Routledge Handbook of South Asian Religions

Edited by Knut A. Jacobsen

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIONS

The *Routledge Handbook of South Asian Religions* presents critical research, overviews, and case studies on religion in historical South Asia, in the seven nation states of contemporary South Asia: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, and in the South Asian diaspora.

Chapters by an international set of experts analyse formative developments, roots, changes and transformations, religious practices and ideas, identities, relations, territorialisation, and globalisation in historical and contemporary South Asia. The Handbook is divided into two parts which first analyse historical South Asian religions and their developments and second contemporary South Asian religions that are influenced by both religious pluralism and their close connection to nation states and their ideological power. Contributors argue that religion has been used as a tool for creating nations as well as majorities within those nations in South Asia, despite their enormous diversity, in particular religious diversity. The Handbook explores these diversities and tensions, historical developments, and the present situation across religious traditions by utilising an array of approaches and from the point of view of various academic disciplines.

Drawing together a remarkable collection of leading and emerging scholars, this handbook is an invaluable research tool and will be of interest to researchers and students in the fields of Asian religion, religion in context, and South Asian religions.

Knut A. Jacobsen is Professor of Religion at the University of Bergen, Norway. His most recent book published by Routledge is *Yoga in Modern Hinduism* (2018) and the co-edited book *Religion and Technology in India* (2018), and he is the editor of the *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary India* (2016).

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PREFACE

Historical and contemporary South Asian religions are connected to a large number of historical languages, such as Sanskrit; Pali and the Middle Indo-Aryan languages called Prakrit; and modern South Asian languages such as Tamil, Bengali, Hindi, Nepali, Dzongkha, Maldivian, Sinhalese, Punjabi, Urdu, English, and so on. The chapters use diacritics in the transcription of names, concepts, and texts from these languages as is the accepted convention. However, diacritics are mostly not used in names of modern figures, organisations, and place names. Brahman refers to the priest, *Brāhmaṇa* to the textual category, and *brahman* to the impersonal divine unchanging principle.

The editor wants to thank all the researchers for their contributions to the book.

<div align="right">Knut A. Jacobsen</div>

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ABBREVIATIONS OF TEXTS

ĀDhS	*Āpastambadharmasūtra*
AN	*Aṅguttaranikāya*
Aṣṭ	*Aṣṭādhyāyī*
AV	*Atharvaveda*
AvG	*Avadhūtagītā*
BĀU	*Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad*
BDhS	*Baudhāyanadharmasūtra*
BG	*Bhagavadgītā*
BSbh	*Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*
ChU	*Chāndogyopaniṣad*
DN	*Dīghanikāya*
GDhs	*Gautamadharmasūtra*
GorSS	*Gorakṣasiddhāntasaṃgraha*
HP	*Haṭhapradīpikā*
INY	*An Introduction to Natha-Yoga*
KĀ	*Kaṭhāraṇyaka*
KauśS	*Kauśikasūtra*
Mā	*Māṇḍukyopaniṣad*
MN	*Majjhimanikāya*
MtU	*Maitrāyaṇīyopaniṣad*
PB	*Pañcaviṃśabrāhmaṇa*
PS	*Paippalādasaṃhitā*
RV	*Ṛgveda*
ŚB	*Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*
ṢB	*Ṣāṭyāyanibrāhmaṇa*
ŚBM	*Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* Mādhyandina recension
SN	*Samyuttanikāya*
ŚS	*Śaunakasaṃhitā*
SSP	*Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*
SV	*Sāmaveda*
TĀ	*Taittirīyāraṇyaka*

TS	*Taittīriyasaṃhitā*
VDhS	*Vasiṣṭhadharmasūtra*
VS	*Vājasaneyisaṃhitā*
YV	*Yajurveda*
YB	*Yogabīja*

