

**Subaltern Ghosts and the Spectral City: Marginalisation and Neoliberalism in Deepa Anappara's *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line***

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**Abstract**

In the contemporary urban South Asian city, diffuse and shadowy operations of exploitative economic, social and political orders are always at work. The postcolonial neoliberal government plans and enacts ways to transform the cityscape, a process that renders the poor classes of the city on the city's margins. In this article, the hostility and brutality of the developmental city are exposed through a reading of Deepa Anappara's debut novel, *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* (2020), through the lens of the spectral turn. We engage with the different kinds of spectralities that are, firstly, embodied by ghostly figures of the city's urban precariat and, secondly, materialised through infrastructural inequalities, alienated workers, and environmental degradation within the text. The spectre's presence-absence is read as a reference to the social justice that is absent in the nation-state, while its non-temporality and non-spatiality speak to the injustices of the past, present and future. Centering these spectres and the slum in the Indian metropolitan city enables an inclusive dialogue in which the majoritarian classes do not speak for the urban poor but, rather, with them.

**Keywords:** Spectre, Nationalism, Neoliberalism, City Fiction, South Asian

## Introduction

Slums have figured in common discourse as a space of nuisance (Ghertner, *Rule by Aesthetics*), an Other to the spectacle of the developmental city. Images of dense clusters of ramshackle block-houses or close-up, sepia-filtered photos of a child's face, malnourished, covered in dirt and surrounded by garbage populate the imagination of many when the word "slum" is uttered. These peripheral spaces are often seen as either objects of pity or objects of disgust in popular imaginaries, and oftentimes, they are not seen at all by the patriarchal nation-state, unless the latter wishes to either garner votes in elections from these marginalised citizens or forcibly evict them from their lands. These spaces do not fit into the image of the phantasmagoric city, a fantasy rivalled by the sensibility and empathy of many fiction and creative nonfiction works in the 21st century, where new ways of envisaging slums have emerged, adopting a position from within the slum rather than outside it.

Deepa Anappara's novel *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* (2020) adds to the growing literature set on the city's margins through its unique blend of gothic elements, the bildungsroman form, and a detective novel; a novel featuring its own set of spectres and spectral spaces that contests the phantasmagoric, illusive metropolitan city. Set in an unnamed cluster of slums (referred to as basti from hereon), near the last metro station on the Purple Line, the novel is narrated through the eyes of a nine-year-old, Jai, as he sets himself up as a detective to unravel the mystery of the missing children of the basti. Along with his friends, Pari and Faiz, Jai goes on one adventure after another as the number of missing children goes up to seven. By writing through the eyes of a basti resident, the novel acknowledges the lived realities of the marginalised people of the global city. The text does not look at the basti through a bird's eye view, which is "a view that only the planner and the global consumer" (Chattopadhyay qtd. in Mukherjee 94) can see through. The basti, thereby, is not associated with the usual symbols of a common and generalised slum, an association

that tends to flatten the residents' lives and exhibits them as one-dimensional beings. Jai's basti has its singular and specific cultural reality, and despite the impoverishment of their neighbourhood, it is their place of belonging, their home for which they fight against the odds set by the larger systems at work. These shadowy and diffuse "systems" can be read through the motifs, symbols and images created in this book – such as the smog settling over and through the basti; the visibility of the inequality in the city, materialized in the comparison between the basti's environs and the neighbouring gated societies that house the bourgeoisie of the city; the ghosts of a rag-picker boss and a broken mother of a victim of rape and murder – and these offer grounds for a reading of the global city as a site of "spectropolitics" (Blanco and Pereen, "Spectropolitics").

This article draws on the conceptual metaphor of the spectre, which gained massive popularity after the publication of Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* in 1994. Derrida's publication marked a moment in critical theory now termed as the "spectral turn", whose popularity is also conferred to the then-budding discipline of trauma studies. As explicated in Derrida's theory, the spectre is a figure of presence-absence; a ghost of the past, that is also a ghost of the present-future; one which is "vital to the historical unfolding of spirit", of the *zeitgeist* (Derrida 134) of an age, and an engagement with it is necessary and imperative to have deeper conversations about various systems of thought and action that render select people and spaces as spectral. He speaks of "generations of ghosts...in the name of *justice*" (xviii):

Of justice where it is not yet, not yet *there*, where it is no longer, let us understand where it is no longer *present*, and where it will never be, no more than the law, reducible to laws or rights. It is necessary to speak *of the ghost*, indeed *to the ghost* and *with* it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not,

seems possible...Without this *non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*, without that which secretly unhinges it, without this responsibility and this respect for justice concerning those who *are not there*, of those who are no longer or who are not yet *present and living*, what sense would there be to ask the question “where?” “where tomorrow?” “whither?” (xviii).

