corruption, abject malnutrition, inept governance and the blatant oppression of rural-urban migrants. This chapter discussed how Lapierre portrays Calcutta as a city which illustrates various forms of Indian inhumanity. First, the city’s poorest peoples are idealised as Christ-like martyrs who show remarkable solidarity. The writer’s representations of their redemptive suffering suggest that they are, from a spiritual perspective, more divine than human. Despite their abject, diseased bodies and living conditions, Lapierre implies that their exemplary spiritual qualities which should be praised by the rest of humanity.

Second, the setting of Calcutta recalls its colonial image as the infernal Black Hole of Indian cruelty to make the poor’s struggle for survival appear more noble and heroic. In addition, the celebrated agency and autonomy of Indian victims appeal to neo-humanitarian ideals that respect state sovereignty and discourage foreigners from engaging in political intervention. Third, the inhumanity of malnourished infants and children is emphasised, in *TCOJ* as well as Lapierre’s other texts on Indian poverty, to highlight the dire need for medical intervention and aid. While the poor bear the cross of physical suffering, disease and deformation, the white man’s burden is to offer medical expertise and aid. Appealing to development discourse, Lapierre sees these subhumans as potential “disorders” that impact the future of the Indian state and the global population.

Another trend in *TCOJ* is that it offers multiple perspectives on relationships: they are not always asymmetrical and can be seen as symbiotic. The ideology of the white man’s burden is matched by the Catholic doctrine of poor Indians’ vicarious suffering. The white humanitarians’ medical intervention and leadership of the Listening Committee of Mutual Aid are complemented by the active participation and
involvement of its members and the slum community. The latter also offer life-saving assistance to these foreigners in times of need. The discrimination and victimisation of the poor are countered by the idea that they can redeem the sins of their cruel exploiters. Through these relationships, this 1985 text highlights the vulnerability and interdependence of Calcutta/India/humanity. Thus, the white man’s romance with post-colonial Calcutta is imagined as Kovalski and Loeb contributing to, and benefiting from, solidarity with its people. The theme of solidarity is further explored in the next chapter which discusses Lapierre’s relationship to South Asia.
Chapter 3

India, My Love

In their article “India through Re-Orientalist Lenses”, Ana Christina Mendes and Lisa Lau describe a shift in the representations of abject poverty in India. They quote Salman Rushdie, who opined in The Guardian on February 28, 2009 that

It used to be the case that western movies about India were about blonde women arriving there to find, almost at once, a maharajah to fall in love with ... or they were about dashing white men galloping about the colonies firing pistols and unsheathing sabres, to varying effect. Now that sort of exoticism has lost its appeal; people want, instead, enough grit and violence to convince themselves that what they are seeing is authentic; but it’s still tourism. If the earlier films were raj tourism, maharajah-tourism, then we, today, have slum tourism instead.

Rushdie’s comments were directed at Slumdog Millionaire, the 2008 film adaptation of Indian diplomat Vikas Swarup’s 2005 novel Q & A. Mendes and Lau suggest that this film had popular appeal because it drew on the work of Swarup, a contemporary Indian author who writes with “an eye on the demand of the western literary marketplace and the rewards it promises” (710). Indeed, the fact that Hollywood filmmakers had secured the film rights, financed its production and global distribution also suggests that Swarup and other Indian writers such as Aravind Adiga and Kavery Nambisan had not been alone in their much-critiqued “selling out” and “marketing” of South Asian poverty. Since Slumdog Millionaire eventually won eight Academy Awards including Best Picture, these foreign film-makers clearly reaped great rewards by meeting the cinematic marketplace’s demand for stories that explore “the exotica of poverty” in India. In particular, Slumdog Millionaire has been called various names (including “poverty porn” and “ghetto picturesque”) by reviewers and scholars who criticise its “othering” of the poor and argue that this film effectively “glorified, celebrated and romanticised poverty” (710).¹ This combination, as Evan Selinger and Kevin Outterson argue in their article “The Ethics of Poverty Tourism”, leads to an “immoral voyeurism”. This is defined as situations “when undetected glances invade privacy and take advantage of people’s vulnerability, and observe people for condescending purposes and/or to further demeaning ends; members of a privileged
group misrepresent the values and beliefs of an underprivileged group based on selective observations” (11).

The success of Lapierre’s *The City of Joy (TCOJ)* and its film adaptation in the 1980s and 1990s would seem to have helped to popularise the consumption of Indian slum stories in Europe and North America. If Mendes and Lau’s belief that many Indian authors ply their craft with “an eye on the demand of the western literary marketplace” is true, then Lapierre’s literary engagement with the Indian poor has contributed to this shift in popular representations of India and the phenomenon of slum tourism (710). As early as 1987, Rone Tempest, in his March 19 article in *The Los Angeles Times*, described Calcutta landing on “the tourist map of squalor”, with the best-selling *TCOJ* being the main reason behind visitors asking local tour guides to take them to slums instead of the Victoria Memorial, and a Japanese travel agency organising tour packages for youths to see abject poverty first-hand. According to Tempest: “On the streets of Calcutta these days, [Lapierre’s] book is often seen clutched in the hands of western tourists. If Paris has the Guide Michelin, Calcutta has *The City of Joy*.” In addition, John Hutnyk has analysed in *The Rumour of Calcutta* how influential writers and scholars such as Rudyard Kipling, Günter Grass and Claude Lévi-Strauss have written at length on this city’s abject poverty and misery. Clearly, Lapierre is one of many voices from the global North who associate Calcutta with urban disaster and poverty. Yet, since both his memoirs revisit Pilkhana extensively, and *It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal* is based on a protagonist living and suffering in a slum, it is evident that Lapierre’s body of work since *Freedom at Midnight (FAM)* has made him a world-renowned, and wealthy, author of Indian slum stories. Hence, this self-appointed spokesperson and passionate fundraiser for the Indian poor can be regarded as an important contributor to the overall shift towards exploitative representations of Indian poverty, and to the emergence of literary, and literal, slum tourism.

This chapter analyses *India, My Love (IML)*, Lapierre’s second and latest memoir in which the writer purports to tell “the story of my humanitarian crusade in support of the poorest of the poor” (11). He does this with some awareness of the criticism that has been directed at his literary and cinematic reproductions of India, its slum communities and humanitarianism over the past few decades. The 2013 memoir relates behind-the-scenes accounts of these stories, their commercial success, the
humanitarian work they funded and the accolades awarded to Lapierre for his services to India. The first half of this text is devoted to the story of his research for *FAM*. Titled “In the Footsteps of the Greatest Empire of all Time”, Lapierre recounts how he and co-author Larry Collins researched the history and key personalities involved in the dissolution of the Raj, Partition and Gandhi’s death from 1947 to 1948. Before leaving for India, he purchases a second-hand Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud to convey him through India. Travelling around in the preferred car of the maharajahs, Lapierre seeks out their remaining descendants to learn about these Indian sovereigns’ opulent lives and fealty to the English Crown. He also joins a luxurious and eventful wild boar hunt with the 61st Calvary of the Indian Army. This regiment dates back to the British Indian Army and continues to honour its ceremonial customs and revelry.

To research Gandhi’s nonviolent activism in Calcutta on the eve of India’s independence, Lapierre interviews his secretary Nirmal Bose. Travelling to Bengal, he forgoes the Rolls-Royce and endures a two-day train-ride to better understand the Mahatma’s view that “the best way to love the Indian people is to travel with them in a third-class compartment” (69-70). After arriving at the “refugee camp” of the enormous Howrah train station and being taken aback by the squatters, Lapierre stays at the prestigious Bengal Club, a “bastion of white supremacy”, and visits the Victorian Memorial to join the “thousands” who gather there to watch the sun rise (73). He also befriends Hasari Pal, a rickshaw wallah and stuns this “road slave” by asking him if he might pull Pal’s rickshaw (75). The writer recalls his first encounter with Mother Teresa, the “the woman who for twenty-two years has been quenching the thirst of Christ crucified” in Calcutta (84). Finally, Lapierre and Collins travel with Gandhi’s assassins to New Delhi where they physically re-enact the murder. Summing up their research trip, Lapierre notes that they have collected altogether “five hundred kilos of material” for the story of “one of the greatest epochs in the history of the 20th century” (90). To promote *FAM*, both writers then take “a hundred odd booksellers” from Europe “on the same trail” through India (93). This successful tour results in a huge marketing campaign across Europe and North America. The best-selling *FAM* enables Lapierre to donate $50,000 to charity “to thank India” and he goes back to find Mother Teresa (95).
In the second half of this memoir, titled “The Unsung Heroes of India, My Love”, Mother Teresa refers Lapierre and his wife, also called Dominique, to James Stevens who founded a home for children of lepers. This Englishman, who “gave up a comfortable existence in England” to run this home (called *Udayan*, meaning “Resurrection” or “Dawn”), was in dire financial straits (113). In Paris, Lapierre sets up a foundation to fundraise for these children and writes an appeal in a French magazine. He receives three thousand donations and bags of letters, enabling him to rescue *Udayan*. On their return to Calcutta, Stevens takes them to a leper colony to meet parents of the children. He then brings the couple to Pilkhana where they meet Gaston Grandjean, the man who inspired *TCOJ*’s Stephan Kovalski. The Swiss nurse initially dismisses the couple as tourists, but their saving of a youth “disarms his reservations” (115). He agrees to show them “around his kingdom of poverty” and Lapierre later offers to sponsor the expansion of the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid’s night school for children.

After numerous visits and a short stay in the slum, Lapierre is initiated into “the richness of their culture” (49). The experiences in this slum become the basis for the story related in *TCOJ*. Lapierre is surprised by the extent of the book’s popularity and the outpouring of readers’ donations and gifts. The writer-turned-humanitarian expands his philanthropy to partner with several more non-governmental organisations (NGOs) run by European humanitarians and Indian aid workers. These projects include homes for handicapped children, medical dispensaries for islands in the Ganges Delta and development projects such as housing, schools and vocational training centres. Lapierre later lists the tangible benefits brought about these NGOs: over twenty-six years, the dispensaries have cured “more than 75 thousand contagious patients” from tuberculosis and the disease has been “eliminated from about twelve hundred villages in the region” (148); “several million Euros” have been sent to community aid projects in India (150) and *Udayan* is now self-sufficient in food whilst curing the children’s leprosy and offering them “the finest education possible” (153).

Besides discussing the challenges surrounding the production of Roland Joffé’s *City of Joy* and its positive reception, Lapierre also describes how the “The City of Joy” had become a catchphrase for Calcutta’s development. He embarks on another project with Sathinath Sarangi, a former mechanical engineer from Bhopal who has “devoted
his life to easing the suffering of the survivors of the greatest industrial accident in
history” (160). This leads to *It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal* (2001) whose royalties
fund “an ultra-modern gynaecology clinic” for “thousands of underprivileged women
completely cast off by the authorities” (165). Lapierre relates the history of the
pesticide production plant and why American chemical giant Union Carbide was
morally culpable for the fateful explosion of lethal gases on December 3, 1984. Finally,
Lapierre gives thanks to his long-term supporters in Europe and North America, who
have helped his Indian friends realise many development dreams over the past few
decades. He also notes that his financial commitments have become so great that he
had downsized his home to set up a trust fund. Besides an appeal for donations, he
details the plethora of honours he has received for his humanitarian work. This
includes the Padma Bhushan, the Indian equivalent of the Nobel Prize, which was
awarded to him after fifty thousand Indian children wrote a joint letter to the Indian
President. Lapierre states that “more than the recognition that came with this honour”
was “the feeling that I had at last entered the great Indian family at the personal
request of her children that gave me the greatest joy” (178).

This synopsis suggests that Lapierre depicts himself as a writer-humanitarian
whose fascination and love for India never ends. It reads as a travelogue and a memoir,
chronicling the depth of his commitment to India and its poorest peoples, especially
charitable causes related to children. This chapter explores how the story of his literary
and humanitarian engagement with South Asia functions as a set of discursive
practices legitimising his credentials as “Big Brother” to his Indian friends. The first
section discusses Lapierre’s representation of his historical research and writing
through the metaphor of the white man’s romance with India. The second section
analyzes his construction of salvific figures in *IML*, including himself, and how he
portrays their humanitarianism and activism as a moral enterprise furthering progress
in India.
Writing History

In *IML* we learn that the decision to go to India was prompted by Raymond Cartier, Lapierre’s mentor from *Paris Match*. Cartier tells Lapierre:

My dear Dominique, when I was your age, I went to a small village in the north of India to interview a scantily-clad little man who brought one of the mightiest empires of all time to its knees. His name was Mohandas Gandhi. Why don’t you and Larry Collins follow the story of his life to do a portrait of India? India, at the time, accounted for one-fifth of mankind. The 15th of August 1947, the day she got her independence, is indeed a red-letter day in World History. That was twenty-five years ago. Gandhi is dead, but several players in this remarkable page of history may still be alive. Surely you’ll be able to find them. Dominique, if I were your age, I’d fly out to India this very evening (20).

The first of many anecdotes, this exchange situates India within an opposition between empire and nation. This section examines how Lapierre depicts India as a multi-faceted polity and his relationship to this country and its people.

The first chapter of this thesis has discussed how *FAM* is a pro-Congress and pro-British account of decolonisation and Partition. By appealing to colonial constructs of communalism in India, Lapierre and Collins exculpate the actions of Mountbatten and the ruling elites that led to Partition and its tragic consequences. In *IML*, Lapierre is able to continue his pro-Congress, pro-Empire approach by appealing to, and adapting, a particular concept of “India” popularised by Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Discovery of India*. Written in 1946, the future first Prime Minister of India tried to conceptualise “India” and what being “Indian” meant. In this text, Nehru described India as “an ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously” (58).

This description, according to historiographers such as Georg Iggers and Q. Edward Wang in *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, gave “a complex, fluid and layered definition of India and Indianness” and allowed for “a ‘fusion culture’ which had a civilisational identity without quite being a ‘melting pot’” (237-238). Recalling Nehru’s concept of India, Lapierre’s “discovery of India” first establishes its diversity, followed by its contradictions.
[A] country, a continent, an immense mosaic of peoples, races, castes, religions and cultures. A country with a population of one billion two hundred million inhabitants living in more than six hundred and fifty thousand villages where more than seven hundred and fifty languages are spoken and twenty million gods are worshipped. India is the promise of eternal wonderment, a theatre in which at times the sublime merges with the horrific (21).

Lapierre’s relationship to this diverse and complex subcontinent is further introduced through the trope of the white man’s romance with India.

India is a country which often has me up in arms; yet she never ceases to captivate me. She shakes my very foundations, constantly throwing up new treasures and filling me with a renewed sense of joy. India, truth be told, is a country which requires at least ten lives to penetrate all her mysteries (21).

This notion of a feminised India uses Nehru’s construction of its layered histories/identities to posit the rational positivist view that it is possible to “penetrate all her mysteries” with enough time and intellectual vigour. After quantifying categories of “knowledge” about India’s demography, languages and religions, Lapierre depicts himself as India’s historian-lover unearthing new facts that either enthrall him or “shake” his “very foundations”. Moreover, these statements reinforce the earlier comparison between India and a “theatre for the sublime and the horrific”. They suggest that India is a drama for Lapierre’s scrutiny and enjoyment, and a narrative so captivating that it dominates the story of his life.

This construction of India as the feminised, exotic Orient to Lapierre’s passionate historian-adventurer later offers rhetorical support for anecdotes where the Frenchman tries to enact the very past he seeks to chronicle. Lapierre’s purchase of an English luxury car marks the start of his “Indian adventure” for FAM. In London he is mesmerised by a Rolls-Royce model that catches his eye just before he boards a train to interview Lord Mountbatten.