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

AAHOA	Asian American Hotel Owners Association
AANA	Ambedkar Association of North America
AHAD	American Hindus against Defamation
AIM	Dr. Ambedkar International Mission
AL	Awami League
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BNF	Bhutan Nuns Foundation
BNP	Bangladesh National Party
CAG	Coalition against Genocide
CAIR	Council on American Islamic Relations
CBCSL	Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CHYK	Chinmaya Yuva Kendra
CMB	Central Monastic Body
DSA	Digital Security Act
FIACONA	Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
HAF	Hindu American Foundation
HI	Hefazat–i–Islam
HICAD	Hindu International Council against Defamation
IAMC	Indian American Muslim Council
ICT	Information & Communication Technology Act
ISKCON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness
JHU	Jatika Hela Urumaya
JI	Jamaat–i–Islami
KHC	Kasih Hospice Care Society
KN	Khatme Nabuwat
MDN	Maldivian Democracy Network
MDP	Maldivian Democratic Party
NCC	National Christian Council
NEFIN	Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities

OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
PTS	Pali Text Society
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SALDEF	Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLAFs	Sri Lanka Armed Forces
SMART	Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force
SNDP	Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
TJ	Tabligh Jamaat
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
UNP	United National Party
USCIRF	U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom
USINPAC	U.S.–India Political Action Committee
VHPA	Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America

CONTRIBUTORS

Chad Bauman is Professor of Religion at Butler University, a senior fellow at the Religious Freedom Institute, and a research fellow at the Center for Religion and American Culture. He is author, co-author, or co-editor of dozens of articles and book chapters, in addition to five books: *Christian Identity and Dalit Religion in Hindu India, 1868–1947* (2008); *Constructing Indian Christianities* (Routledge: 2014); *Pentecostals, Proselytization, and Anti-Christian Violence in Contemporary India* (2015); *Anti-Christian Violence in India* (Cornell: forthcoming); and *The Routledge Handbook of Hindu-Christian Relations* (Routledge: forthcoming). The first of these books won the prize for Best Book in Hindu–Christian Studies, 2006–2008, from the Society for Hindu-Christian Studies.

Michel Boivin is Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies, CNRS-EHESS, in Paris. Trained in contemporary history, Islamic studies, and anthropology, he is Director of Research at the National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), and he teaches at the EHESS (School of Advanced Studies in Social Sciences, Paris Research University) the historical anthropology of the Muslim societies of South Asia, with a focus on the interaction between Islam (Sufism and Shiism) and Hinduism, as well as the issues related to shared spaces of worship. Furthermore, he has recently developed an interest in visual studies. He is the author or (co-)editor of 15 books, the two last being *The Sufi Paradigm and the Makings of a Vernacular Knowledge in Colonial India: The case of Sindh* (2020) and *The Hindu Sufis of South Asia: Partition, Shrine Culture and the Sindhis of India* (2019).

David Brick is an assistant professor of Sanskrit at the University of Michigan. He is the author of numerous articles related to classical India and Hinduism, as well as the book *Brahmanical Theories of the Gift: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Dānakāṇḍa of the Kṛtyakalpataru* (2015).

Johannes Bronkhorst is Professor Emeritus at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland. His primary areas of expertise include the history of Indian thought, broadly conceived. He has published numerous research papers and books, including *Greater Magadha* (2007), *Aux origines de la philosophie indienne* (2008), *Buddhist Teaching in India* (2009), *Language and Reality* (2011), *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism* (2011), *Karma* (2011), *Absorption* (2012), and *How the Brahmins Won* (2016).

Patton E. Burchett is an assistant professor of religious studies at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. He earned his Ph.D. (2012) in South Asian religions from Columbia University and then spent three years as an assistant professor and faculty fellow in religious studies at New York University (NYU). His research focuses on (a) early modern devotional (*bhakti*) and tantric/yogic religiosity in north India and (b) the interrelations of magic, science, and religion in the rise of Indian and Western modernities. His first book, released in May 2019, is titled *A Genealogy of Devotion: Bhakti, Tantra, Yoga, and Sufism in North India*.