Derrida’s engagement with Marxism and discourses of political action in *Specters of Marx* is through his centring of the ghost, which we read as a subaltern figure in the world of the living. The ghost embodies the presence-absence of people who are often rendered marginalised through systemic injustice; people whose lives are not real or worth acknowledging in the eyes of the dominant classes or majoritarian systems. Such an exploration of spectral politics within literary texts can be read as a part of hauntological analyses, which “contains a deconstructionist agenda to uncover temporal and ontological aporias and ellipses and to question the status quo” (Chaipanit 56). It is this politics of social justice that is further taken up by scholars.

In *Ghostly Matters*, Avery Gordon investigates haunting as a phenomenon through the lens of sociology (but hers is also an attempt to widen the epistemological frameworks of sociology), and leads her analysis of racial slavery and state terror as a “haunting”, where “that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence” (8). In the middle of this invisible pervasiveness of certain systems of sociality, the ghost can be read as evidence of haunting, and it becomes “a social figure” in Gordon’s work, whose investigation “can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life” (8). In a similar vein, Blanco and Preen, through evoking the “haunting” of the colonial empire, associate the current-day spread of certain economic orders, notably neoliberal capitalism, with the concept of the spectral that haunts nation-states of the globalizing world in a manner similar to the imperial empire, for they (neoliberal capitalism and the spectral figure) are both “ungraspably

complex, only partially material, accelerated to the point of disappearance, capable of occupying multiple spaces at once” (Blanco and Preen, “Spectropolitics” 92). While on the one hand, Gordon emphasizes that the ghost is a social figure whose presence-absence indicates the omnipotence of state-sponsored racism, on the other hand, Blanco and Preen look at the omnipotence and omnipresence of discriminatory economic orders as a spectral presence. Both these definitions and concepts of the spectre and the spectral are conducive to our analysis of *Djinn Patrol*.

In the Indian context, too, the spectral turn has made its mark. Arjun Appadurai’s essay “Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai” traces the transformation of Bombay to Mumbai from the 1970s to the 1990s; the city metamorphoses from a cosmopolitan haven for business into an increasingly Hinduized, ethnically cleansed centre that still strives to be globalising. He looks into the spectrality of the city by, first, exposing the invisible wealth behind the massive cash economy of the city’s citizens; second, scrutinizing the housing conditions of the city (sparse and marked by “speculation and specularities” (635)); and, third, critiquing the ethnic cleansing of the city under Shiva Sena, which renders the Other population, the non-Marathi and Muslim population of the city, as spectral. Appadurai’s essay reveals the essential connections between a globalising city and the rise of nationalism in South Asian cities like Mumbai. Postcolonial nations, like India, often look towards nationalism as a tool of uniting their citizens, even while the nation is in strife with the inequities of urban modernity, which render its poor and religious-Other citizens as outsiders, or worse, invisible. Caroline Herbert explores this crisis of postcolonial modernity and secularism in her essay “Spectrality and Secularism in Bombay Fiction”, reading the politics of visibility and invisibility in Bombay fictions where processes of globalisation and Hindu nationalism render the Muslim citizen-subjects as spectral.