In front of the Rolls-Royce showroom window, a light green 8 cylinder Corniche was on display. Now this was perhaps one of the most expensive cars on the planet, forty-thousand pounds sterling, or the price of ten Alfa Romeos. The sheer beauty of it sent me into a state of ecstasy. I was rooted to the spot, hypnotised by the chrome radiator grill reminiscent of the pediment of a Greek temple. An irrepressible urge propels me into the shop. Just as one’s hand moves automatically to stroke the bevelled surface of a precious stone or the bare shoulder of a beautiful woman, I am overtaken by the desire to let my hands wander over the body of this gem. I wait for the salesman to talk to a customer before I stroke the wings of the small statuette standing on the
bonnet. I go around the car several times before I finally summon the courage to sit inside (21-22).

The Rolls-Royce brand is iconically associated with royalty and other elites, an epitome of “old” luxury continuing hand-in-hand with modern technology. In addition, this exclusive automobile is a globally recognisable brand symbolising British prestige. This description of Lapierre mesmerised by a Corniche right before he interviews Mountbatten for this text foreshadows the intensity and longevity of his feelings for imperial India. Because Lapierre describes himself being “hypnotised” by the radiator grill “reminiscent of the pediment of a Greek temple”, and later likens the car to a “precious stone” and a “beautiful woman”, the Rolls-Royce is a metaphor for the “Jewel in the Crown” and Lapierre falling in love with the British Raj. His phrase “state of ecstasy” also plays on the name of the car’s famous bonnet statuette, “The Spirit of Ecstasy”, which depicts a woman leaning forward with a billowing cloth running from her outstretched arms to her back, like wings.

The staff of the Rolls-Royce dealership however, refuse to sell Lapierre the Corniche because he wants to take it to India. According to the writer, these Englishmen “tripped over the word ‘India’ as if the association of a Rolls-Royce with a country like India was most incongruous” (25). They later state that they no longer have a representative in India and insinuate that Indian garages would not be able to carry out the basic “maintenance” of the Corniche.

“We are really sorry, sir,” the export manager said with the clear conscience of a father who wants to keep his daughter away from undesirable suiters. “We cannot sell you this motorcar.”

I took the blow with all the dignity I could muster. Then, seething with anger, I rushed to Victoria station (28).

This encounter with the Rolls-Royce dealership in 1970s London symbolises the British withdrawal/disassociation from India in various ways. The haughty staff who clearly do not think well of India and cannot contemplate a Rolls-Royce being taken there are made to stand for a country that has now turned its back on its imperial past. Yet, Lapierre also implies through this encounter the endurance of imperial symbols. The “Victoria station” where he takes the train to meet Queen Victoria’s great-grandson recalls the Queen-Empress of India, the longevity of her reign/lineage, the surviving last Viceroy and how the British-built railway system once symbolised civilising
governance, unification and technological progress in the Raj. Together, they suggest that while the white man's imperial romance with India may have faded, the prestige of its past cannot be obliterated.

In the narrative, the second-hand Rolls-Royce that Lapierre takes to India becomes a gesture toward enduring imperial prestige. When reading Mountbatten’s personal diary, Lapierre is “stupefied” to find a Rolls-Royce featuring in the Englishman’s “account of a tiger hunt with the Maharaja of Mysore, dated 21st April 1921”.

His Highness transformed one of his numerous Rolls-Royce into a hunting jeep so that his guests could aim and fire at game from the most comfortable of platforms imaginable ... The car is an absolute marvel. It can cross rivers ... go up and down the steepest tracks without having to change gear and travel through the jungle making light of all obstacles. If only a Rolls-Royce representative had been there, he would have been so proud! (29)

This anecdote inserts part of young Mountbatten’s “exciting memoirs” of “his fabled discovery of his great-grandmother Victoria’s empire” into Lapierre’s 2013 memoir (28). The Englishman’s authoritative voice on this “unforgettable page” of history speaks for imperial India. He testifies not only to the “absolute marvel” of the Maharajah’s converted Rolls-Royce but also to friendly relations between English and Indian royals. As discussed in the first chapter, Mountbatten is represented in FAM as both a symbol of the imperial past and a twentieth-century technocrat, a highly decorated naval commander who embraces military and communications technologies. This “discovery” of “empire”, first by Mountbatten in 1921, and later by Lapierre who reads his memoirs close to half a century later, affirms the technological prowess of both the Rolls-Royce and Indian sovereigns. It suggests that the white man’s imperial romance with India had been reciprocated by Indian elites who had enjoyed the best of European luxury and modernity.  

On his next trip to the British capital, the Frenchman states he was “happy to get my revenge” by going back to the dealership to show them “the page from the personal diary of the Queen of England’s uncle” (29). To the export manager who denied him the right to buy the Corniche, he states: “Sir, allow me to give you this. Do read it. It was written by one of your most illustrious compatriots. I now understand why you did not deem it fit to sell me one of your cars. I regret to say that today’s
Rolls-Royce is no match for its predecessors” (30). Lapierre’s attempt to educate these 1970s Englishmen reflects the particular idea that IML has the author speaking up for colonial history. This humorous anecdote suggests that the close ties between England and India, and the glory of ancient and imperial India, appeared to have been forgotten by many Britons. The Frenchman’s effort to correct the export manager’s ignorance, and implied racism, can also be read as a sign of him attempting to resurrect the white man’s romance with India. Given the earlier emphasis on his “discovery” of historical evidence/inscribed history, the writer once more recalls Nehru’s Indian “palimpsest”, where “layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously” (58).

After buying a second-hand Silver Cloud at Mountbatten’s suggestion and setting up residence in New Delhi with Collins’ family, his partner assigns him the task of seeking out the maharajahs since he “shared the love of big cars with this dying breed of princes” (35). During this assignment, Lapierre learns that there were close to two thousand Rolls-Royces owned by India’s five hundred and sixty-five Hindu maharajahs and Muslim nawabs in 1947; experts have estimated that “on average each one possessed 11 titles, 5.8 wives, 12.6 children, 9.2 elephants, 2.8 private rail carriages, 3.4 Rolls-Royces and 22.9 trophies of tigers shots” (36). As he travels around the subcontinent in his Silver Cloud, he devours facts and accounts of their “fabled vices and virtues”, suggesting that this research trip becomes an “unforgettable adventure” of vicarious indulgence (36).

For instance, Lapierre visits Sikh Maharaja Yadavindra Singh, the last maharajah of the State of Patiala. Singh’s father Sir Bhupinder Singh “epitomised” for “the generation between the wars the maharajas of India in all their splendour”. Lapierre learns how the elder Singh had a “gargantuan” appetite (“twenty kilos of food everyday”) and a vast stable of polo horses (“more than five hundred of the finest specimens”). Then there was the size of his royal harem (three hundred and sixty-five at the height of its glory, “one for each day of the year”); the erotic bas-reliefs of the ceilings and walls of his apartments (“a catalogue of mind-boggling poses, enough to exhaust the most fertile imagination and the most athletic of bodies”); and the pool where he frolicked with his wives (“cooled with bags of ice carried down by packs of
coolies from the Himalayas”). Lapierre also describes how the maharajah sought “the greatest plastic surgeons” to sculpt his wives’ features “in accordance with his whims and dictates of fashion magazines ordered from London and Paris”, and finally, how he died of sheer exhaustion at the age of forty-five after trying all kinds of treatments to boost his sexual prowess (38-39).

After enacting the “maharajah tourism” Rushdie satirises, Lapierre concludes that this adventure verifies Rudyard Kipling’s view that these men were created by Providence in order to supply the world with picturesque tiger hunts and grandiose entertainment. Stories of ... their extravagance and prodigality, their fads and eccentricities had enriched the collective folklore of mankind, filling with wonder a world thirsting for exoticism and fantasy (36).

This evocation of kings who “sailed through life on the flying carpet of an oriental tale” establishes the immense wealth of feudal and imperial India. More importantly, Lapierre’s profiles of Sir Bhupinder Singh, and other sovereigns such as the Francophile Maharajah of Kapurthala who built a replica of Versailles Palace, illustrate how they not only accepted the paramountcy of the English Crown but also adopted European ideals of cultural and material refinement. Such examples develop the theme of the white man’s romance with India by suggesting that it was well-reciprocated by its royal elites. According to the writer, the maharajahs, princes and nawabs who ruled independent kingdoms outside of British India were “the most zealous supporters of the British domination of India”. They were “generous in their support for the two World Wars in terms of both money and human lives”. In return, “the English had shown their gratitude to these faithful and prodigious vassals showering upon them honours and decorations” (42-43).

Lapierre notes that while Singh’s garages in 1947 “had housed a fleet of 27 Rolls-Royces, each more extravagant than the other, there were now only a locally manufactured Ambassador and an ancient French Dion-Bouton bearing as a mascot the number plate ‘Patiala 1’”. Lapierre calls this car “a relic” for it “dated back to 1898” and had been “the first car to be imported into India” (37). While “Patalia 1” is held up as the sign of India’s entry into the automobile age, the phrase “only a locally manufactured Ambassador” highlights the loss of twenty-seven other relics after the dissolution of the Raj in 1947. Although Lapierre is able to locate this legendary king’s
heir Yadavindra Singh – “a six foot six giant of a man, passionate about polo and cricket” (37) – the only other Rolls-Royce he finds in India “belonged to none other than Her Britannic Majesty’s Ambassador” (50). Since the younger Singh is also described as a man “who espoused new India after independence to become one of her most respected diplomats”, the writer plays on the word “ambassador” by associating him with the Indian-made Ambassador car. While the younger Singh and his car speak for “new India”, his father’s vanished Rolls-Royce collection bears witness to the lost Raj and its famed opulence and prestige.

Besides studying Indian sovereigns of the past, Lapierre is delighted to take part in “an unforgettable pigsticking, a legacy from the folklore of Queen Victoria’s empire” organised by the 61st Calvary of the Indian Army. After noting that “generations of young Englishmen thirsty for glory and space came to look for adventure” in British Indian Army, he states “a whole imagery had popularised the exploits of the while gentlemen with their plumed helmets, followed by squadrons of turbaned horsemen riding behind them”, based on images of “heroes” from “Kipling to Gary Cooper galloping across the screen at the head of the Bengal Lancers” (59). After this adventure, he concludes: “I should have met my beloved India in earlier times when colonisers from faraway England leading squadrons of turbaned sowars came here to write history” (67). This example, together with his maharajah anecdotes, suggest that to him, the exotic appeal of imperial India is as much to do with fabulously extravagant Oriental kings as the valorised exploits of soldier-administrators featured in European (Kipling) and North American (Cooper) cultural narratives in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More crucially, since Lapierre wishes that he had been able to meet one of the colonisers who came in earlier times” to “write history”, he plays on the notion of “writing history” to equate it with making history. He effectively compares FAM’s research stint in India to a neo-imperial campaign for knowledge, a heroic and thrilling adventure where Indian history is performed on the body of a feminised Orient. In addition, this pun blurs the boundaries between history, biography and story in Lapierre’s memoir. He reinforces the earlier construct of India as his “theatre”: it is both a real and discursive terrain where he can enact his imperial dreams.
One instance where Lapierre emphasises the impact and significance of his historical nonfiction is this memoir’s representation of the two writers’ investigations into Gandhi’s assassination. This recalls how FAM’s account of the events leading up to the murder on January 30, 1948 directly links it to the controversial failure of India’s police and intelligence forces to apprehend the perpetrators after their first botched attempt. FAM’s account of Nathuram Godse, Narayan Apte and Vishnu Karkare’s actions stands apart from other historical texts because it offers the lengthy first-person testimony of Karkare, the only assassin to have escaped the death sentence. Like A Thousand Suns, IML relates how the two writers brought Karkare—and other co-conspirators who had also served jail time for helping to plan the murder—back to the scene of the crime to re-enact the assassination. This anecdote illustrates the meticulous and exhaustive research behind FAM’s reconstruction of Gandhi’s death: the writers obtained the testimonies of the surviving members of this team, corroborated their recollections of the murder and checked these against police and intelligence reports from the 1940s. More importantly, Lapierre suggests that this was an investigation the Indian police had been unable to carry out. According to the writer, “the Indian police had had to abandon the idea of reconstructing the scene of the crime for fear of bloody reprisals” (88). Thus, although the writers only met Gandhi’s killers in 1972, Lapierre suggests that the evidence presented in 1975 with the publication of FAM offered new insights into Gandhi’s final moments as well as the plot to murder him.

Moreover, IML narrates Lapierre’s first-person experiences with the assassins and co-conspirators to depict the ongoing threat of Hindu political fundamentalism. These men had been part of Hindu Rashtra Dal, a secret society founded and led by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, former leader of Hindu Mahasabha, a right-wing, Hindu political party. An exceedingly influential man Igers and Wang call “the acknowledged ideological mentor of Hindu political fundamentalism,” Savarkar had also been charged for conspiracy to murder Gandhi but he was eventually acquitted for lack of evidence in 1949 (231). He later died in 1966 without being brought to justice. Thus, the historical account offered by FAM, which not only names Savarkar as the initiator of this plot but also offers details supported by first-person testimonies from the
assassins and co-conspirators, serves as a public indictment of this popular right-wing Hindu leader.

In *A Thousand Suns* (ATS) and *IML*, Lapierre suggests that Hindu fundamentalist secret societies are well and truly alive by describing the ceremony conducted by Godse’s family each year on the anniversary of his execution. He first describes how his brother and co-conspirator Gopal tells him that Gandhi’s non-violence had been unacceptable because it “threw the Hindus into the clutches of the enemy” by trying to stop Hindu retaliation against Muslim aggression. He then relates how all the members of Godse’s family gather yearly on November 15 to worship his remains and affirm their vows to unite India under Hindu rule by force. According to Lapierre, these Hindu fundamentalists prostrated themselves before the urn containing the assassin’s ashes, bowed to the clothes he had worn to kill Gandhi and affirmed “in chorus” their vow to “re-conquer” Pakistan, “the lost territory of India” and “re-unify India under Hindu domination” (86-87). Just as *FAM* posits communalism as the malaise which historically led to sectarian riots, Partition and Gandhi’s death, *ATS* and *IML* emphasise Hindu political fundamentalism as ongoing threats to the political stability of the subcontinent. Lapierre’s feelings about these fundamentalists are summed up by his remark: “Gandhi has been dead for too long” (89).

At the end of their *FAM* research adventure, Lapierre is satisfied with the quality and volume of the historical material they uncovered.

What bliss! My beloved India, had gratified Larry and me with the most exhaustive documentation ever collected on the fall of the British Empire in India and the partition of the subcontinent into two sovereign nations, India with a Hindu majority and Muslim Pakistan. We had collected more than two thousand unpublished accounts and about five hundred kilos of material. The documents in our treasure trove were almost entirely original, rich material that constituted the basis of the narrative for one of the greatest epoch in the history of the 20th century (90).

By asserting that the scholarship behind *FAM* relies on “almost entirely original” material unearthed by Lapierre and Collins, he depicts both writers as the producers of new and significant knowledge, again equating writing history with making history. Furthermore, the phrase “my beloved India” references the metaphor of the white man’s romance with India. This romance later deepens during the writers’ second tour of the subcontinent. After “a most enthusiastic” response by their French publisher,
Lapierre says “I dared to suggest that before the book launch, we take a hundred-odd booksellers on the same trail” (93). The writer’s recollections depict this second tour as a most memorable odyssey for these European visitors.

Thus, one morning in 1975 we found ourselves standing at the Khyber Pass, sharing bread and salt with redoubtable Pathan warriors. Upon reaching the Indian border, we were showered with rose petals by lancers on horseback, and almost burst into tears when we heard a vibrant rendition of the Marseillaise by the army band (93).