Debi Chatterjee is a former professor at Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Her areas of specialisation include Dalit studies, Indian society and social problems, and human rights and gender. Chatterjee is the Founder-Editor of the journal *Contemporary Voice of Dalit*, and she has written articles in journals and edited volumes in both English and Bengali and authored several books such as *Dalit Rights/Human Rights, Ideas and Movements Against Caste in India: Ancient to Modern Times*, *Up Against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar*, *Sociology of National Integration*, *Marxist Thought in India*, and *The Colour Volcano*.

Donald R. Davis, Jr., is Professor and Chair in the Department of Asian Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. His most recent books include *The Dharma of Business: Commercial Law in Medieval India* (2017) and *Hindu Law: A New History of Dharmaśāstra* (2018, co-edited with Patrick Olivelle).

David N. Gellner is Professor of Social Anthropology and a Fellow of All Souls College, University of Oxford. He has conducted research in Nepal (and occasionally elsewhere) on religion, politics, ethnicity, caste, class, activism, borderlands, and other topics since 1981. He gave the Mahesh Chandra Regmi Lecture on "The Idea of Nepal" in 2016. His monographs include *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest: Newar Buddhism and Its Hierarchy of Ritual* (CUP, 1992), *The Anthropology of Buddhism and Hinduism: Weberian Themes* (OUP, 1992), and (with Sarah LeVine) *Rebuilding Buddhism: The Theravada Movement in Twentieth-Century Nepal* (Harvard U.P., 2005). He has edited or co-edited 16 volumes, including a special issue of *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* on "Nepal's Dalits in Transition" (2019), *Global Nepalis: Religion, Culture, and Community in a New and Old Diaspora* (OUP, 2018), *Religion, Secularism, and Ethnicity in Contemporary Nepal* (OUP, 2016), and *Borderland Lives in Northern South Asia* (Duke U.P., 2013).

Marko Geslani is Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of South Carolina. His research focuses on early Hindu ritual and astral science. He is author of *Rites of the God-King: Śānti and Ritual Change in Early Hinduism* (2018).

Dorji Gyeltshen is a scholar of Himalayan Buddhism and an associate professor at the Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law (JSWSL), where he teaches Dzongkha as well as logic (reasoning) for law students. Before becoming a professor, he was a monk, and his religious education spans various Buddhist schools. Although his family belonged to the Sakya school, his early monastic education was in the Kagyu tradition, while he pursued higher studies at Namdroling Shedra (monastic college), a Nyingma institution in India, where he obtained the degree of Khenpo. In order to further his knowledge of philosophical debate, he also spent some time at a Geluk monastery. He has taught in religious and secular academic institutions in Bhutan, India, and Nepal over the last 20 years.

Justin Henry is Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy, Religion & Liberal Studies at Georgia College & State University. He has published articles on aspects of Pali, Sinhala, and Tamil

religious literature and is the co-editor of an August 2019 special issue of *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* on the reception of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Sri Lanka.

Ute Hüsken is Professor of the Department of Cultural and Religious History of South Asia (Classical Indology, South Asia Institute), Heidelberg University. Until 2017, she was Professor of South Asia Studies (Sanskrit) at Oslo University (Norway). Hüsken's main research fields are Buddhist studies, Hindu studies, ritual and festival studies, and gender studies. Her major publications include *Die Vorschriften für die buddhistische Nonnengemeinde im Vinaya-Piṭaka der Theravādin* (1997); *When Rituals Go Wrong. Mistakes, Failure, and the Dynamics of Ritual* (2007); *Viṣṇu's Children. Prenatal Life-Cycle Rituals in South India* (2009); and several edited volumes, such as *The Ambivalence of Denial. Danger and Appeal of Rituals* (ed. with Udo Simon, 2016) and *Buddhist Modernities. Re-Inventing Tradition in the Globalizing Modern World* (ed. by Hanna Havnevik, Ute Hüsken, Mark Teeuwen, Vladimir Tikhonov, Koen Wellens, Routledge, 2017). Together with Ronald Grimes and Barry Stephenson, she edits *The Oxford Ritual Studies Series*.