This article situates *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* amongst the literature set on the global city's margins; spaces that face the brunt of the growing metropolis in South Asia. The novel exposes the global city as a site of "spectropolitics" that can reveal the workings of the "diffuse operations and effects of present-day globalization, as well as to critique the way its processes produce certain subjects as consistently disenfranchised or, in Judith Butler's terms, forced to live in extreme precarity as 'would-be humans, the spectrally human'" (Blanco and Preen, "Spectropolitics" 93). This article will engage with different kinds of spectralities that are embodied by ghostly figures and materialised through infrastructural inequalities, alienated workers, and environmental degradation. The discussion above on the conceptual metaphor of the spectre/ghost and the spectral systems of economic, social and political order informs our article's interpretation and analysis of *Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line*. Through the novel's centring of the city's visible-invisible basti population, its gothic language and generic hybridity, and its haunting dynamics of the police state, it centres the marginalised subjects of the city and depicts the growing metropolis and its bourgeois residents as the unknowable Other, rather than obliging to the majoritarian discourse's other way around it. This centring in the novel opens up conversations on nationalism, globalisation and marginalisation of the urban poor through its symbol of the spectre. How can a ghost effectively and loudly speak of the past and to the future? Is it possible to locate the spectrality of the city if it is indeed invisible? How can opening a channel between these ghosts and us initiate the social justice that Derrida speaks of?

In order to effectively engage with these questions, it is imperative to situate the novel's setting historically, spatially and socially. The text never mentions the city in which the basti is set, and does not name the basti itself, which seems like a tactic used by Anappara to situate all the globalised cities of India as places that thrive on inequality — socially, spatially, and economically. However, even without the explicit naming of the city, it is

almost natural to read the city as Delhi, given the weather cycles in the book (cold weather and intense smog), the physical geography of the city (the river that runs through the middle of the city is most likely Yamuna, whereon a Hindu-majority population lives on one side, and on the other a Muslim-majority population), and the mention of Mughal rulers from a pre-colonial time. Moreover, Anappara's website features a list of resources that they consulted while writing the novel, and most of the books and articles are written on the impoverishment and navigation of the slum residents of Delhi NCR. The novel is embedded in the social injustices faced by slum residents across all Indian metropolitan cities, but locating it in Delhi specifically opens up conversations between literature and the sociology of impoverishment and injustice as they operate in the capital city, which reveals, first, the network of neoliberalist policies that render the poor on the margins and, second, the layers of the globalizing developmental city.

### **Spectral City and Spectral Citizenship**

*Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* follows the life of Jai, a nine-year-old basti resident, as he undertakes the task of "detectiving" (17) the case of the missing children of his neighbourhood along with his friends, Pari and Faiz. In Angelo Monaco's article on the novel in question, she writes in detail about the generic hybridity of the text, meaning that the text combines conventions from various genres like *bildungsroman*, social realism, detective novels, and mythology, in addition to the voices of many different narrators, all of which creates a narrative polyphony that critiques the diverse flaws of the urban Indian city. Moreover, Sanghamitra Devi's essay delineates how the text's use of gothic tropes, like ghosts and smog, creates a space of haunting that reveals diffuse operations of the neocolonial capitalist regime at work in the postcolonial Indian city. In a similar vein, this section examines the formation of the city spaces in the novel that are coded with inequality

and injustice. It draws inspiration from Boehmer and Davies' concept of "Planned Violence" (2018), which refers to infrastructural injustice as it is built and appears in the postcolonial city, resulting from the structural violence executed by the nation-state and its repressive and ideological state apparatuses. This planned violence of the state and the city is woven into the fabric of Anappara's novel, and her creative engagement with it presents a spectral city.

In Delhi, it is common to see shantytowns at the periphery of the city. Such placement is enabled by the city's planning authority, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA), that has been evicting slums from the urban, formal and legal parts of the central city since 1947, with the power invested in it through the Master Plan for Delhi, a planning document released every 20 years to plan the city's land use and further its urban development project (Bhan *Public's Interest*). Bhan engages with Ananya Roy's argument in "Urban Informality", where planning is conceived as "a spatial mode of governance' where the state exercises a 'calculated informality,' to 'decide what is informal and what is not, to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear'" (21). This mode of governance furthers the discourse of seeing slums as a sight and site of nuisance, a juxtaposition to the city's glossy, private ventures. It also enables the High Court and the Supreme Court of India to allow undemocratic evictions, without the due process of complete rehabilitation of the slum residents (Bhan *Public's Interest*; Ghertner *Rule*). The erasure of these "undesirable" shantytowns becomes an act of "good governance, order and public interest" (Bhan 12). Bhan undertakes his study on the evictions of slums in Delhi with the intention of looking at urban planning from the peripheral and marginalised spaces of bastis, in order to "tell the tale of the fiction of the rule" (36). Reading *Djinn Patrol* also reveals something similar about the condition of India, its social, economic and infrastructural injustices.