Lapierre’s description depicts this Indian adventure as the reliving of the imperial dream. Since the writer states earlier in the text “I had so often regretted not having been a Bengal Lancer in fierce pursuit of the ferocious Pathan warriors on the slopes of the Khyber Pass” – the “last outpost of the British Empire in India” – he first imagines taking his publisher and the booksellers through the frontiers of Empire, bravely breaking bread with the “redoubtable Pathan warriors” (59). It is only after passing these legendary frontiers of imperialism that these Europeans are “showered with rose petals by lancers on horseback”; their feted arrival accompanied by a “vibrant rendition” of the French national anthem. After associating these Europeans with the heroism of its Army/lancers, Lapierre praises India for its hospitality

My beloved India had spared no effort to show us her most generous face. At her residence in Delhi, Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, received the publishers and booksellers who were going to spread the tale of her country’s struggle for freedom. In Jaipur, the Maharaja and his court organised a splendid polo match for our benefit. In Kathmandu, we were received by the King of Nepal (93-94).

Although this description recalls the idea of Indian hospitality – best summed by the well-known Sanskrit verse *Atithi Devo Bhavah* (“treat a guest as if he/she were God him/herself”) – it also depicts the European visitors as important dignitaries. In their article “Representative Dissonance: India’s Self and the Western Image”, Ranjan Bandyopadhyay and Duarte Morais have noted that “luxury and royal treatment” rank highly in the “touristic representations and destination image-making” of American and Indian media, as well as the Indian Tourism Ministry (1013 - 1016). While appealing to these established images of India’s allure for visitors, Lapierre also stresses that they were not simply indulging in maharajah tourism. Besides the Maharaja of Jaipur, they met Indira Gandhi herself. The writer suggests that “the publishers and booksellers who were going to spread the tale of her country’s struggle
for freedom” were not just marketing any ordinary nonfiction book; they were cultivated as important ambassadors for India.

Lapierre depicts this tour as a great campaign leading to the publishers and booksellers’ heightened appreciation for India. In return, they promoted FAM and India with much enthusiasm.

By the time we boarded the plane back to Paris, more than two hundred thousand copies had been ordered by the booksellers for their summer display. The book was called “Freedom at Midnight”. The title was an abridged form of the first sentence of Jawaharlal’s famous speech on the eve of India’s independence: “When the world sleeps, India will awaken to life and freedom.”

Translated simultaneously into Italian, Spanish, German and English, Freedom at Midnight was soon to become number one on bestseller lists. Many booksellers converted their display windows into temples dedicated to India; along with copies of the book were albums, guidebooks, memories and accounts on the land of Gandhi. In many bookshops incense sticks were burnt to provide an authentic Indian atmosphere in a bid to woo readers (94).

This conclusion, once again, compares the publishing and marketing of FAM with the promotion of Indian culture, history and tourism. The phrases “temples dedicated to India” and “incense sticks were burnt” compare these ambassadors’ Indianisation to the worship of “the land of Gandhi”. Given the Rolls-Royce dealership staff’s blatant ignorance of Indian history, and prejudice towards this subcontinent, Lapierre suggests that the writers, and their powerful Indian connections, helped revive the white man’s romance with India. By the end of “In the Footsteps of the Greatest Empire of all Time”, FAM’s commercial success is matched by the rhetorical achievement of drawing global interest to South Asia, Gandhi and the history of decolonisation.

In these descriptions, the figurative white man does not “woo” a feminised and mystical India. Instead, he is wooing the rest of the world to an India identified with patriarchal freedom fighters such as Gandhi and Nehru. FAM’s message of sovereignty and liberty is emphasised by Lapierre who claims that “the title of our book almost gave rise to a major political incident” when he was on a promotional tour in Spain.

The book flooded display windows at a time when General Franco was breathing his last in the Prado Palace. The entire country had come to a standstill as the dictator lay on his deathbed. Fearing the title “Esta noche la libertad” be seen as a provocation, booksellers, erring on the side of caution, placed prominent signs on their windows: “Lapierre’s and Collins’ latest book
has nothing to do with the painful situation Spain is going through at present” (94-95).

This reference to Spain and General Francisco Franco recalls the dictator’s death, shortly after midnight on November 20, 1975. Lapierre’s description also references Or I’ll Dress You in Mourning, the 1966 book co-authored with Collins on Manuel Benítez Pérez, the famous bullfighter known as “El Cordobés”. This text, which depicts the life of this idolised and flamboyant national hero against the backdrop of Spanish history, ends with the image of the matador dining as an honoured guest next to the dictator “whose prison camps had been responsible for his father’s death” – “a photograph of an old man approaching the end of his life and his powers, and the unruly matador who unconsciously symbolised so many of his restless nation’s aspirations” (339). By highlighting how the release of FAM in Spain coincided with the end of Franco’s totalitarian rule, Lapierre alludes to the dismantling of authoritarian institutions, the revival of political parties and the country’s evolution into a democratic constitutional monarchy by 1978. More importantly, he suggests a contrast between Spain and India’s political histories to privilege the much earlier formation of democratic India in 1947 and the success of the freedom struggle led by Gandhi and Nehru.

Discursively, this celebration of the title “Freedom at Midnight” appeals to a Whiggish narrative of history imagining the past progressing in a seemingly inevitable march towards democratic nationhood to privilege constitutional government, tolerance, freedom and liberty. This ending to “In the Footsteps of the Greatest Empire of all Time” can appear odd given its early characterisation of Lapierre as the neo-imperial historian indulging in his fascination with the Orient and Empire. More crucially, it is ironic given that FAM, as demonstrated in the first chapter, asserts the moral imperative of the white man’s burden by depicting an India unable to self-govern in 1947. One explanation for Lapierre highlighting India as “the land of Gandhi” – and his reference to its spiritual exotica to reinforce the Mahatma’s asceticism and idealism – concerns the phenomenon known as the “Gandhi Revival”. He alludes to what Mark Juergensmeyer in his 1984 article “The Gandhi Revival – A Review Article” describes as the “renaissance of interest” in the Mahatma’s life story, his role in the emergence of independent India and the application of Gandhian thought to contemporary issues/problems in the 1970s and 1980s (293). On Gandhian
biographies, Juergensmeyer has described the box office success of Richard Attenborough’s celebrated epic *Gandhi* (1982) as one of the most popular films of its time and the most famous cinematic portrayal of his life. Since Lapierre asserts in the Preface to the 1997 edition of *FAM* that John Briley has credited much of his inspiration for his Academy-Award winning screenplay to *Gandhi*, IML’s reference to the “Gandhi Revival” reinforces this text as an exceedingly influential narrative (xlv). Together with IML’s anecdotes on the original evidence Lapierre and Collins gathered about the Mahatma’s assassination, this allusion to the “Gandhi Revival” stresses, again, the significance of *FAM*’s scholarship. By associating the popularity of this text with a discursive impact on the world’s perception of India and Gandhi, Lapierre depicts himself as an authoritative historian and spokesperson for India.

In his Foreword to the 1998 re-issue of Benita Parry’s *Delusions and Discoveries: India in the British Imagination*, Michael Sprinkler argues that “the nostalgia for the era of British rule in India increased in inverse proportion to the empire’s actual territorial reach”. Beginning in the 1960s, a “Raj Revival” in literature, television and cinematic narratives constituted a rhetorical attempt to sustain the imperial legacy and “stave off the precipitous decline in Britain’s geopolitical power and prestige, whose first major symptom had been India’s independence in 1947” (vii). The surge of narratives set in the Raj included *The Jewel In the Crown* (1966), the first of Paul Scott’s *Raj Quartet*, the 1964 reprint of Phillip Mason’s *The Men who Ruled India*, Paul Scott’s *Raj Quartet* (issued in one volume in 1973) and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala’s *Heat and Dust* (1975). In addition, there were James Ivory’s film *Heat* and *Dust* (1983), David Lean’s film *A Passage to India* (1984), Nicholas Meyer’s *The Deceivers* (1988), a made-for-television film series *Kim* by John Davies (1984) and the television serials *The Jewel in the Crown* (1982) and *The Far Pavilions* (1984). The renaissance of Gandhian narratives, and *FAM* itself, can thus be situated within this broader resurgence of interest in the history of imperial India during the 1970s and 1980s.
Saving the Indian Poor

The second chapter of this thesis has discussed at length how the Victoria Memorial is featured in *TCOJ* as the “heart of the urban jungle” in post-independence Calcutta, and how Lapierre used features of this Memorial to depict Indians as ever-loyal subjects who still express affection for the English sovereign and the imperial humanitarian ideals she represents. In *IML*, the writer reiterates *TCOJ*’s point that this is the “white marble” monument “the Indians themselves built through public subscription to honour their empress” (72). Since Calcuttans gather daily by the “imposing statue” that “beckons her subjects to her” and behold the sunrise, Lapierre associates this ritual, which “governs the lives of millions of Indians” with an imperial England on which the sun would never set. To illustrate how their worship of the sun unites Indians of all races and faiths, Lapierre describes their joy when dawn breaks.

Frantic clapping bursts out the minute the red disk of Surya, the Sun God, peeps out of the polluted translucent rays of light, framed between the four turrets of the neo-gothic cathedral of Saint Paul. Sitting in the lotus position, a holy man in saffron robes recites mantras and a group of young Hindus chant a song of thanksgiving. Rooted to the spot as if hypnotised, couples, even entire families, contemplate the ball of fire that heralds the end of darkness and the birth of a new day. I am just as moved as the crowds at this magnificent spectacle (73).

Although this practice associated with the Hindu “Sun God”, the words “darkness” and “birth” also recall the imperial humanitarian ideals associated with the Queen Victoria. While Lapierre at the beginning of *IML* is “hypnotised” by the shining jewel of a Rolls-Royce, the same word is used to describe Indians in this passage when they behold the sun rising at Queen Victoria’s Memorial, heralding the “the end of darkness” and “the birth of a new day”. Through the metaphors of light and darkness, death and resurrection, Lapierre calls Calcutta’s colonial association with death and the rhetoric of the white man’s responsibility to civilise and evangelise to the dark, idolatrous peoples of the Orient. This chapter discusses how *IML*, like *TCOJ*, posits the ongoing relevance of the white man’s burden by depicting foreigners as saviours whose assistance are welcomed by the Indian poor. It examines Lapierre’s representations of Indian poverty and white humanitarians and how they legitimise his humanitarian engagement in South Asia.
When Lapierre travels to Calcutta in “In the Footsteps of the Greatest Empire of All Time”, he does so in a third-class train carriage, citing Gandhi’s belief that “it was by travelling with the most downtrodden of his countrymen that he could identify with the country’s inner strength” (69). Of this two-day journey, he remembers “the dust, the grime, the laments, the cries, the overpowering smell of incense, curry and urine mixed together, in the midst of a prodigious riot of colours, smiling faces, vitality and dignity!” (70) The “vitality” and “dignity” he sees in fellow third-class travellers, however, is absent amongst the squatters he meets upon arrival at the “enormous station-caravanserai of Howrah, Calcutta’s twin city, where the Mahatma had landed twenty-five years before me” (70). The writer’s descriptions of this setting suggest that the subcontinent’s “most downtrodden” are not Indians in third-class carriages but rather, the displaced victims of Partition in 1947 and the subsequent wars between both states.

The Partition of the country in 1947 and the 1971 war between Indian and Pakistan had pitchforked millions of people fleeing massacre and terror into Calcutta. I was hurtled into a sleazy hall. In the pale neon light, women with shrivelled breasts were delousing children with bloated stomachs; children in rags were looking in rubbish heaps for scraps of food; lepers on wooden boards with wheels were holding out their begging bowls ... As if in counterpoint, the place pulsed with life. A host of coolies in red tunics scampered in all directions, carrying pyramids of bags and suitcases on their heads ... a fleet of taxis and cars honked loudly to make their way and drop their passengers at the door of their compartments; interminable queues jostled with each other around the counters. I was drunk with all that I saw, stunned by the cacophony of loudspeakers, shouts, calls and whistling trains (70). In this scene, the 1970s railway station is depicted as the meeting place, or juxtaposition, of two very different Indias. One of them is an industrial metropolis. To Lapierre, it “pulsated with life” and is characterised by mobility and travel: besides the honking of taxis and cars, Calcuttans are either strong coolies transporting luggage and goods, or passengers buying train tickets and boarding trains. The other India is “a refugee camp” of people “fleeing massacre and terror”. Lapierre’s descriptions of refugees are dominated by female and young squatters and maimed lepers on wooden boards with wheels; they are starving and malnourished, with nowhere to go. More importantly, the busy Calcuttans appear to be indifferent to the refugees. Lapierre’s gaze reads the latter’s bodies to show clear signs of malnutrition and disease: “shrivelled breasts”, “bloated stomachs” and lepers “on wooden boards with wheels”.

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This representation of a “partitioned” train station clearly serves as a metonym for Lapierre’s idea of an inhuman Calcutta as well as his construction of a deeply stratified Indian society. The overcrowded train station recalls *TCOJ*’s representation of the refugee crisis and overpopulation in Calcutta in general, and how refugees are the moral “Other” to cruel and exploitative Calcuttans. It also recalls *FAM*’s portrayal of the Partition as the traumatic historical phenomenon leaving a bitter legacy of Indo-Pakistani conflict.

Hence, although *IML* and *TCOJ* both depict the Indian poor as people who need support from other Indians, the latter differs in its representations of the city’s “most downtrodden” by politicising this refugee crisis. While *TCOJ* depicts refugees mainly as rural-urban migrants victimised by drought and famine in the Bengal countryside and cruel Calcuttans, *IML* resituates this group as people who experience political crises and persecution. By constructing these squatters as displaced persons “fleeing massacres and terror into Calcutta”, he refers to Partition as well as the events of 1971 where former East Pakistan declared independence from West Pakistan and ten million civilians fled into neighbouring India because of the violent repression by the Pakistani army. Scholars such as Michael Barnett in *Empire of Humanity* and Antara Datta in *Refugees and Borders in South Asia: The Great Exodus of 1971* describe how the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) served as the principal international body engaged in relief efforts during this crisis. Datta also explains that India’s “lack of participation in the international refugee regime” – because it had not signed the United Nations Convention on Refugees in 1951 and its 1967 Protocol – together with its support for the formation of Bangladesh led Indira Gandhi’s government to classify these evacuees not as “refugees” but as “foreigners” to be repatriated (55 - 60). By situating their plight within the historical context of the Indo-Pakistani conflicts, and calling them “refugees”, Lapierre thus depicts them as pitiful victims of persecution whose rights under the international refugee conventions went unrecognised. This appeal to the discourse of human rights reinforces the need for foreign aid and intervention.

Moreover, the politicisation of refugees and this appeal to international humanitarian and human rights ideals constitute an important difference between *IML* and two earlier books, *FAM* and *TCOJ*. The first chapter has analysed how *FAM* first
demonises South Asians as violent, communal hordes before humanising them as traumatised and displaced populations who necessitated Mountbatten’s secret return to power and military governance. The second chapter has discussed how TCOJ describes post-colonial Calcutta as a primitive and degenerate space overpopulated with displaced persons – who are depicted as both parasitic migrants and pitiful beasts of burden – struggling to survive in this concrete jungle. Hence, the figure of the refugee in both narratives can be read as a character victimised by uniquely South Asian problems such as communal madness, natural disasters and ineffective local governance. Since IML’s construction of refugees in Calcutta appeals to human rights and international treaties, this text differs from FAM and TCOJ by moving away from localised images of South Asian victims and referencing a transnational notion of refugee populations whose rights are recognised by governments and humanitarian aid organisations from the global North. Hence, Lapierre’s portrayal of refugees in this 2013 text is more aligned with liberal humanitarian ideology, which dominates twenty-first century narratives, than imperial humanitarian or neo-humanitarian ideologies.