Knut A. Jacobsen is professor of religion at the University of Bergen. His research focuses on South Asian religions and philosophies, especially the Hindu traditions in India, but also their globalization and diasporas, as well as the Jain, Buddhist, and Sikh traditions. He has published widely in these fields but many of his publications have focused in particular on Sāṃkhya and Yoga, both classical and contemporary traditions; on ideas and rituals of space and time; and on Hinduism and migration. His most important books include the monographs *Prakṛti in Sāṃkhya-Yoga* (1999), *Kapila* (2008), *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition* (Routledge 2013), and *Yoga in Modern Hinduism: Hariharānanda Āraṇya and Sāṃkhyayoga* (Routledge 2018). He is Co-Editor of the two volumes *Handbook of Hinduism in Europe* (2020) and is the Founding Editor-in-Chief of the six-volume *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (2009–2015).

Tilmann Kulke works as Assistant Professor for Islamic and Global History at Ilia State University Tbilisi, Georgia. He is primarily interested in the narratological analyses of premodern (Islamic) texts and the history of multiple globalizations, with a focus on the Mughal Empire and early modern Georgia and their various connections (roughly between 1300–1800). Outside academia, he is a constant seeker for alternative and innovative methods to teach German to his young Georgian students.

Mukesh Kumar is a Humboldt post-doctoral fellow at the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University. He has B.A., M.A., and M.Phil. degrees from Delhi University, and a Ph.D. (2019) from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). His research interests lie at the intersection of history and anthropology; he employs and combines methods of ethnographic fieldwork and archival work to examine the changing forms of religious culture and the issue of Hindu–Muslim cultural encounter in north India from a *longue durée* perspective. Some of his works have appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, London, and *Economic and Political Weekly*. One of his research articles was awarded the best Ph.D. paper at the ANU Religion Conference, 2018.

Prema Kurien is Professor of Sociology as well as the Founding Director of the Asian/Asian American Studies program at Syracuse University. She is the author of three award-winning books, *Kaleidoscopic Ethnicity: International Migration and the Reconstruction of Community Identities in India* (2002), *A Place at the Multicultural Table: The Development of an American Hinduism* (2007), and *Ethnic Church Meets Mega Church: Indian American Christianity in Motion* (2017) and over 50 other publications. She is currently working on her next book, *Race, Religion, and Citizenship:*

Indian American Political Advocacy, and on a research project, "The Political Incorporation of Religious Minorities in Canada and the United States".

Chiara Letizia is Professor of South Asian Religions at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM). She has been conducting fieldwork on religion and society in contemporary Nepal since 1997, focusing on ritual, religion and politics, pilgrimage, ethnic/religious activism, the meaning and implementation of secularism, and the role of the courts in redefining religious practices. She is currently working on activism directed against animal sacrifice as a religious practice. She is the author of *La dea bambina. Il culto della Kumari e la regalità in Nepal* (FrancoAngeli, 2003) and the co-editor of *Religion, Secularism and Ethnicity in Contemporary Nepal* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

Carlos Lopez is the author of *Atharvaveda-Paippalāda Kāṇḍas Thirteen and Fourteen* (Harvard Oriental Series, Opera Minora 6; 2010). He has contributed articles to encyclopedias and edited volumes, including "The Philological Limits of Translating Religion: *Śraddhā* and *Dharma* in Hindu Texts" in *Translating Religion: What Is Lost and Gained* (Routledge Studies in Religion, 47). He has taught courses in South Asian religions at Florida State University, the University of South Florida, and Long Island University's Global College and has worked in the field of global education. He is currently the Assistant Director of Study Abroad for Faculty-Led Programs at Central Michigan University.