Jeremy Tambling writes of the city as a "site of consumption, of commodity fetishism, and of the 'phantasmagoria'" which "makes the city so much an ideological

product, preventing people from seeing things as they are” (24). This idea of the phantasmagoric city is challenged by the child protagonist of *Djinn Patrol*, even as he is enamoured by the city’s glossy infrastructure. Jai and Pari travel through the city’s vast metro network for the first time in their lives to investigate at the railway station, where they hope to find clues about the missing children of their basti. The journey undertaken offers views of the metropolitan city from a comfortable place, that of the air-conditioned metro which travels over and under the city, prompting Jai to say, “I feel like I’m in a dream... This ride is the best.” (100-101). This is the only instance in the novel where Jai sees the city as most of the urban middle and upper classes do. At the metro station closest to his basti, he quips, “It’s like we are in a foreign country. Even the smog looks tame from here” (99). This distance from urban squalor is unknown to Jai, and the city becomes a phantasmic space.

However, Jai’s observation at the metro station reveals his personal stakes in this futuristic construction when he says, “I look around at the station, wishing I could tell which parts Papa worked on. Maybe his fingerprints are hidden under the paint, stamped in cement” (99). His father worked on the building of these phantasmagoric spaces, but his labour is spectral, for there are no signs of him having worked here. The phantasmagoria of the city is established through capitalism’s commodity fetishism that alienates the worker and his product. It is only through Jai’s observation and his wishes that the reader can imagine the worker having much to do with this public infrastructure. The workers are the ones who keep the spectacle of the city alive, with their labour that goes into making the world-class city; yet, the city planners keep them on the edges, as far away from their sight as possible.

The basti in the novel is located near the last metro station on the Purple Line, at the periphery of the city, along with multiple high-rise apartments where the city’s upper-middle classes reside. A large garbage disposal site separates the high-rise gated societies from the basti. Jai notes that the “hi-fi people are trying to get rid of the rubbish ground” because “The

prices of their flats are going down because of the stench” (141). The global city’s citizens do not wish to confront the remains of the brutalism that they and many corporations leave in the wake of the city’s developmental projects. Within the context of spectral politics, this trash has a past and a future, while possessing material consequences for the present. This argument gains greater significance when the rubbish yard becomes a site of investigation when items belonging to the missing children are found here by the child rag-pickers of the basti. These children can be likened to Walter Benjamin’s rag-pickers<sup>1</sup>, as archivists or collectors of the scraps left over in the process of the nation-state’s formation. The missing children’s precarious subjectivities, embodied in the material remains found at the garbage site, serve as a glaring reminder of the nation-state’s ignorance of their lives. The lives of the basti residents remain unwritten in the nation’s politics, as spectral citizens. It is only through the rag-pickers’ work that the vulnerable realities of the missing children’s lives come to the fore. They perform the archival work that the neoliberal state and its upper and middle-class citizens refuse to perform.

Throughout the novel, there is a constant fear of displacement amongst the basti residents that permeates even through the children. Jai is motivated to find the missing children because of this fear of eviction, as the case of the missing children begins to attract the attention of the police, for all the wrong reasons. There is a common consensus amongst the basti residents to attract as little attention as possible from the police. This consensus is broken when the first of the children, Bahadur, goes missing, and his mother has no choice but to reach out to the police for help, who ultimately demand a bribe from Bahadur’s parents instead of filing a report. Through Jai’s eyes, the police presence in the basti is described as follows:

Something is not right but I can’t tell what. I stop and look around. Hold my

breath and listen. My heart knocks against my ribs...The alley is quiet and empty. Everyone is missing...Something rumbles behind the smog. Maybe it's a djinn. A bad feeling flickers through me. I want to pee. A door to my left creaks open. I jump. I'm going to be snatched. But it's just a woman in a sari....'Boy, don't you have a brain on you?' she bellows. 'There are policemen everywhere in our basti. You want them to catch you?' (Anappara 37-8).