In spite of this departure from FAM and TCOJ, IML maintains these earlier texts’ tendency to highlight the Indian masses’ desire for spiritual salvation. En route to Bangalore, Lapierre witnesses “a sea of humanity” taking part in the ritual sprinkling of holy water on Bahubali – the “idol worshipped by fervent followers of Jainism” – and describes them at the “climax” of the ceremony drinking in ecstasy the “holy manna” as if it were “unction” (45-48). In Benares, one of the oldest cities in India, Lapierre plunges into another “sea of humanity” at the banks of the Ganges where dead Hindus are cremated. He hears a “dry crackling sound” as the deceased’s head splits open for “his energy to merge with cosmic eternity”. In this way, he writes, “India’s sacred city escapes from the material turmoil of the world and offers its pilgrims the gift of eternal liberation” (58).

Besides water metaphors, Lapierre also appeals to Christian discourses when describing Indians’ desire for salvation. On Christmas Eve in Calcutta, Lapierre describes the “immense Howrah station”, “streaming with garlands like luminous stars”, looking as if this refugee camp has been transformed into “a maharajah’s palace on the night of his coronation”. The king that reigns amongst India’s “most downtrodden” is identified as Jesus when Lapierre describes how “in the poorest
quarters of the city” the doorsteps of slum dwellings offer “innumerable small crèches decorated with holy images or a copy of the Bible opened at the page of the Nativity” (81). This “poignant tribute of the poor to the birth of the Saviour” symbolised their collective hope for a heavenly saviour. Lapierre then describes a “luminous star hanging at the end of a bamboo stick placed on the roof” of Christian homes.

It was the Hindus and Muslims who thought of this symbol of hope up in the sky over an area where there was so much suffering. As if to say to the inhabitants: “Fear no more. You are not alone. For tonight when the God of the Christians is born, there will be a saviour in our midst.” Surely this would have warmed the cockles of Gandhi’s heart (81).

Repeatedly, Lapierre associates Indians’ desire for relief and “liberation” from suffering with the rituals they undertake to gain spiritual blessing and salvation (58). The reference to Gandhi emphasises how this apostle of nonviolence and fraternity would have approved of the slum uniting in celebration of the “God of Christians”.

Such examples show how Lapierre depicts refugees at Howrah Station and the residents of the city’s slums as a fraternity bound by “suffering” so great it cuts across any political, ethnic, caste or religious divide. Like TCOJ, IML depicts the solidarity of India’s “most downtrodden” as something borne of suffering. Furthermore, Lapierre’s reference to Gandhi recalls the Mahatma’s affinity with Indians in “third-class” train carriages and his desire to identify with their “inner strength” (69). Thus, the bamboo stick bearing Hindus, Muslims and Christians’ luminous star in the slum can also be read as a sign of the poor’s “inner strength”: their capacity for faith and solidarity. Similar to the example of Calcuttans gathering around the white marble monument their forebears had erected for Queen Victoria, this example of the refugees and slum residents celebrating Jesus’ birth can be interpreted as a scene showing Indians venerating a Messianic Christian figure.

In line with the principle of neutrality endorsed by relief agencies and the ideology of state sovereignty central to neo-humanitarianism, the dominant white saviours in IML are European religious humanitarians who do not interfere in Indian politics. Lapierre, however, stresses the idea that these foreign humanitarians are assisted by, or partner with, Indian charities and aid agencies. Although the text does briefly mention Mountbatten, it does not highlight his contribution to India which is depicted as a heroic trusteeship in FAM. Instead, the humanitarians Lapierre depicts
are Mother Teresa, James Stevens and Gaston Grandjean – friends and mentors who have played pivotal roles in his own work with the Indian poor. The first Christian saviour discussed is the Albanian nun and Nobel Prize laureate whose fame had made Calcutta known worldwide as the headquarters and birthplace of The Missionaries of Charity. Shortly after describing Christmas Eve in the slums, Lapierre recounts his visit to their premises where he sees her praying.

The bells of a Hindu temple frenetically call the populace for the early morning *puja*. Number 54/A is a large grey building. I reach the entrance through a small side street. There is a simple wooden plaque at the threshold: “Mother Teresa”. I pull a string that causes a small bell to ring inside. The dark face of a young Indian Sister in a white sari and veil with a blue border appears. Immediately from the shadows behind me springs a starving old man trying to get through the door. The Sister pushes him back gently, explaining to him in Bengali how to reach the centre for help and care. A nun guides me to the chapel on the first floor. It is a vast empty room with large windows opening onto the noise of the awakening city. On the wall, behind the altar is a simple inscription: “I thirst”.

I thirst! It is indeed a poignant moment when I see, kneeling at the end of the room on old threadbare jute bag, the woman, who for twenty-two years has been quenching the thirst of Christ crucified. I am deeply moved as I gaze at her face, lined with wrinkles, wizened with age and watch her lips quiver in perpetual prayer. I can hear the words in my mind as they say “Blessed are you, Calcutta, for in your misfortune you have given birth to saints” (83).

This passage references three well-known aspects of Mother Teresa’s image and the religious congregation she founded: every branch of the Missionaries of Charity has an altar with the image of crucified Christ bearing the inscription “I thirst”; Mother Teresa is said to be a woman who savours the quiet and her lips are in “perpetual prayer” and the Missionaries of Charity describe themselves as “quenching the thirst” of the crucified poor, who are symbolised by the “starving old man” seeking help. In this introduction to Mother Teresa, Lapierre does not speak to her but rather, for her. He gazes upon her kneeling at the altar and emphasises that this devout Catholic’s lips “quiver” only to recite prayers. Hence, the only sound he can “hear” inside this chapel is that of his internal monologue which recalls her beautification as “Blessed Teresa of Calcutta” in 2003.6

This description recalls TCOJ’s Stephan Kovalski who venerates Christ and sees his image in the Indian poor. More importantly, it also venerates the saintly nun who is objectified by Lapierre’s Christian gaze. Their one and only conversation in this memoir
takes place in the opening paragraph of Part Two, “The Unsung Heroes of India, My Love”, when Lapierre returns to the city after FAM’s successful launch to donate $50,000.

As soon as we arrive in Calcutta, we entrust our humanitarian project to Mother Teresa. No one understands better than her the suffering of the poor. She knows which institution our act of solidarity can help.

“God has sent you!” she exclaims enthusiastically.

“Mother, this is only a drop in the ocean,” I say apologetically.

She looks at us with tender amusement.

“The ocean would not be an ocean without this drop,” she replies firmly.

That very evening, a jovial forty-year old European, dressed in an Indian kurta and cotton trousers, arrives at our doorstep. He has been sent by Mother. Within a span of fifteen years, the Englishman James Stevens has lifted out of poverty and snatched from the jaws of death more than a thousand children afflicted with leprosy. To do this, the former gentlemen’s outfitter sold off his entire business and gave up his comfortable existence in England. On 24th March 1979, he set up a home in a Calcutta suburb. He called it “Udayan”, the Hindi word for “resurrection” or “dawn”. We soon discover that a terrible tragedy lies behind his jovialness: he is on the verge of closing his home and returning the one hundred and twenty children he has been looking after to poverty. He has exhausted all his personal resources and has not found any financial aid to carry on his work. A small haven of light in the midst of hell is about to be snuffed out (99).

This exchange with Mother Teresa asserts her authority and knowledge as Calcutta’s most famous humanitarian. It also lends credibility to Lapierre and Stevens’ work with Indian children “afflicted with leprosy”. The nun’s declaration that “God has sent” Lapierre suggests that his philanthropy is a divinely guided rescue for Udayan. Lapierre’s $50,000 and subsequent fundraising appeal in France not only pay off Stevens’ debts but also allow the Englishman to take in fifty more children. These outcomes establish Lapierre as a salvific figure similar to Mother Teresa and Stevens. They also suggest that the nun is a friend and advisor to his humanitarianism. In addition, as the name of this home recalls biblical and imperial humanitarian metaphors comparing aid to “resurrection” or “dawn”, Lapierre associates the leper children with the Calcuttans beholding the sunrise every day at the Victoria Memorial. This implies that their work with the Indian poor, like Mother Teresa’s, constitutes a form of humanitarian government.
The global impact of Mother Teresa’s humanitarian government is highlighted at the end of *IML*. It is the last of “three emotional experiences, which, in the evening of my life, are engraved in my heart with a particular intensity” (178). This anecdote describes Lapierre and his wife in New York, and their amazement when they “read in the newspapers that Mother Teresa and a small group of her Indian nuns from Calcutta had just arrived in Manhattan to open a hospice for those dying of AIDS, who had neither money nor any family to look after them” (181). According to the writer, this was a most remarkable event. “This time it was India that was coming to the help of the affluent West. I rushed to the address given in the papers. The ‘Saint of Calcutta’ had named the home ‘Gift of Love’” (181). This anecdote alludes to the success of Mother Teresa’s religious congregation, which had established nearly six hundred missions worldwide by the early twenty-first century according to Louise Slavicek’s *Mother Teresa* (90). In *Empire of Humanity*, Michael Barnett explains that “the centrepiece of Christian mission is to cross frontiers, geographical, cultural, economic, social and political, in the service of Christ and his Kingdom” (64). Lapierre’s comment affirms this pioneering spirit by highlighting how Mother Teresa and her fellow nuns had crossed great divides between Calcutta and “the affluent West”. He also suggests that these religious humanitarians were symbolically creating a Kingdom of Heaven for ostracised AIDS patients living in a city which did not know “the riches of poverty” Lapierre exalts in *TCOJ* and *IML*. The name of this hospice also alludes to *Beyond Love*, Lapierre’s 1991 text on the doctors, scientists, missionaries and patients fighting on “the battlefront of AIDS” to “protect mankind from one of the most terrible plagues of all time” (1). This text, which features *TCOJ*’s Bandona from the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid in Pilkhana as one of the nuns who travel to Manhattan, depicts the Missionaries of Charity as Christian and Indian salvific figures. Lapierre dwells on the fact that these compassionate humanitarians from the global South lovingly tended to terminally-ill AIDS patients in the early years of this epidemic, when little was known about this disease and few Americans were willing to care for them.

More crucially, this recognition of Mother Teresa and her Indian nuns’ global missionary work is linked to the problem of communalism and Gandhi’s nonviolent efforts to stop it. Earlier in *IML*, Lapierre describes Gandhi condemning and fasting against sectarian riots in a slum in Calcutta in August 1947. After Calcuttans repented
and begged him to stop his fast unto death, the Mahatma issues them a “warning” before sipping some juice: “Calcutta holds the key to peace in India. The least incident here can produce incalculable repercussions elsewhere. Even if the whole countryside goes up in a conflagration, you must see to it that Calcutta is kept out of the flames. Strive to make Calcutta one day the pride of Heaven” (77). This anecdote reinforces FAM’s construction of Gandhi’s nonviolent fasts as redemptive suffering that sought to heal India’s divided body politic. More importantly, it depicts Calcutta as the nation’s hotbed of communal violence. Hence, IML’s ending — which imagines Calcutta as the source of exemplary Indians spreading Christian charity worldwide — portrays Mother Teresa leading Calcuttans towards nonviolence, solidarity and compassion. By helping the city, its peoples and improving its image, her humanitarianism is shown to be in alignment with Gandhi’s ideals as the Mahatma is known for his wish that independent India would become a role model for the rest of the world. In the process, Lapierre reinforces, again, the imperial humanitarian belief that Christian values are both universal and salvific. This anecdote also reinforces FAM and TCOJ’s image of Indians as masses in need of moral leadership as well as both texts’ suggestion that the spread of Christianity and Christian values can engender the moral improvement of Indian society Gandhi desired.

By beginning and ending “The Unsung Heroes of India, My Love” with anecdotes associating his humanitarian work and writing with Mother Teresa, Lapierre also leverages on her image as a global humanitarian icon to legitimise his own work. Kathryn Spink, who is the English translator of Lapierre’s TCOJ and Beyond Love, demonstrates in her Christopher Award-winning Mother Teresa: An Authorised Biography that the many international awards bestowed upon the humanitarian honoured her as a “transcendental” figure appealing to people of all races, religions and creeds. She is recognised worldwide as a symbol of humanity, compassion and service to the poor (160-168). Spink also asserts that these glowing tributes have helped to cement the good reputation of the missionary organisation she had founded in India.

So the list of honours and awards lengthened. In India, the Missionaries of Charity had earned themselves a position of general respect. Whereas other Christians and foreigners undertaking work to relieve the suffering of the poor were accused of giving disproportionate emphasis to the problem of India’s
poverty, and experienced difficulties with the renewal of visas and other attempts at obstruction, Mother Teresa was regarded by many as a national heroine. The Indian government granted her all kinds of visa privileges and customs exemptions. Innumerable concessions and marks of appreciation, such as free travel on Indian Railways, facilitated the progress of her work (162-163).

Although the nun was not involved in Indian politics, Gëzim Alpion’s *Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity?* also argues that her work and saintly reputation had benefited greatly from the patronage and support of the Indian government and media. According to him, “Indian politicians at local and national level were interested in ensuring that the ‘saintly’ Mother Teresa was known by as many people as possible in Calcutta and throughout India” (13). This affirmation of her work, however, carried a political and social agenda: “successive Indian governments backed by the Indian media” helped to cultivate Mother Teresa’s image as the embodiment of compassion and other universal human virtues to garner support for progressive reforms assisting “millions of Indians traditionally abandoned and shunned by the class-conscious and caste-ridden Indian society” (13). Hence, Lapierre’s construction of Mother Teresa appeals to the saintly image that has been propagated by the Indian government and media.

The previous chapter has noted how criticisms directed at Lapierre’s representation of the Indian poor in *TCOJ* have come from a range of sources, including Calcuttans heading aid organisations in slums and prominent foreigners who reside in the city. In addition, it has highlighted that the filming of Roland Joffé’s adaptation of *TCOJ* had been beset with numerous challenges due to the Bengal government and many Calcuttans’ disapproval of the film and the text’s representations of Indian poverty. These experiences show how Lapierre can be seen as one of the Christians and foreigners facing “attempts at obstruction” in Spink’s description. *IML*’s repeated references to the author’s association with “Blessed Teresa of Calcutta” can thus be read as a rhetorical attempt to validate Lapierre’s humanitarian work and writing as expressions of his own Christian compassion. He depicts Mother Teresa as a venerated mentor who gives him direction on his philanthropy and also alludes to that fact that he had interviewed her and other Missionaries of Charity for *Beyond Love*.  

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It is important to note, however, that Mother Teresa only features briefly in the beginning and ending of the second half of this memoir. Throughout the rest of *IML*, Lapierre quotes her well-known platitudes on charity and humanity – such as “God will provide” (158) and “To save a child is to save the world” (111) – but does not represent any other encounter with her during his decades of humanitarianism and advocacy except for a photo of them smiling and chatting. In addition, while he does describe the Indian Sisters, they are described as nameless and faceless “frail silhouettes” bringing “a wave of generosity” to the places they visit (84). Such examples show that Lapierre establishes his long association with Mother Teresa but refrains from depicting their relationship and the Missionaries of Charity in great detail. One glaring omission is the fact that *IML* and *A Thousand Suns* do not discuss the teleplay he had co-written for *In the Name of God’s Poor*, a 1997 biopic of this humanitarian icon. Mother Teresa’s muted presence in both memoirs, together with this omission, are indicative of the issues that arose between them over the content of these narratives. According to Spink, “unwelcome and inaccurate attention” had been drawn to the Sisters’ work with AIDS patients in the United States because of the best-selling *Beyond Love*, leading Mother Teresa to have reservations about the teleplay. She had given and withdrawn consent three times for Lapierre to portray her and the Missionaries of Charity in this film. In addition, the Indian Government, who had been conscious of the Order’s disapproval – and sensitive about focusing international attention on India’s poverty – barred the film from being shot in India (176-177).