What feels like the haunting presence of a bad djinn, or a child-snatcher, turns out to be policemen. The basti residents' fear of the police is rooted in the corrupt, structural practices that work against the urban poor. The constant threat of the police state is materialized in the text through the basti's empty, smog-ridden alleys, where the police regularly collect "hafta" (protection money or bribe) from the basti residents as a fee for guaranteeing that the latter are not evicted from their homes. Bulldozers also become an image of the threat of destruction of people's homes, adding to the infrastructural insecurities of the basti and its residents. Through such power invested in them by the nation-state and its machinery, the police render these marginalised spaces as haunted, where citizenship and protection in the democratic nation-state remain a dream.

The basti residents find ways to navigate around the bureaucratic red tape of the government. They believe that their citizenship in the nation-state is ensured through their identity cards, as opposed to the Bangladeshi migrants who populate another basti, whose position remains more precarious than their own. Jai's father reassures his children that they will not be evicted by the police as they "have been paying the police hafta on time. And now they have got an extra gold chain. Like a second Diwali bonus. They won't bother us for a while" (58). The basti residents use such "tactics" to work around the "strategic"<sup>2</sup> planning of the government to keep their right to the city and their homes. Although Jai's father seems

confident in his statements, this is only “for a while”, and their formal citizenship that appears in the form of their identity cards remains on unstable grounds.

Case studies on evictions in the city of Delhi reveal an arbitrary pattern of displacement based on the aesthetics of a world-class city, rather than legal, democratic use of land (Ghertner, *Rule*). The above form of citizenship corroborates with the distinction between formal and substantive citizenship proposed by Holston and Appadurai: “If the formal refers to membership in the nation-state and the substantive to the array of political, socio-economic and cultural rights people possess and exercise”, then formal membership is “neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for substantive citizenship” (190). Such disjunctions in the form of membership devalue the meaning of being a citizen in the first place, for both members and nonmembers. Appadurai and Holston propose two responses to this disjunction as observed in all neocapitalist regimes: one makes citizenship more exclusive, and the other makes it more inclusive (191). In *Djinn Patrol*, both of these responses are present, one through the lacking public infrastructure and exclusive gated societies, and the other through the local government bodies’ participation in the majoritarian, Hindu nationalist ideology.

The basti in the novel is located next to many high-rise buildings where the middle class of the city reside. These buildings are hyper-visible from the basti, but they are anonymous to Jai because they remain gated and inaccessible to the basti residents, unless the latter offer their labour to the middle-class residents, as security guards or domestic help. The anonymity of these hyper-visible structures adds to the spectrality of the city. The presence of these high-rise apartments alongside shantytowns reveals an infrastructural hellscape that is common to many South Asian cities where private development is rampant, and public infrastructure and social welfare take a back seat. The roads outside these gated societies are also not well-equipped for the basti residents who are all pedestrians, for these roads are

made for the upper-middle-class citizens who access them by car. In a certain section of the text, Omvir, the son of the presswallah (local laundromat), takes this unlit and dark road to return home after making a delivery at Golden Gate, a gated society where many from the basti are employed. He ends up being kidnapped on this road, for there are neither any street lights nor any surveillance that could have prevented such a crime. The city and state planning's lack of care for public spaces at the peripheries of the city becomes a major reason for all the "snatchings" in the novel, revealing the exclusionary development of public infrastructural spaces in addition to the obvious private infrastructures like the gated societies.

The other case of hyper-inclusive politics of the state's local governmental bodies is materialized through their religious performance in the novel. The local governmental head, the pradhan, organizes a puja (prayer ceremony) to "ask our gods to vanquish the great evil in our basti" (Anappara 215) after most of the basti residents are unsettled by the snatchings. The local head capitalises on this tragedy by collecting donations from the basti residents to organise the Hindu Samaj puja. The religio-political body of the Hindu Samaj also carries out a demonstration, blaming the basti's Muslim residents for the "evils" in their society, and demanding that these imaginary perpetrators "*Release Our Children Now*" (Anappara 206). Masked Hindu vigilantes also attack Muslim residents on a seemingly normal day near the communal washrooms (Anappara 231-2). These acts of violence and religious performance can be read as the local governmental body's move towards engaging with the Hindu nationalist movement, and an effort to participate in this particular vision of the nation. The act of collecting money from all the residents becomes an attempt to pull the basti's Hindu residents to participate in this "visible religion"<sup>3</sup>, a performative gesture to move towards the majoritarian ideology, while othering the Muslim residents of the basti. Instead of a cultural and sacred manifestation of religion, like one embodied at the tomb of djinn-saints discussed

in the next section, the Hindu Samaj's optics of religious performance become a way to engage with and co-opt a jingoistic vision of Hindu national citizenship, whose basis is the othering of the basti's Muslim residents.