Along with Mother Teresa, the other two Christian salvific figures in *IML* are Gaston Grandjean and Lapierre himself. The relationship between the Swiss and the Frenchman, which results in the publication of *TCOJ*, portrays Lapierre as a committed humanitarian and spokesperson for the Indian poor, not a writer-voyeur who exploits Indian poverty to indulge in literary slum tourism. First, Lapierre dwells on their initial meeting and how they had to gain the Swiss nurse’s trust before they were allowed to get to know Pilkhana.

James takes us through narrow lanes till we reach the end of one of the communal courtyards. There, in a space no more than six by four with no water, no electricity, no window, no furniture, not even a camp bed, lives a forty-four year old Swiss man. His extreme pallor, his thin frame and his long Indian shirt
make him look like a hippie on his way to Kathmandu. Everyone here calls him Brother Gaston or Gaston Dada. He doesn’t approve of our visit.

“I’m sorry friends, but tourists are not welcome here!” he exclaims on seeing us.

For the past twelve years, Gaston Dada, who is a nurse, and the team of Indian social workers he has trained, have been tirelessly covering each and every corner of this abject locality. The dirt, the malnutrition, the superstition and the complete lack of hygiene don’t give a minute’s respite to this foreigner who, like me, has fallen in love with India (112).

This description illustrates how the Swiss humanitarian had earned his title “Dada” (Big Brother) by detailing his years of service and residence in this “abject locality”. It portrays this white man’s romance with the Indian poor not as tourism – which Grandjean objects to – but as selfless aid at the grassroots level. More importantly, by highlighting his status in the slum and his leadership of a well-established NGO, Lapierre suggests that the Swiss is no ordinary nurse. This Christian’s humanitarian government of the slum is a self-sacrificing yet salvific relationship likened to the white man’s romance with India. Lapierre states that Grandjean “landed in Calcutta” with only “a copy of the Bible, a razor and toothbrush” to live amongst the poor.

A few days later, he settled down in this slum. He cured an almost-blind little girl who was his neighbour. When the inhabitants saw that his solidarity was not with any intention to convert, he was able to slowly win their trust. His reservations about us, on the other hand, were more difficult to overcome (113).

Lapierre then depicts himself impressing the Swiss in the same way the missionary had won over his Indian neighbours: by making a great difference to someone’s life. Their meeting with Grandjean is abruptly interrupted by an urgent call for the nurse to save a dying Indian youth. Fortuitously, the Lapierres have a rental car and driver waiting; they rush the young man through “the traffic jams of this permanently asphyxiated city” to a dispensary with a newly-arrived German doctor (114). This intervention saves the young man’s life and makes it possible for the couple to get to know the slum community.

This act of solidarity disarms the reservations the Swiss nurse has about us: people who come for an immersion course in exotic poverty before returning to the comforts of their affluent world. ... Convinced of the genuineness of our feelings for India and my desire to show him our gratitude by helping the poorest of the poor, the Swiss nurse agrees to take us around his kingdom of poverty (115).
It is evident that these interventions further develop the theme of solidarity by equating solidarity with humanitarian aid. In the process, Lapierre also distinguishes humanitarian action from slum tourism. While the former is tied to solidarity with Indians and concrete actions that help them, the latter is critiqued as voyeurism. While acknowledging that many foreigners come for “an immersion course in exotic poverty”, he depicts his wife and himself as caring visitors who come prepared to help needy Indians.

Earlier in the text, the theme of solidarity is associated with India’s “most downtrodden” when they unite in celebrating the birth of Christ the Saviour, recalling TCOJ’s construction of poverty and suffering as a unique fraternity dissolving all class, castes, religious and ethnic differences in the slum (69). By representing these white men’s intervention as expressions of “solidarity”, Lapierre suggests that humanitarian aid, like poverty and suffering, can unite very different and diverse groups of people worldwide. Throughout the rest of IML, Lapierre continues to equate humanitarianism and his writing on the Indian poor with solidarity. When introducing It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal, his book about Bhopal’s 1984 toxic gas explosion whose royalties support aid projects for victims of this industrial disaster, he states that “my beloved India did not want me to limit my impulses of solidarity to the slums of Calcutta and the poorest regions of Bengal” (160). Later, to thank his most significant donor friends and long-term supporters – such as Alexander and Suzanne Van Meerwijk, owners of one of the world’s largest distributors of household goods, and French couturier Hubert de Givenchy, who donated the black sheath Audrey Hepburn had worn in the film Breakfast at Tiffany’s for an auction – the writer uses the term “vibrant solidarity” to describe their “passionate crusade” and “generosity” (173-175).

On the theme of solidarity, the previous chapter on TCOJ discussed how the asymmetrical relations inherent in compassionate humanitarians’ work with slum residents – such as Kovalski and Max Loeb’s medical dispensary in Pilkhana – are balanced out repeatedly by acts of solidarity whenever these foreigners are in danger. In addition, the previous chapter analysed how Lapierre represents key members of the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid as rural-urban migrants who face poverty and hardship like their neighbours. By volunteering as aid workers and social workers, they demonstrate solidarity with their neighbours in the slum. Such storylines enable
Lapierre to portray interdependent instead of one-sided relationships between everyone in the slum community, including the white humanitarians. While IML does relate very similar stories of impoverished Indians saving each other, this text differs from TCOJ since it does not depict Lapierre, Grandjean and any other white humanitarian receiving any critical assistance from the Indian poor. Hence, unlike TCOJ, white Christian humanitarians such as Lapierre, Stevens, Grandjean – and their generous foreign donor friends – are depicted as compassionate and intervening saviours to Indian victims. This suggests asymmetrical saviour-victim relationships between people of the global North and global South.

Lapierre’s critique of foreigners who come to experience “exotic poverty” in the slum before returning to their “affluent world” can seem hypocritical given his indulgence in India’s “exotic” Oriental and imperial past and objectification of Indian royalty. This chapter has analysed how the Rolls-Royce-loving Frenchman revels in maharaja tourism, takes publishers and booksellers “on the same trail” of India (93) and even reiterates Kipling’s view that the Indian sovereigns of the past had “enriched the collective folklore of mankind, filling with wonder a world thirsting for exoticism and fantasy” (36). Such examples clearly show that the writer himself indulges in, and promotes, tourism and voyeuristic tendencies predicated on India’s image as the exotic “Other” to the white man. Furthermore, the European and American philanthropists and humanitarians he cites in this memoir as enthusiastic supporters and benefactors of the Indian poor are chosen from the wealthiest and most distinguished elites in the global North. They are even more privileged than most tourists “slumming it” in Calcutta. From this perspective, the theme of white humanitarians showing their “solidarity” with India’s “most downtrodden” can be read as a rhetorical device used to mitigate the disparities between aid recipients and foreign donors and humanitarians. Throughout the second half of IML, Lapierre gives examples to show how his experiences and publication of slum stories are not geared towards voyeurism or exploitation but expressions of solidarity. For example, the expenses spent on launching TCOJ at a Parisian hotel for twelve hundred booksellers and guests were matched by a donation of the same value to purchase thirty-five tonnes of rice, “in other words, five hundred grams per person”, for Pilkhana (144). He also writes about being able to meet “several pressing requests for financial help”
because of the success of this book and “the nearly two hundred thousand letters and donations” sent to him by readers worldwide (145).

On one occasion, Lapierre acknowledges that the rhetoric of solidarity cannot mask the obvious disparities between himself and the Indian poor. After the French couple offer Grandjean the means to extend the Listening Committee for Mutual Aid’s night school so “the children who worked all day long in workshops and tea-stalls could learn to read and write”, they are invited “to further experience the reality of his locality” as “a reward” (121). Lapierre later stays overnight in Grandjean’s hovel where the nurse leads a “prayer of thanksgiving ‘for the joy given to us of being together’”.

“This prayer describing Lapierre’s intention to “take back all that he sees and feels in the midst of the suffering innocents of this slum” suggests that the writer plans to tell stories about the Indian poor in Pilkhana to his friends and readers in France. It draws a parallel between his visit to Udayan which preceded his successful fundraising appeal in a French magazine and this immersion in the slum which later informs his writing of TCOJ. This implication that Lapierre’s research and writing are further acts of solidarity with the poor is reinforced when the Swiss names Jesus as “the voice of the voiceless”, and thanks him for “making” the writer want to learn about Christ’s suffering Indian “children”. Hence, the Swiss imagines Lapierre not as a voyeuristic tourist or writer pandering to readers’ tastes for accounts of exotic Indian poverty but as a legitimate spokesperson for the slum. Grandjean’s view that this writer-humanitarian carries out the ministry of Christ recalls TCOJ description of Kovalski insisting that the aid committee should read the Gospel together to “understand the link” “between the person of Christ and those who had taken it upon themselves to continue his work” (TCOJ 165-166).
Lapierre responds with humility to Grandjean’s words. After the Swiss bids him “Goodnight, brother!” in “the tone of a veteran talking to a young recruit on his first night in a trench on the line of fire”, he turns pensive.

The fact that he calls me “Brother” touches me doubly. First because the person who calls me “Brother” has made fraternity his life’s ideal. Secondly because the term is an expression of the adventure I will be living tonight … I have slept in many a strange and dangerous place … but never before have I slept in the purgatory of a Third World shantytown. Do I have the right to share the sleep of these people who are immured and condemned to live out their days here, knowing that I am going to spend the next night in a comfortable, well-appointed apartment? Suddenly my experiment seems a little indecent (126).

This reflection recalls Lapierre’s earlier critique of voyeurs who “come for an immersion course in exotic poverty before returning to the comforts of their affluent world” (115). The idea of Lapierre and other foreigners coming from a different “world” is reiterated by the writer’s reference to Calcutta’s “Third World” status. Hence, Lapierre’s self-imposed “experiment” in this “shantytown” seems “indecent” because he constructs poverty and suffering as involuntary outcomes of the underdevelopment he sees in South Asia. Given that TCOJ was published in 1985, and that it was based on the writer’s experiences and research in Pilkhana, it is likely that Lapierre’s definition relates to 1980s India. This definition substitutes the “Third World” for the Orient and “First World” for Europe to appeal to postwar constructs of the relations between former colonial territories and what Lapierre calls “the affluent West” (181). His view that the people of Pilkhana are “immured and condemned to live out their days” in this slum, together with earlier descriptions of maimed, malnourished and marginalised refugees in Howrah train station, are typical of development discourse which portrays “underdeveloped” or “Third World” as places where people are miserable and unfortunate victims of diseases, poverty and stagnation who need help.

Leading scholars such as Arturo Escobar and Gilbert Rist argue that particular ways of thinking and speaking about the “Third World” legitimise various practices and interventions towards the global South. Escobar’s Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World argues that the discourse of development allows the North to gather facts in order to define and improve the circumstances of poor peoples of the South. Policies and programmes enabling new forms of power and
control by developed nations – predicated on their superior technical knowledge, scientific advances and greater production – are justified with a humanitarian concern for development. Consequently, argues Escobar, “poor peoples’ ability to define and take care of their own lives was eroded in a deeper manner than perhaps ever before” (39). Rist, in *The History of Development, From Western Origins to Global Faith*, notes that the global South’s central characteristics are defined by what it lacks, not what it possesses.

By defining underdevelopment as a lack rather than the result of historical circumstances, and by treating the underdeveloped simply as “poor” without seeking the reasons for their destitution, development policy made of growth and aid (conceived in technocratic, quantitative terms) the only possible answer (79). While structuring development discourse around a series of absences, deficiencies or abnormalities to be remedied legitimises humanitarian action and intervention (35), Rist also explains how this discourse continues to perpetuate narratives/myths of progress and evolution deeply embedded in European culture since the Renaissance to package the postwar decades of neo-humanitarianism as the “development era” (47).

Such critiques of development narratives can be applied to Lapierre’s stories of his engagement with the Indian poor. Although he praises the slum’s workshops where “slaves of all ages spend their lives making springs, truck parts, bolts, aeroplane tanks and turbine gears with precision higher than the tenth of a micron”, he implies that their “unbelievable” workmanship, “inventiveness and resourcefulness” are predicated on the lack of material resources, which explains why “nothing is ever scrapped” in the slum and people can “assemble, replicate or repair any part, any machine” (117). Furthermore, despite their great skills, Indians are not workers but “slaves” living on a pittance. Reflecting on his research for *TCOJ*, Lapierre concludes

I had to learn how people cope with a smile in inhuman circumstances; how people labour like beasts of burden with only a few handfuls of rice in their bellies; how people stay clean with less than one litre of water a day; how people light a fire in the monsoon deluge with a single matchstick and create a breeze to waft in their faces while sleeping in the purgatory of summer. ... Having lived amongst people who made not so much as half a rupee a day on which to survive, I have learned the value of the smallest of things. I can never leave a hotel room now without switching off the lights. I use the last bit of my soap and avoid throwing away anything that can still be used or recycled (139-140).
This reflection conveys Lapierre’s view that life in Pilkhana is “inhuman” because of the overwhelming lack of food, sanitation, running water and income. This lack is all the more apparent given his privileged circumstances. According to the writer, many of these “Third World” problems in Pilkhana and other impoverished parts of India were later addressed by the development and aid projects initiated after the immense popularity and success of *TCOJ*. First, the city’s Communist mayor made the Lapierres “honorary citizens of the city” and presented them with a “plan for urban development” titled “Calcutta – The City of Joy – Blueprint for the Future”. This development plan included initiatives “to improve the living conditions of the people” such as “the daily distribution of ten litres of drinking water to each one of the three million slum dwellers (155). Second, with the royalties donated by the Lapierres and readers of the book, the French couple sponsored the creation of various development and aid projects together with Grandjean and his friends. For example, they helped Kamruddin, the Swiss nurse’s protégé from Pilkhana and homeopathic doctor, fulfil his “plans which attacked poverty and underdevelopment at their very roots” in slums and poor villages. In twenty years, the Lapierres helped “realise all his dreams” by sending “several million Euros” to his association, United Brothers and Sisters. This NGO built villages with running water for homeless families, “crèches, primary schools, apprentice workshops, libraries and handicraft centres” and a home for young handicapped boys. One of the villages was “baptised” as “The Dominique Lapierre – City of Joy Village” (150-151).

Some of these examples – particularly that of providing free housing to the homeless – contradict *TCOJ*’s warning against playing “Santa Claus” to the poor as it can deplete them of their agency. The previous chapter has discussed how Max Loeb dissuades his wealthy surgeon father from buying up Pilkhana and building new homes with sanitation facilities, running water and electricity as a gift for the poor (419-420). It also discusses how Lapierre suggests to the implied European and North American reader that paternalistic approaches to aid and development can have the detrimental effect of denying and eroding the recipients’ agency. Unlike *TCOJ*, *IML* depicts white humanitarians such as Mother Teresa, Lapierre, Stevens, Grandjean – and Indians either mentored by the Swiss nurse or introduced to Lapierre by him – meeting one emergency after another and launching development projects in succession. These
forms of assistance involve the help or partnership with local Indian aid workers, volunteers and NGOs. This includes a “Muslim crusader” named Wohab and “a young Hindu widow” named Sabitri. According to Lapierre, their friendship and co-operation symbolised “inter-religious solidarity” and propelled the growth of a mutual help committee in the rural Ganges delta region. Yet, besides the example of the night school in Pilkhana, Lapierre does not mention how any of the other projects were devised or implemented with the consultant or participation of their intended recipients. Thus, the Indian poor are repeatedly portrayed as passive, though exceedingly grateful, beneficiaries to the many aid workers and humanitarians featured in this memoir. Lapierre’s focus is mainly centred on Christian humanitarians who are portrayed as salvific figures from the global North offering their enthusiastic and compassionate aid. By highlighting that his biggest benefactors and supporters are his readers and wealthy friends from Europe and North America, and appealing to the idea of the “First World” saving the “Third World”, he depicts himself as an exceedingly accomplished advocate for the Indian poor. Instead of promoting literary slum tourism, he suggests that his writing achieves various humanitarian outcomes by supporting development and relief projects that benefit the Indian poor.