In both of the above cases, of hyper-exclusivity or jingoistic-inclusivity, the basti residents do not have permanent or stable citizenship in the nation-state. Their bodies, their identities, their labour and their residence are all spectral for the nation-state; one day it is there, another, it is not. Their lives are not "grievable" because "to be grievable...lives must be considered as such; ungrievability, instead, emerges when there is an erasure of what life is" (Monaco 50). However, Anappara offers alternative modes of being in the city; alternative temporal and spatial realities that are inclusive and respectful of the lives of the basti residents. Literature, in the following ways, intervenes in the discourse of the global city and maps the existence of a spectrality that goes unacknowledged in nationalist and neoliberal discourses.

### **Marginal Specters: Ghosts and Djinns**

The novel is interspersed with chapters from the perspective of the missing children from the moment right before their kidnapping. Moreover, all three parts of the text begin with a chapter titled "THIS STORY WILL SAVE YOUR LIFE". The first implication is clear – there are lives to be saved, and these are the lives of the city's underclass. The book starts with a similarly titled chapter that narrates the story of a boy named Mental whose ghost protects the vulnerable, impoverished boys of the city from any possible harm. The catch is that they must utter his real name for him to be manifested. Similarly, the second section begins with the story of a woman named "Junction ki Rani" (The Queen of the Traffic Lights' Junction), a woman who loses her daughter – one who aspired to break out of poverty by becoming an engineer – to sexual assault and murder. Like Mental, she comes to the rescue of

young girls in the form of a ghost. The third section takes a different turn, as an unnamed narrator preaches the powers of the djinn-saints and their miracles to Faiz and his brother. The two brothers had come to the djinn-saints' shrine to pray for the release of another sibling, who had wrongly been taken into police custody in connection with the case of the missing children. The narrator emphasizes that "Everyone is equal here" (264), pointing out how people from different religions and classes come to this sacred space to pray and leave their wishes in a letter for the djinn-saints to read. These three chapters offer the most fundamental message of the novel – stories, belief and hope have the power to save your life from the harsh realities of the global city.

The ghosts or spectres in the text are those of marginalised citizens who, despite being a part of the underbelly, lived their lives as successfully as possible: Mental, a gang leader and patriarchal figure to the beggar boys of the city, and Junction-ki-Rani, who gained visibility to the impervious vehicle-owners who feigned ignorance in the face of the destitute. In their death, and as a secondary form of who they used to be, they topple over previous hierarchies of class by making their absent-bodies absolutely present, i.e., by physically fighting off the criminal perpetrators who sought to bring harm to either poor boys or vulnerable girls. Their ghostly presence invites attention to what is completely absent – secure and safe lives of the urban poor, especially children. In the flow of the storytelling, their stories offer an alternate reality to the main plot where children are kidnapped and not found at all. It also displays the most optimistic vision of what would happen if the urban poor actually took to arms against their oppressors. These spectres bring hope to their listeners, the children from the margins of the city, and most importantly, they take upon themselves the role of a hero, one who performs law enforcement better than the actual law enforcement officials and the nation state. In many ways, the ghosts here articulate "social justice as urgently necessary, but necessarily impossible, a promise of democracy that has

always already failed and is always yet ‘to come’” (Herbert, “National Hauntings” 80). In the absence of a caring state, these ghosts take on the responsibility to provide protection to the city’s most precarious population – its young ones.

Throughout the entire novel, Jai and Faiz speculate that it is djinns who are behind the disappearance of the missing children, a deduction based on Islamic folklore. But in the third section of the text, an unnamed narrator speaks to Faiz about the good djinns, the saintly djinns, who are also an irrefutable part of Islamic and Sufi cultures. The djinns, here, are left letters by people from many religions “listing their grievances”, sometimes along with “copies of birth certificates and marriage certificates and sales deeds of houses that are being divided, unequally and disagreeably” (262-3). The people decidedly put their faith in an otherworldly entity rather than trusting the nation-state. In his ethnographic study of the djinn-saints of the medieval ruins of Firoz Shah Kotla, Anand Vivek Taneja writes, “These letters to the jinn-saints create an unusual archive of the struggles and desires of subaltern life in contemporary city, voices otherwise unheard by families, by the media, by the government” (11). This archive functions as an alternative to the official records of the nation-state, and the practice of veneration of the djinn-saints can be read as a “poetics of bearing witness to the postcolonial condition of everyday life in Delhi” (Taneja 25). Similarly, the djinn-saints in the novel bear witness to the social injustices that persist through the nexus of growing Hindu nationalism, neoliberalism, and prejudices against the poor. Moreover, this particular chapter in the novel draws attention to a different temporality, arguably a more religiously tolerant one, that coexists in the same global city where religious differences are exploited to fuel division among citizens by political entities at every level of society.

In *The Spectralities Reader*, Blanco and Preen describe the manifestation of spectres in texts where the subaltern speaks as “Situations of disorientation in which these forms,

normally unacknowledged, unexpectedly come to the fore are conceived as scenes of haunting, producing ghosts or spectres that impose a demand for attention and, crucially, action (recognition and reparation)” (93-4). While the first two ghosts in *Djinn Patrol* are from the subaltern class of the city, and their saving of victims from possible horrendous crimes does impose the said demand on the entire subaltern class and the negligent nation-state, their lives before dying and becoming ghosts are not presented as entirely destitute, and, consequently, are not pitiful. Mental, in his prime, was much like a patriarchal “boss-man with eighteen to twenty children working for him” (Anappara 3). He remained a local legend after his death for being kinder than many other predatory figures who would exploit children with absolutely no reward for their rag-picking and begging work, and the only time he punished the boys was if they came to him under the influence of drugs. That demanded the harshest punishment, much like a father. His death was mourned by the boys he took care of, and his ghost carries his self-respect in the afterlife, as his ghost can only be summoned if Mental’s real name (that remains unrevealed in the text) is uttered in the boys’ prayers. Similarly, Junction-ki-Rani’s story begins as any other urban, poor domestic worker who has lived a precarious life, but after the death of her daughter, she refuses to comply with the moral standards of her society and acts out in vengeance by standing on traffic junctions and lifting up “her sari and underskirt and [pulling] down her underwear and [doing] her business right on the road” (123) and she curses and spits on the upper-class citizens of the city who finally *look* at beggars like her on the roads. The onlookers are forced to look at this miserable woman perform her grief, a deep and insane kind that is projected onto whoever looks at her. The narrators deem this being-looked-at, being acknowledged, as nothing short of a miracle. The other beggars around her would collect the alms thrown at her and argue over its distribution, for she did not take any of it because it was not what she wanted. Her ability to not let them look away, her visibility to the state and its privileged citizens, can be

read as her greatest success when she was alive. Both of these humans did their utmost for either caring for the city's invisible children or garnering visibility from the city's prejudiced and uncaring citizens.

Mental and Junction-ki-Rani's resentment towards the nation and the city's prejudice are embodied in the figure of the spectre, in their return as ghosts. In this form, with no real spatiality and temporality, they finally have some power over their oppressors, one that they use to protect those they could not protect before. Their ghosts protect those few, and their ghostly, powerful actions haunt the nation-state, which wishes to remain unaffected by the precarity of the city's vulnerable population. In constructing the subaltern ghosts in such a manner – from humans who were defiant and resilient in the face of adversity to ghosts who continue to fight against adversaries – Anappara keeps the focus on subaltern spaces and personhood as opposed to texts like Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995). Priya Kumar writes of "Rushdie's version of cosmopolitanism", which, despite its well-meaning intentions to write against the grain of growing Hindu nationalism in Bombay and the country, "remains faithful to the concept's legacy of class privilege" (63), which also brings into play a class-based form of exclusion when he writes of them as "the wraiths that kept the city going, building its houses, hauling its goods, cleaning up its droppings, and then simply and terribly dying..." (qtd. in Kumar 63). Rushdie's form of spectrality is effective in critiquing the grotesque systems of neoliberalism and caste elitism that invisibilise the subaltern population of Bombay, as argued by Caroline Herbert ("National Hauntings" 954), but it maintains distance from them. Here, Anappara's work is different as she chooses to use her knowledge from her work as an investigative journalist to write from within their spaces – writing *from* their spaces, rather than *about* their spaces.