Such anecdotes illustrate the dynamic between the categories of “victim”, “saviour” and “villain” Karin Gwinn Wilkins discusses in her study of rescue narratives of global development. Wilkins analyses in her article “Celebrities in Global Development” how helpless victims are made of people in the global South “to establish the necessity of development as rescue” (133). More importantly, she concurs with Rist’s view that the problems of “underdevelopment” are depoliticised and often separated from a close study of their historical circumstances. The “villain” of the “development plot” tends to be “uncontrollable circumstances” such as “a manifestation of official mismanagement, violent conflicts, or environmental causes” so that blame is displaced from the victims who are portrayed sympathetically, and passively, to justify their rescue. The “heroes” of development embody the nobility of intervention; their often dramatic and valiant actions tend to boost “public debate centring on narrow questions of how rather than broader questions about why” (130-133). In IML, one of Lapierre’s most dramatic rescue narratives concerns “the fifty-four islands of the Bay of Bengal off the deltas of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra” (156).
He first establishes the people of these “extremely densely-populated” islands as vulnerable victims: they are “the first to be hit by the cyclones that periodically devastate north-eastern India”; their “rice yields are meagre” and scores of starving residents who try to gather honey for sustenance in the mangrove forests are “devoured by man-eating tigers” whose ferocity remains a mystery. While tigers are initially represented as game for the Rolls-Royce-loving English and Indian royals in British India, those that haunt these isolated islands off the Bay of Bengal are described as semi-aquatic “terrifying predators” that attack crocodiles and honey-gathering peasants. In addition, Lapierre highlights symptoms of the underdevelopment of these populations – “besides the tigers, tuberculosis, cholera, malaria, dysentery and all the illnesses associated with deficiency ravage these deprived islands” (156-157). To meet their needs, the writer states that “only a boat dispensary could remedy the situation”. This mobile solution not only addresses emergency cases and cares for the sick but also makes it “possible” to bring about “a health and social revolution for the region.”

It would be possible to carry out preventive and vaccination campaigns against tuberculosis and promote education, family planning, hygiene and home economics ... For it to become effective, the boat needed to be equipped with a portable X-ray unit as well as a generator, a basic surgical antenna and a solar-panelled refrigerator to store vaccines and medicines. There had to be a medical team of two doctors and several nurses on board, and a skilled crew (157-158).

Such a boat dispensary functions as a metonym for the comprehensive governance brought about by development and aid programmes: health, sanitation and the containment and eradication of contagious diseases, population control, education and economics. It brings to these islands knowledge and interventions in medical science, transport and communications technologies from the “First World” and requires a highly-skilled team of professionals on board.

To depict this development and aid project as a heroic endeavour, Lapierre dwells on its fundraising saga and does not mention the role of any Indian helpers or aid workers. Since each boat costs at least a hundred thousand Euros and the writer envisions eight boats “to cover the entire zone”, the Lapierres and Grandjean decide to put their faith in Mother Teresa’s maxim “God will provide” and do their best to source the “huge finances” required (158). Lapierre states that “God sent us an intermediary
in the guise of” wealthy Dutch couple Alexander and Suzanne Van Meerwijk, who provided the first boat and christened it “Mersion Van Meerwijk – City of Joy Boat Dispensary” (158). Although it “seemed an impossible venture on account of the cost and the difficulty in managing such a fleet in a region as dangerous and unpredictable as the mouth of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra,” Lapierre “succeeded nonetheless” in getting three more boats. They are financed by “Peré Roquet, a generous banker from the Principality of Andorra”, the city of Lecco and other generous Italian donors. His success exemplifies Wilkins’ argument that male celebrities’ involvement in global development or aid initiatives are typically aligned with the “entrepreneurial spirit” and celebrated as “networking initiatives, in the serious business of commerce”, unlike the compassionate maternal images associated with female celebrities such as Madonna or Angelina Jolie (133).

After securing enough sponsorship and funds to buy four of the envisioned eight boats, Lapierre describes this success as a significant humanitarian victory.

Equipped with VHF radio links, the four boats can today coordinate emergency operations. This is a unique achievement in India, and perhaps in the entire Third World; humanitarian support can reach hitherto isolated populations and cater to, even anticipate, the needs of the most underprivileged. At the time the devastating Cyclone Aila was unleashed on 27th May 2009, our boat dispensaries braved the tidal flood to save thousands of inhabitants in distress, taking them drinking water, food and emergency medical help (159).

This description implies a parallel between Lapierre’s ability to network with wealthy foreign donors and the four boats’ ability to coordinate emergency operations and link up “isolated populations” under the leadership of the NGO founded by the Lapierre and Grandjean. The benevolent humanitarian government formed by these Christian saviours and their financial backers, however, is not “unique” because of its long-term and revolutionary preventive healthcare regime. Instead, the “achievement” Lapierre celebrates is their faith in God and the boats’ unprecedented access to backward and vulnerable parts of the “Third World” – the formation of a neo-imperial emergency network which has proven its worth during Cyclone Aila as the saviour of “thousands” of Indian victims. This anecdote also highlights the importance of transport metaphors in IML. While the Rolls-Royce symbolises the imperial splendour of the Raj and the white man’s imperial romance, these boat dispensaries signify the writer’s vision for a “revolution” in “Third World” health, society and disaster relief. Lapierre’s acquisition
of different modes of transport mirrors his evolution from a historian-adventurer
discovering India to a neo-humanitarian developing its out-lying islands.

This rescue narrative of development evidently focuses on the victims and the
heroes, instead of the reasons why these vulnerable and backward islanders do not get
enough help from the Bengal and national governments. Like other anecdotes in *IML*,
it continues to reinforce the image of white Christian humanitarians as modern-day saviours of “Third World” India, a symbolically partitioned country where the poor are marginalised as a result of class and caste differences or government neglect. In addition, Lapierre suggests that the work of the aid organisations he has helped to establish or promote is well-recognised in India. He even claims that these NGOs’ fame has been discursively appropriated by multiple parties in Calcutta. Visitors leaving the airport to enter the city will see “enormous hoardings” that “greet them with WELCOME TO THE CITY OF JOY”; paint manufacturers in their advertising promised that their products would “repaint the city and make it a City of Joy”; “disgruntled citizens would call upon their elected representatives and ask: ‘When are you going to make our city a real City of Joy?’”; and the Marxist government, who “desperately wanted to erase the bad reputation Calcutta had acquired in international business circles”, coined the slogan “Come and invest in the City of Joy” (155-156). These examples suggest that “The City of Joy” has become a name synonymous with “development” – it is used as a catchphrase for many Calcuttans’ desires for more tourism, commerce and foreign investment. It is even used in their demands for better governance. Hence, Lapierre furthers *IML*’s development narrative which posits capitalist economic growth and constitutional, democratic government as critical enablers of Calcutta/India’s “progress” along its implied evolutionary path towards “First World” standards of living.

These overwhelmingly positive images of white humanitarian saviours and the NGOs Lapierre supports not only promotes humanitarian causes in South Asia but also exalts the Frenchman’s image as a tireless and passionate writer-advocate for the Indian poor. One reason for this overt self-promotion may be Lapierre’s desire to refute the harsh criticism that has been directed at his books, particularly *TCOJ*. As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, and the previous Chapter, *TCOJ* and its film adaptation have been critiqued for “fetishising poverty”, promoting slum tourism and
perpetuating what anthropologist John Hutnyk in The Rumour of Calcutta has described as the “imagery of decay, absolute poverty, teeming millions, squalor and leprosy” (viii). In his seminal Distant Suffering, Luc Boltanski argues that “reference to action is central to the justification of humanitarianism”, and that the failure to act, to carry out effective action, validates criticisms of representations of distant suffering (182-183). Lapierre’s stories of his heroic deeds show him being confronted by the spectacle of Indian poverty/suffering and taking great action to address it. If development and emergency aid are the outcomes of his writing which generates aid for Indians, his representations of distant Indian suffering to his readers, friends and supporters worldwide can be seen as legitimate and moral according to Boltanski’s reasoning.

Conclusion

The finale of Lapierre’s Whiggish narrative of progress and development takes place in the “majestic Durbar Hall of the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the presence of Sonia Gandhi, the Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and other national and diplomatic dignitaries” (177). It is also symbolically witnessed by the “huge portraits of the viceroys and vicereines who had headed the most powerful colonial empire of all time” (178). After “fifty thousand” Indian children pieced together the Guinness World Records’ “longest letter ever written in history” to the Indian President, asking her to award “Big Brother Dominique” the Padma Bhushan, Mrs Pratibha Patil presents Lapierre with “the Indian equivalent of the Nobel Prize given in recognition of exceptional services to the nation” (176-177). By aligning this momentous event in his biography with the narrative of the Indian state, Lapierre suggests that the humanitarian government effected by his writing and the NGOs he supports is officially recognised by its recipients and their political leaders. Reinforcing his constructs of the Indian poor being trapped by poverty, marginalisation and misfortune, he implies that his contribution to India’s development is something which helps to liberate them. Lapierre expresses his joy at receiving “the tribute of the nation that these giants of history, Mountbatten, Gandhi and Nehru, had led to freedom!” The writer concludes
But more than this extraordinary recognition that came with this honour, it was the feeling that I had at last entered the great Indian family at the personal request of her children that gave me the greatest joy. To accomplish, with the grace of God, new tasks, launch new projects and bring more love ... (178).

Hence, he imagines this honour as the fruition of his white man’s romance with India, the official inscription of his contribution to its history and development onto the Indian palimpsest. His entry into the Indian fraternity recalls the theme of solidarity which encompasses suffering, poverty, humanitarian action and relations between the global North and South.

This reflection also sums up how *IML* depicts this writer-humanitarian as a man who has made his glorious mark on India and found his calling serving the cause of its development and aid. He is shown to be a paternalistic humanitarian following in the footsteps of salvific political or humanitarian leaders such as Mountbatten, Gandhi, Nehru and Mother Teresa. The children who petitioned for his recognition represent the future of the Indian nation: as their “Big Brother”, he will continue to help his adopted family fight disease, disaster and underdevelopment. Although the first half of this memoir stresses how Indo-Pakistani conflicts and Hindu political fundamentalism still rage unabated, its second half privileges neo-humanitarian ideals respecting state sovereignty to suggest that these problems can be mitigated by development, relief aid, Christian charity and the spread of Christian morality. Lapière’s Christian faith and admiration of humanitarians such as Mother Teresa and Gaston Grandjean are reflected in his appeal to Christian views on the sanctified poor. This memoir revives maharajah tourism and defends his slum activism against critics of his stories of India. It ultimately promotes Lapière and his humanitarian friends as saviours and reduces aid recipients to colonial constructs of helpless and child-like Indians. When the writer says “Blessed are you, Calcutta, for in your misfortune you have given birth to saints”, he refers not to the beatitudes of the poor but that of Mother Teresa and other Christian humanitarians (83).
Conclusion

In Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire, Alex von Tunzelmann notes that “[t]he most popular work on the transfer of power has been Freedom at Midnight.” “That book,” she continued, “largely and unquestioningly based on the rose-tinted reminiscences of Lord Mountbatten in the 1970s, is highly entertaining, but so imaginative that it is best read as a novelisation of events” (427). My own study has been concerned with analysing the discursive patterns that have shaped Dominique Lapierre’s work in ways that help account for its extraordinary popularity. Most particularly, what I have sought to expose is the relationship between his writing and the discourses of humanitarianism. Hence, in the first chapter’s analysis of Freedom at Midnight (FAM)’s “novelisation” of South Asia’s independence and Partition, I pointed to the repeated ways that the text drew its key narrative positions from a mixture of the older regime of imperial humanitarianism (idealised by the authors) and the newer regime of neo-humanitarianism, which was the conceptual basis for humanitarianism in the 1970s when the book was written. I suggested that Lapierre and co-author Larry Collins shifted the rationale behind the dissolution of the Raj away from the struggle between Indian nationalists and the colonial administration, and in the process, diminished the violent possession and dispossession of ancestral lands, assets, communities and lives caused by the territorial division of the subcontinent. Instead, the writers imagined the endgame of Empire as a moral battleground where Mountbatten and Gandhi heroically tried to stop South Asia’s uneducated, bigoted and fervently religious masses from killing each other when they were temporarily overcome by communal madness in 1947.

In this way, Lapierre’s first text on India relates the tragic history of decolonisation and Partition-related violence as a story of heroic political leaders combatting the morass of Indian communalism. It introduces a few contradictions and dichotomies that discursively legitimise humanitarian government and foreign intervention. First, Indian unity, which is represented as a spiritual fraternity in communion with the suffering and Christ-like Gandhi, is portrayed as the antidote to the madness of Indian communalism, a phenomenon which destroyed entire
communities and has traumatically affected Hindu-Muslim relations in the subcontinent since the late 1940s. This chapter offered a close reading of FAM’s representation of sectarian violence to show how Lapierre and Collins’ writing exemplifies the “communal riot narrative” identified by influential Subaltern Studies historian Gyanendra Pandey. By adopting this approach of reading history “from below”, this chapter demonstrated how FAM constructs sectarian riots in 1947 as a chain reaction of retaliatory communal madness spreading from one region to another, beginning with “The Great Calcutta’s Killings” instigated by Jinnah in August 1946. Through its invocation of the communal riot narrative, the Indian body politic is imagined in FAM as being infected by the “medieval plague” of communal madness spreading from Calcutta to the rest of the subcontinent to create the civil war threat that necessitated Mountbatten’s Viceroyship and later, Partition (329). Hence, Lapierre and Collins’ popular “high politics” account is shown to be a pro-British and pro-Congress narrative that decontextualises the causes of riots in various parts of South Asia to lay blame on its essentialised peoples (their essence was racial and religious passion) and a demonised Muslim League. Both culprits become the foil for the revival of the white man’s burden and Gandhi’s nonviolent activism.

FAM also subsumes Gandhi’s leadership into the broader framework of Mountbatten’s humanitarian government. Recalling hagiographic accounts of Gandhi’s assassination as the martyrdom that finally ended sectarian riots in South Asia, FAM has the Mahatma functioning as a metonym for the Indian body politic. Its teleological narrative makes his murder the climactic end of his suffering over the “vivisection” of the subcontinent. Furthermore, and simultaneously, the drama of Gandhi’s agonising fasts unto death in Calcutta and New Delhi are shown to be decisive actions uniting the “Father of India” with repentant Hindus and Muslims as citizens of the new Indian nation. Hence, FAM’s account of Gandhi’s moral conversion of Indians suggests that submerged Christian values are both universal and salvific. So, as well, another opposition justifying humanitarian government was that between a Christian ethics of sacrificial suffering and the self-aggrandisement of warring Hindus and Muslims. This implied contrast privileges Christianity as a religion that can effect a moral improvement of Indian society, thus recalling a fundamental tenet of imperial humanitarian ideology.
In the second chapter, I demonstrated how the opposition between Christian morality and Indian immorality is underscored by a contrast between white humanitarians’ Christian compassion and the ruthlessly competitive and class and caste-ridden society in 1970s and 1980s Calcutta. These constructs of Calcutta and its residents in The City of Joy (TCOJ) recall, again, colonial images of the Black Hole incident and Indian cruelty. More importantly, my analysis of Stephan Kovalski’s Christian gaze – and that of other humanitarians in A Thousand Suns, It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal and India, My Love – found that it routinely associated the Indian poor with the Catholic doctrine of vicarious suffering. In this way, the texts put forward the idea that Indian immorality is being spiritually redeemed by the martyr-like Indian poor. I also showed that Lapierre’s writing, originally published in French, draws upon an established and influential nineteenth and twentieth-century French literary tradition of idealising poverty and suffering.

The third chapter’s study of India, My Love (IML)’s “development narrative” effectively illustrates the many similarities between imperial humanitarian and neo-humanitarian ideologies. This 2013 memoir first establishes Lapierre as a lover of imperial India who becomes an ardent admirer of Gandhi during his research for FAM. It then illustrates how the writer tries to emulate the Mahatma’s affinity with the Indian poor by visiting slum communities and writing and fundraising on their behalf. Since the white man’s burden symbolised by Calcutta’s Victoria Memorial easily translates into Lapierre’s constructions of heroic Europeans such as Mother Teresa, Gaston Grandjean and himself directing their Christian compassion at the Indian poor, IML ultimately implies that a victim-saviour dynamic lies at the heart of the relationships between Indians and the humanitarians who assist them.

Collectively, my study of FAM, TCOJ, IML – and pertinent parts of other texts featuring the Indian poor – demonstrated how the metaphor of the white man’s romance dominates Lapierre’s writing on India. All the white Christian European humanitarians in these texts are imagined, in one way or another, as neo-colonial figures who have come to either live in India or love it as a second home. Even Lord Mountbatten, who historically resided in India for just over a year, is imagined as colonising the Government House in the most dramatic ways when he presides over Nehru’s Cabinet, and the country, during his secret return to trusteeship in the months
following Partition. This analogy between humanitarian government and neo-
colonialism explains why Lapierre’s texts depict the humanitarian enterprise in India as
a charismatic domination of its impoverished masses that is, ironically, carried out in
the name of their emancipation. The imperial and neo-humanitarian discourses
legitimising humanitarian action in his writing continually reduce South Asians to
colonial images of irrational, infantilised and potentially violent hordes. The
subcontinent is cast as a feminised Orient, home to opulent maharajahs, mystical
spirituality but plagued by a treacherous climate, natural disasters, pestilence,
primitive superstitions, communal madness, hunger, poverty and an oppressive socio-
economic system tied to the caste discrimination supported by an idolatrous Hindu
religion. Hence, Lapierre relies on images of India propagated by colonial
administrators and writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Besides
exoticising South Asians and rendering them inferior by appealing to the notion of a
stratified humanity, he normalises disaster, emergency and suffering in the
subcontinent to justify the fascination, and settlement, of white Christian humanitarians.

In the Introduction, I noted one similarity between imperial humanitarian and
neo-humanitarian discourses. In Empire of Humanity, Michael Barnett has noted that
similar to abolitionists who argued that colonialism would help atone for the sins of
slavery and imperial expansion, many aid agencies insisted that the wealthier global
North had inherited both moral and causal responsibilities to the global South because
of colonialism (105-106). Both arguments effectively support the paternalistic and
interventionist nature of humanitarian government by arguing that freedom would
mean little without the intellectual and material resources necessary for the progress
of communities in the global South (105-106). One interesting aspect of Lapierre’s
writing is that his justification for the white man’s burden does not emphasise the
moral obligation to atone for the sins of slavery, economic oppression and the violence
associated with colonialism and imperialism. In FAM, TCOJ and IML, the writer
acknowledges the violence and exploitation inherent in the imposition of British rule in
South Asia without implying the need for the figurative white man’s atonement for
such cruelty. Instead, what Lapierre repeatedly highlights are acts of Indian immorality
which are interpreted as signs of their inferior humanity and the moral superiority of
the white Christian Europeans. By glorifying the colonial administration as a paternalistic yet humane and benevolent government, these texts’ resurrection of the white man’s burden in independent India thus supports the neo-colonial humanitarian government of white Christian European characters. Their humanitarian government, which is founded on exemplary Christian values such as nonviolence, fraternity and compassion, is headed by heroic Christians who strive not to atone for the sins of Empire but to help poor Indians bear their suffering – a suffering which can spiritually redeem the flawed humanity of Indians in general. Clearly, Lapierre’s portrayal of humanitarian government in India differs from established constructs of imperial humanitarianism and neo-humanitarianism by putting the burden of atonement on suffering Indians instead of the figurative white man.

The three chapters also demonstrated how Lapierre views suffering as the pivotal transformative condition for enabling solidarity. This solidarity is the guiding ethical goal that animates all of Lapierre’s texts. It can be seen working its “magic” in varied settings: between temporarily-insane Indians and fasting Gandhi; vicariously suffering Indians and their cruel oppressors, the slum community and the missionaries who voluntarily live like them and, finally, Lapierre and his “First World” friends who sympathise with “Third World” India. These relationships show how humanitarian government is as much an affective movement as a set of discursive practices enabling the dominance of the global North. Since Lapierre’s writing on India has successfully raised millions for charity and inspired hundreds of thousands of letters and gifts from his readers since 1985, this phenomenon indicates his significant contribution to an affective movement directing the global North towards Indian suffering.

At the start of this thesis, I expected Lapierre’s texts on India, which were published over four decades beginning with FAM in 1975, to draw upon a mix of discourses from imperial humanitarianism to liberal humanitarianism. In particular, I looked forward to the 2013 publication of IML as it would be issued fourteen years after his first memoir A Thousand Suns, and twelve years after It was Five Past Midnight in Bhopal, his previous book on the Indian poor. My analyses however, showed that the writer consistently appeals to the ideologies of imperial humanitarianism and neo-humanitarianism. In the third chapter on IML, my critique of Lapierre’s joy at receiving the Padma Bhushan Award in 2008 for his “exceptional
services to the nation” by the Indian Prime Minister (177) also illustrates why this text remains antecedent to liberal humanitarian discourse, which historically emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century. Since liberal humanitarian government tends to portray unjust or failed states to justify foreign armed intervention and the protection of vulnerable populations, it supports neither Lapierre’s self-laudatory account of his entry into the Indian fraternity, nor the alignment of his humanitarian government with that of its founding fathers – Mountbatten, Gandhi and Nehru – who are remembered during this ceremony.

The one difference between IML and the rest of Lapierre’s writing is that he makes an appeal to human rights in his representation of refugees at the Howrah train station. The third chapter demonstrated how the figure of the refugee in IML differs from that of TCOJ. The former depicts them as pitiful victims of persecution whose rights under international refugee conventions went unrecognised whereas the latter depicts them as victims of natural disaster and Indian cruelty. This appeal to the discourse of human rights in his description of the Indian poor in Calcutta can reflect the symbiotic relationship between human rights and humanitarianism, especially during the age of liberal humanitarianism where foreign intervention and aid are justified by both human rights and humanitarian discourses. This is one important difference between IML, FAM and TCOJ. It suggests that one aspect of IML does reflect the twenty-first century convergence of human rights and humanitarian ideals.

In addition, the third chapter’s analysis showed that Lapierre’s construct of Calcutta has evolved across his writing on India. In FAM and TCOJ, he suggests that it is India’s most feared city for poverty-stricken Calcutta is prone to horrific outbreaks of violence and cruelty. IML’s ending, however, imagines as the city as the headquarters of Mother Teresa’s neo-colonial humanitarian government. Lapierre praises Calcutta as the source of exemplary Indians spreading Christian fraternity and charity to affluent Manhattan. He credits this phenomenon to the inspiring leadership of this beatified nun who oversaw the successful expansion of the Missionaries of Charity which began its postulancy in 1950.

Lapierre’s construct of Mother Teresa’s reverse neo-colonialism, a South-North humanitarian government effected by this world-renowned missionary order founded
in Calcutta, also praises the redemptive suffering of its Indian nuns. These young women, who renounce the traditional roles expected of Indian women to become brides of Christ, sanctify the suffering poor and embrace their vows of poverty. Hence, the novel association between vicarious Indian suffering and humanitarian government I have identified in Lapierre’s writing on India can be further researched by studying Beyond Love (1991) and the teleplay Lapierre co-wrote for the biopic Mother Teresa: In the Name of God’s Poor (1997). The former depicts the Missionaries of Charity as spiritual and humanitarian saviours of AIDS patients who are portrayed as outcasts in America. The latter depicts Mother Teresa’s founding of this missionary organisation, its remarkable ascendance in Calcutta and other parts of the world, and ends with her travelling to Norway to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. Since this thesis is limited to a study of Lapierre’s portrayal of humanitarian government in India, and analyses written nonfiction, both texts fall outside the scope of my inquiry. I note, however, that Lapierre’s exceedingly favourable representations of the woman known as “Blessed Teresa of Calcutta” run counter to the views of many scholars and critics, both Indian and non-Indian. An in-depth study of Lapierre’s representations of the Missionaries of Charity’s reverse neo-colonialism will involve comparing these images of Mother Teresa and the Indian Sisters to representations by other writers and scholars who debate the achievements, perceived shortcomings and controversies of this missionary Order.¹ Such lines of inquiry offer avenues for further research on the relationship between the discourses of humanitarianism and Lapierre’s representations of humanitarian government.
Notes

Introduction

1. Following the suggestion of development theorist Cheryl McEwan, the terms “global North” and “global South” are used in this study as a metaphorical rather than geographical distinction. See Cheryl McEwan, Postcolonialism and Development (Oxford: Routledge, 2008): 13. This is an effort to avoid using typologies such as “First” and “Third World”, “developed” and “developing” and the implicitly negative framework of “Western” and “non-Western” countries. Some of these terms, however, are cited at times in this thesis when I refer to the language used by Lapierre to analyse the discursive implications of his work. In addition, the terms “humanitarianism”, “humanitarian action” and “humanitarian government” refer specifically to organised North-South humanitarian aid.

2. On the development of moral concepts to do with the notion of “humanity” and “humanness”, one can refer to Jane Lydon’s Photography, Humanitarianism and Empire for a succinct overview. Lydon outlines how “a concern for the suffering of other people” helped shaped the moral views of “humanity” and “humanness” since the mid-eighteenth century, when “a so-called ‘cult of sensibility’ arose in Britain, stressing a set of values that regarded sensation as a ‘moral and emotional capacity’, and that came to associate sensibility with refined feeling, discrimination and taste as well as an intensive sensitivity to the suffering of others. Adam Smith’s landmark 1759 work, The Theory of Moral Sentiments, examined the human capacity for ‘pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner.’” In addition, Lydon notes “By the end of the eighteenth century, the cult of sensibility, along with its stereotype, ‘the Man of Feeling’, had become the object of parody and satire, suggesting its decline. However, a new culture of ‘sentimentalism’ emerged from this emotional regime, infused with a new power by evangelical Protestantism, and becoming a key element of nineteenth-century philanthropy and humanitarianism. The rise of ‘humanitarianism’ has been closely linked to the anti-slavery movement and a shift in perception towards the end of the eighteenth century which made slavery appear morally unacceptable to many.” See Jane Lydon, Photography, Humanitarianism and Empire (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016): 3-5.


7. International intervention in Somalia’s militia war in 1993 was regarded as a debacle; the international community was divided over delayed international responses to genocide in Rwanda in 1994; the UN was unable to prevent ethnic cleansing in Srebrenica in Bosnia in 1995 and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) controversially intervened without the approval of the United Nations Security Council and launched air strikes in Kosovo in 1999.


10. Slim is writing the first major practical text on humanitarian ethics in war and disaster, which seeks to develop professional ethics in humanitarian organisations and discuss new standards of care and accountability. His recent work includes A Call to Alms: Humanitarian Action and the Art of War (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2004) and Killing Civilians: Method, Madness and Morality in War (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).


12. In 2001, the Indian government officially readopted “Kolkata”, the pre-colonial Bengali name for this city. While acknowledging this significant change which privileges India’s independence and the city’s Bengali identity, I use the earlier Anglicised name “Calcutta”. This ensures that the spelling of the city’s name is consistent with that of quotations from Lapierre’s texts and various secondary sources cited in this thesis.

Chapter 1

2. Pro-Congress accounts tend to highlight Muslim communalism as a British creation designed to weaken nationalist struggle against imperialism. They also portray the Muslim League’s stubbornness during negotiations as the reason for Congress’ acceptance of Partition. See Lal Bhabudr, Struggle for Pakistan: Tragedy of the Triumph of Muslim Communalism in India, 1906-1947 (New Delhi: Sterling, 1988) and Sucheta Mahajan, Independence and Partition: The Erosion of Colonial Power in India (New Delhi: Sage, 2000). In contrast, Pakistani writers tend to focus on the founding of their Islamic state as an achievement. These scholars maintain that the demand for a separate state originated because Indian Muslims’ identity was defined by religion and a distinctive Muslim social order. See Ishfaq Hussain Qureshi, The Muslim Community of the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent (610-1947): A Brief Historical Analysis (Karachi: Ma’aref, 1977); Hafeez Malik, Muslim Nationalism in India and Pakistan (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1963) and Khalid bin Sayeed, Pakistan: The Formative Phrase, 1857-1948 (Oxford University Press, 1968).


4. In his Report on the Constitutional Problem in India, Coupland juxtaposes the principles of freedom and unity to elucidate Britain’s conundrum about its postwar policy for India. He states “it will be found that for a generation past the stress in Indian politics has been all on freedom, but that now, when the full attainment of freedom is in sight, the balance has swung over and unity has become again, as it was when British rule began, the major Indian problem” (6).


6. In addition, by exalting the moral and spiritual values and leadership of Gandhi, FAM can be read as a pro-Congress historical account which follows what Subaltern scholar Ranajit Guha calls “elitist historiography of the nationalist or neo-nationalist type” in India in his well-known essay “Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India” (37). In this essay, Guha observes that such historiography serves “to uphold Indian nationalism as a phenomenal expression of the goodness of the native elite with the antagonistic aspect of their relation to the colonial regime made, against all evidence, to look larger that its collaborationist aspect” (38). In addition, Guha notes that such historiography tends to highlight the “altruism and self-abnegation” of the Indian elite instead of “their scramble for the modicum of power and privilege granted by the rulers in order to make sure of their support for the Raj” (38). Hence, he concludes, “the history of Indian nationalism is thus written up as a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite” (38). This Chapter’s subsequent discussion of FAM’s hagiographic representation of Gandhi will show how FAM propagates such pro-Congress, elitist views of Gandhi.
Lapierre and Collins’ claim that the British policy of “divide and rule” had contributed to Hindu-Muslim antagonism is limited however, to “economic differences” (8). In his overview of the four well-known histories compiled in The Partition Omnibus, Mushirul Hasan – a prolific scholar of Partition history and narratives himself – argues that the British also exacerbated political differences between religious communities. Hasan asserts that to study the cause of extensive violence is to “assess the consequences of carving out special religious categories” and the colonial government’s “practice of extending special favours to them on that basis” (xxiii). In addition, David Paige’s Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920 – 1932 outlines how political tensions between Hindus and Muslims intensified in the twentieth century after separate electorates were created for Muslims at the provincial level. Paige interprets the creation of separate electorates for Muslims as a British strategy of cultivating “communal allies” to maintain systems of political control in provinces where the Congress Party refused to cooperate. Indian nationalist leaders and historians often cite these historical developments when discussing the political ascendance of the Muslim League and their claim to Pakistan. This supports their belief that Muslim communalism is a British creation designed to weaken the overall nationalist struggle (260-261). By not mentioning any part played by the British in the politicisation of communal ideologies in India, Lapierre and Collins thus perpetuate colonial constructs of communalism as a uniquely Indian problem.