## Conclusion

Jai and his father are watching the television when the news headline displays “*Dilli: Police Commissioner Reunited with His Cat!*”, to which Jai says, “Even if our basti goes up in flames, we won’t be on TV” (186). The media acts in tandem with the nation-state in making slums and shantytown residents invisible, spectral. Any inconsequential event pertaining to the richer urban populations has greater visibility in national discourse than the matter of life and death of the basti folks. In the face of such gross ignorance and indifference, stories and literature amplify the voices of the marginalized. On the one hand, stories and local mythologies within communities, like those of Mental, Junction-ki-Rani and djinn-saints, build a sense of kinship and belonging that counters the narratives of nationalism, which seeks to build its community through Othering. Such stories call back to the city’s past, and their new interpretations can attempt a “re-enchantment of the city’s sacred spaces” (Taneja 272), spaces that have been deemed a ruin or a relic of the past. Such re-enchantment can bring people from the same place closer to one another, rather than succumbing to the divisive politics based on grand narratives of abstract, nationalist sentiments. On the other hand, this novel conveys the spectral realities of the city to us, as readers and fellow citizens.

*Djinn Patrol on the Purple Line* captures the pervasive violence in the daily lives of urban marginalised communities, where they negotiate with the hierarchizing power structures of the nation-state each day. The novel’s language of ghostliness and images of environmental degradation highlight the material failures of the developmental nation-state, addressing issues such as child poverty, worker alienation, stark wealth gaps, and housing insecurity. The ghosts offer twin interpretations – showing the absence of a well-functioning democracy, and also embodying the resilience of the marginalised communities. The spectres in this novel offer alternative realities by acting as either rebellious heroes or wish-granting entities to oppose the spectrality imposed on the subaltern classes by the neoliberal nation-state. They bear witness to the injustices faced by the impoverished population of the

city, and take action in the absence of a caring nation-state or a reliable god-figure: “Our gods are too busy to hear our prayers, but ghosts— ghosts have nothing to do but wait and wander, wander and wait, and they are always listening to our words because they are bored and that’s one way to pass the time” (Anappara 7). In a world where rampant globalisation creates excessive wealth gaps and consequently, a spatial apartheid, discourse on marginalisation in global cities from those spaces becomes the need of the hour. We must open lines of conversation with the spectres of the city, to enable an inclusive dialogue that creates a noise loud enough for people in power to hear and to break out of the imposed spectropolitics of the South Asian global city.

## Notes

1. Le Roy (2012) says that the rag-picker is the most essential figure in Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*, as they act as a "figuration of the materialist historian [Benjamin] envisioned with his project" (128). The rag-picker collects the material refuse of society and puts it together creatively; they make new ways of being a material historian possible, one in disjunction with the dominant methods and institutions of performing archival work and historiography. The rediscovery of the refuse makes possible new ways of thinking about the past and taking action in the present.
2. Michel de Certeau defines strategy as the "calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an environment" (xix), and it operates from a place "proper", and builds relationships with those exterior to it, from its position. On the other hand, a tactic does not operate from such a place, and its "place...belongs to the other" (xix). The Other needs to seize opportunities on the whim and manipulate events in such a way that they may receive a momentary advantage out of it. Such is the power equation of a strategy and a tactic.
3. The distinction between "visible religion" and "invisible religion", first introduced by Thomas Luckmann and built upon by Jan Assmann, is used by Anand Vivek Taneja in his study of the religious ethos in Delhi, specifically to the Muslim saint shrines around the city. In his own words, "Invisible religion consists of a culture's underlying notions of cosmological order, justice, and ethics, while visible religion consists of one's ritual relationship to the deity" (168). In *Djinn Patrol*, we see, both, the politicisation of visible religion, and the secularism of invisible religion in the chapter featuring djinn-saints.

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