This acknowledgement of Mountbatten’s superior leadership skills, which is voiced by the new Indian Prime Minister shortly after independence has been achieved, can illustrate what Said calls the “flexible positional superiority” of Europeans which puts “the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (7). In Orientalism, Said has noted that the hegemony of European ideas about the Orient is manifest in different ways, including the idea of the people of the Orient themselves “reiterating European superiority over Oriental backwardness” (7). Even after earning the mandate to rule India, the writers depict the Indian leaders citing the contingencies of Partition and their relative lack of experience in governance as reasons to assert Mountbatten’s political authority and stress the need for his paternalistic leadership. Hence, this discursive and literal transfer of power back to the British illustrates how the hegemonic rule of the imperial master embodied by the Englishman is constructed in relation to the people he is entrusted to lead. This example also shows how this trusteeship can be legitimised using different perspectives which continually subordinate Indian leaders/Indians to Mountbatten.

Lapierre and Collins have acknowledged that this representation of Nehru and Patel was not well-received by many readers. In the early 1980s, they published the transcripts of their interviews with Mountbatten in two volumes titled...
Mountbatten and the Partition of India: March 22 - August 15, 1947 and Mountbatten and Independent India: 16 August 1947 – 18 June 1948. These texts also featured the writers’ personal appraisals of the Englishman and his leadership role in South Asian history. On the latter, the writers noted that “[n]o single passage in Freedom at Midnight caused as much controversy in India or as much understandable resentment as Mountbatten’s description of Nehru and Patel as ‘as pair of chastened schoolboys’ when the three men met on his return from Simla at the height of the Punjab crisis. The reader of this volume can see the phrase, exactly as Mountbatten employed it, set in the context in which he used it. To be honest, we as authors and historians had our reservations about its use, but censoring the words of the last Viceroy or anyone else we interviewed was not our function. Mountbatten read the gallery proofs of Freedom at Midnight with great care and made no objection to the phrase. Later, in correspondence with us, he regretted its use, not because he wished to qualify its accuracy but because he had appreciated his insensitivity in employing it. ... Vanity, as he was the first to admit it, was not the least of Louis Mountbatten’s faults and many a reader is going to rebel at his description of the central role he played in those tragic days. Old men tend, with the perspective of time, to see themselves in exaggerated dimension. Perhaps there is an element of the boastful, of a tendency he did indeed have to see in himself as constantly at the centre of the stage dominating the action. Yet, a very careful study of those men who were still alive and participated in those crisis meetings confirmed the essential accuracy of his words” (ix). Through this explanation, Lapierre and Collins claim that FAM’s portrayal of Mountbatten as the paternalistic saviour and mentor to Nehru and Patel is based on the Englishman’s own recollections as well as other witnesses’ affirmation of his leadership and influence in 1947-1947. This claim, however has been refuted by noted Indian scholar Sankar Ghose in Jawaharlal Nehru, A Biography. According to Ghose, “on 14 September 1976, Mountbatten admitted in a letter to M.O. Mathai, extracted in his Reminiscences of the Nehru Age, that V.P. Menon misled me into believing that both the P.M. and his deputy wished me to return to Delhi”, though “both Nehru and Patel had considerable regard for Mountbatten” and “Nehru, in particular, gave a lot of weight to Mountbatten’s suggestions and advice” (154).

11. In David Spurr’s Rhetoric of Empire, he references this argument by Homi Bhabha in his discussion on the trope of “Affirmation” in colonial discourse: when colonial authority begins to be asserted, a split is opened up between the assertion and authority itself, in which the latter is revealed as conditional and contingent upon its representation (124).

12. Gandhi’s controversial actions and leadership has been critiqued by various scholars and biographers. They include Richard Grenier, author of The Gandhi Nobody Knows and G. B. Singh, author of Gandhi: Behind the Mask of Divinity. Harold Coward, in Indian Critiques of Gandhi, has also discussed famous Indian figures and writers who critically engaged Gandhi, such as Nehru, Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar, the political leader and advocate of Untouchables, and Indian Nobel Prize for Literature winner Rabindranath Tagore. Coward’s text also discusses the criticisms levelled upon Gandhi by Annie Besant and C. F. Andrews, two English migrants who have made India their home.
13. On Gandhi’s relationship with his grandniece Manuben, Lapierre and Collins note in *FAM* “[f]or Gandhi, secure in his own conscience, there was nothing improper or even remotely sexual in his relations with Manu” (81). They also emphasise Gandhi’s emotional and spiritual attachment to his grandniece and propose a reason for this practice: “[i]n the twilight of his life, Gandhi was a lonely man. ... a deep, spiritual bond was destined to link the Mahatma and the shy, devoted girl so anxious to share his misery during the closing months of his life” (81-82).


15. In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s seminal essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, she argues that the abolition of *suttee* in colonial India “has been generally understood as a case of ‘white men saving brown women from brown men’” (93). Lapierre and Collins’ portrayal of the reconciliation between the Congress leaders and British administration in 1947-1948 is summed up by this anecdote at the Mahatma’s funeral which shows “white men saving brown women with brown men’s help”. Although *FAM* reinforces Mountbatten’s humanitarian government by drawing a parallel between this Governor-General and his nineteenth-century predecessor Lord William Bentinck, its pro-Britain and pro-Congress account of the end of British India depicts Mountbatten winning the Congress leaders’ respect and acting with the strong support of these Indian politicians. Thus the “Subaltern”, who is metaphorically represented as the grief-stricken “brown women” prevented from immolating themselves on Gandhi’s funeral pyre, is portrayed as the Indian body politic contained by the firm governance of the state. Spivak notes that “[o]ne never encounters the testimony of the women’s voice-consciousness” during this colonial ban on *suttee*. Similarly, the anecdote in *FAM* suggests that the Indian body politic is represented as expressing itself mainly through seemingly senseless acts of mass violence and madness. This not only justifies the firm, paternalistic and rational rule of Mountbatten and the Indian leaders but also reduces South Asians, again, to primitive communal hordes.

Chapter 2

1. Both *ATS* and *IML* describe Lapierre seeking Mother Teresa’s advice on which charity he should donate part of his *FAM* royalties to. The former praises the nun as a “walking catalogue of all the city’s wretchedness” who “did not need to think for very long to know who was in urgent financial need” (446). The latter asserts that “no one understands better than her the suffering of the poor” (99).

3. In *The Black Hole of Empire*, Chatterjee argues that Thomas Macaulay’s writing on the Black Hole incident in the 1840s, which was read by schoolchildren in the metropole, is “a fable of moral instruction, to instil pride in their hearts not merely for the valour of their compatriots but also for the selfless service they were rendering to the people of Empire” (167). In his review article for *The Guardian* on July 16, 2006, Moorhouse stresses that “the Black Hole was the event that first established moral rectitude as a justification of empire-building”. It has been remembered as “a noble British tragedy in the face of native savagery.”

4. Given that missionaries like Kovalski are portrayed as salvific Christ-like figures, this use of Biblical metaphors in the introduction to Calcutta can be interpreted as an attempt to establish the setting of this text as a disaster-prone region which would benefit from the presence and intervention of Messianic figures such as religious humanitarians.

5. Kipling, who took the title from James Thompson’s poem of that name first published in 1874, had written with London in mind.

6. Besides references to Hindus and Hindu religious practices including Kali worship, *TCOI*, like *FAM*, *ATS* and *IML*, also highlights other religious practices and spiritual beliefs of its Indian characters. Collectively, these examples reinforce the popular image of India as an incredibly diverse land of spiritual faiths, religions and superstitions. The construction of an innately spiritual and religious India helps to develop the setting of *TCOI* as a space which can readily accommodate the Christian faith of missionaries and migrants such as Kovalski.

7. This was one of the worst twentieth-century famines. A recent indictment of the role played by the British government in this humanitarian disaster can be found in Bengali author Madhusree Mukerjee’s *Churchill’s Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India during World War II* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2011). This text is also cited by Chatterjee in *Black Hole of Empire* who argues that the famine “was brought about not by a crop failure but rather by the scorched-earth policy of the British fleeing from the threat of a Japanese invasion of East Bengal, the government’s desperation to ensure food supplies to the army and Calcutta, and the resultant distortions in the food grains market” (335).

8. In *India, My Love*, Lapierre himself acknowledges this fact. Praising the entire crew for giving their all in spite of “a lot of difficulties and demonstrations against the shooting”, he states that they were “inspired by the courage and determination of the characters they played” to make the film “a tribute to the spirit of courage and survival” (170). For more details on the production challenges, including the Bengal state government’s resistance to Joffé filming on location in Calcutta, see Mark Fineman,

9. In comparison to City of Joy, Sengupta argues that Slumdog Millionaire is “strategically brilliant” by avoiding the former’s “use of white bodies to propel its central storyline.” The protagonist Jamal Malik’s “undeterred individualism and autonomy” enable him to “rise above the moral decay” of a society “evidently beleaguered by corruption, communal strife and class segregation”. His story realises contemporary middle-class aspirations in India by “exiting the slum” and claiming “success within the domains of the modern, globalising city” of Mumbai. Hence, while rejecting “an overtly paternalistic distinction between a modern/civilised West and a traditional/backward Third World”, this Indian hero “depoliticises and universalises values associated with a highly specific and power-laden history of Northern development”. Like City of Joy, Slumdog Millionaire “never departs from ‘the Master’s image of progress’” (84-85).


11. Robert Ziegler’s article “The Palimpsest of Suffering” discusses how Bloy’s writing “describes the poor as wounds inflicted by the rich on Christ’s body” (661). The writer continually depicts the deep and mystical connection between the Holy Ghost and the most marginalised, most despised and most rejected people of modernity.

12. Brenna Moore’s article “Feminised Suffering in Modern French Catholicism” examines various female characters in Bloy’s work. She surmises that “abject women of all sorts appear throughout his texts”. Besides Clotilde from The Woman Who Was Poor or La femme pauvre (1897), his first novel The Desperate Man or Le Désespéré (1886) is about Véronique, an impoverished prostitute who becomes a vessel of God as she descends into madness and is committed to an asylum. The once beautiful woman freely transforms her body and has all her teeth extracted and her head shaved, rendering herself repulsive while deepening her experience of love with God (53). In general, Bloy’s representations of women, however, are “fraught and deeply ambiguous”: “women are at once the source of astonishing suffering, pleasure and transformation. They were radically other, a sex set apart and the source of real power, models of sanctity who pointed to salvation and incited religious experiences. Suffering women are brought in from the margins, recognised and sanctified” (56).
13. Lapierre’s idealisation of the Indian poor — as a community with remarkable solidarity and a culture of mutual aid, together with his praise for individual characters’ remarkable endurance, resourcefulness and resilience — also mitigates to a certain extent the writer’s condemnation of the caste system, economic exploitation and inequality in India. Indian accounts of poverty and marginalised communities, such as Dalit narratives (stories of outcasts and Untouchables often by members of marginalised castes) often convey the desire for revolutionary changes that redress the divides and inequalities fostered by religion and caste. Lapierre’s representations of poverty and actions designed to alleviate it, however, support not overt revolution and political mobilisation but moral admiration for the idealised Indian poor.


Chapter 3

1. In her review, “Shocked by Slumdog’s Poverty Porn” The Times columnist Alice Miles’s critique of this film references the term “poverty porn” that is often traced back to Jørgen Lissner. Lissner, author of The Politics of Altruism (1977), famously condemned the use of images of malnourished children by advertisers and aid agencies in his 1981 essay “Merchants of Misery” as being “dangerously close to being pornographic” by exhibiting “the human body and soul in all its nakedness, without any respect and piety for the person involved” (23-24). In Representations of Global Poverty: Aid, Development and International NGOs, Nandita Dogra has noted that “academics and development practitioners” — such as Jonathan Bentall and Henrietta Lidchi — have drawn “largely upon” Lissner’s criticisms to argue that “negative images of Africa had reproduced colonial stereotypes of a ‘dark continent ’ of misery and hunger” (5). By referencing such critique of African stereotypes, Miles’ review of Slumdog Millionaire suggests that this film’s portrayal of young Indian bodies and their slum setting demeans not only the Indian poor but also their country’s image. In her essay “Reading Slumdog Millionaire across Cultures,” Rebecca Duncan also notes that reviewers’ categorisations of this film indicate that it “conveyed a disturbing yet exotic beauty to the slum” (313). According to Duncan, while one reviewer related the Mumbai slum setting to the “‘ghetto picaresque’ portrayed in the Brazilian slums in the 2002 film, City of God”, a New York Times reviewer “found a sort of ‘armchair tourism’ in the film’s travel episodes, particularly Jamal and Salim’s stint as vendors/thieves on trains and at the Taj Mahal” (313).

2. In The Cultural Life of the Automobile: Roads to Modernity, Guillermo Giucci argues that the automobile in the twentieth century was the “totemic object of
modernity” (xix), for between 1900 and 1940 it was not yet accessible to the masses and worshipped as “a luxury item, a toy for millionaires, a symbol for distinction, power, freedom and emotion” (189). While Paris was the global automotive capital and France the world’s foremost car producer by the end of the nineteenth century – more successful than industrialised England, “the bastion of the equestrian world” (119) – the Rolls-Royce nevertheless helped to cement British car-makers’ place in the automobile movement, and modernity, by establishing this English brand as one of the earliest manufacturers of premium luxury cars. Since the automobile served as a symbol of luxury and distinction in the early twentieth century, the Rolls-Royce can be regarded as one of the most exclusive status symbols of this period. In light of this historical and cultural context, the converted Rolls-Royce praised by Mountbatten in 1921 makes the wealth and lifestyle of the Maharaja of Mysore, and by extension that of other Rolls-Royce loving Indian sovereigns, seem globally exceptional and prestigious.

3. According to the Preface of 1997 edition of FAM which commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of South Asia’s independence, this text was a bestseller in Europe, the United States, and South Asia (xiii). This achievement indicates that Lapierre and Collins’ concerted efforts to woo publishers and booksellers, and the ensuing marketing campaigns in various countries, have enabled FAM to become a commercially-successfully work of historical non-fiction.


5. According to Datta, the UNHCR was, for the first time in a humanitarian crisis, chosen to act as general coordinator for all UN assistance. This was a “pivotal point” in UNHCR’s history. It was seen as the “focal point” of relief efforts: it mobilised international support and funds, oversaw the procurement and delivery of relief supplies to India and coordinated with the Indian government which in turn, organised the distribution of these supplies (187).


7. This reflection also suggests that Lapierre’s disapproval of slum tourism does not preclude him from representing himself in the stereotypical image of the adventurous white man experiencing travel as form of “travail” which changes his worldview and perspective on life. Paul Fussell in his classic text Abroad has elaborated
on how travel “was conceived to be like study, and its fruits were considered to be the adornment of the mind and the formation of the judgement” (39). Lapierre’s reflection on how he avoids wasting resources because of the scarcity he has witnessed in the slum suggests that his Indian “travails” were both educational and life-changing.

Conclusion

1. Two of the most vocal critics of Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity are British journalist Christopher Hitchens and Indian-born physician Aroup Chatterjee. Hitchens’ well-known 1994 BBC documentary Hell’s Angel: Mother Teresa of Calcutta and subsequent book The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice (1995) refutes the saintly image of the nun and her humanitarian organisation promoted by earlier works such as British journalist Malcolm Muggeridge’s 1969 documentary and book, both titled Something Beautiful for God. Hitchens’ work also draws upon the critique of Chatterjee, who has written prolifically since the 1990s on issues such as the medical practices and financial management of the Missionaries of Charity in books including Mother Teresa: The Final Verdict (2003). Other scholars and biographers who have contributed to debates on the controversies surrounding Mother Teresa’s life, humanitarian work and her image include Gëzim Alpion, who wrote Mother Teresa: Saint or Celebrity (2007), and Indian-American writer Vijay Prashad’s well-known essay “Mother Teresa: Mirror of Bourgeois Guilt” which was published in the year of her demise.
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