Manuel Lopez is a scholar of Buddhism with a particular regional focus on Tibet and the Himalayas. He is an assistant professor of religion at New College of Florida, where he teaches courses on Buddhism, Tibetan and Himalayan Buddhism, Buddhist contemplative systems, Hinduism, and Asian religions in general. Recent publications include "In Search of the Lost Manuscript: The Obscure Recension History of the Tenth Century Text *The Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*," *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines* 52, October 2019, and "Contemplative Practice, Doxographies, and the Construction of Tibetan Buddhism: Nupchen Sangyé Yeshé and *The Lamp for the Eye in Meditation*" in *Religions* 2018, 9 (11).

Amanda Lucia is Associate Professor of Religious Studies at University of California-Riverside. She is the author of *White Utopias: The Religious Exoticism of Transformational Festivals* (2020) and *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace* (2014). She is also crafting a body of research on celebrity gurus and sexual abuse.

Nathan McGovern is Assistant Professor of Asian Religions at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. His research interests include early Indian religion and religion in Thailand. He recently published his first book, *The Snake and the Mongoose: The Emergence of Identity in Early Indian Religion*.

Axel Michaels is Senior Professor of Classical Indology at the South Asia Institute, University of Heidelberg. Current fields of interest are social history and history of Hinduism, theory of rituals, and life cycle rites of passage in Nepal, as well as the cultural and legal history of Nepal. Major book publications include: *Kultur und Geschichte Nepals* (2018), *Homo ritualis. Hindu Rituals and Its Significance for Ritual Theory* (2016) and *Hinduism. Past and Present* (2004).

Adrián Muñoz is Lecturer of South Asian religions at El Colegio de México. He has authored *Radiografía del hathayoga* (2016), co-edited *Yogi Heroes and Poets: Histories and Legends of the Naths*

(2011), and co-authored *Historia minima del yoga* (2019). He is currently working on a project about the history and practice of yoga in Latin America.

Anne Murphy (Ph.D. Columbia) teaches at the University of British Columbia, where she currently serves as Director of the Centre for India and South Asia Research and is Associate Dean in the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. She teaches and conducts research on the vernacular literary and religious traditions of the Punjab region (India and Pakistan), with interests in literary and material cultures, commemoration, and historiography. Current research concerns modern Punjabi cultural production in the Indian and Pakistani Punjabs and the Punjabi diaspora and the early modern history of Punjabi's emergence as a literary language. She has published one monograph, two edited volumes (one co-edited), and articles in *History and Theory, Studies in Canadian Literature, South Asian History and Culture,* the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, and other journals. Her book-length translation of the short stories of Punjabi-language writer Zubair Ahmed, *Grieving for Pigeons: Twelve Stories of Lahore*, is due out in 2020.

Meera Nanda started out as a microbiologist (Ph.D., IIT-Delhi) and later turned to history and philosophy of science (Ph.D., Science Studies, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, NY, USA). She has taught history of science at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, first at Mohali (2009–2017) and later at IISER-Pune (2019–2020). She is the author, most recently, of *Science in Saffron: Skeptical Essays on the History of Science* (2016).

Azra Naseem is an independent researcher affiliated with the Institute for International Conflict Resolution and Reconstruction at the School of Law and Government in Dublin City University (DCU). She has a doctorate and master's in international relations from DCU and is a regular contributor to international research and media coverage of the rapidly changing religious landscape in the Maldives.

Ali Riaz is a distinguished professor at Illinois State University, USA. He held the Thomas E. Eimermann Professorship in Political Science (2018–2020). He is also a nonresident senior fellow of the Atlantic Council South Asia Center based in Washington, D.C., USA. He was the chair of the Department of Politics and Government between 2007 and 2017. Riaz previously taught at universities in Bangladesh, England, and South Carolina, USA; worked as a broadcast journalist at the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in London, and served as a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at Washington D.C. He served as a consultant to various international organizations and appeared before the US Congress in 2013 and 2015 as an expert witness. His primary area of interests are democratisation, violent extremism, political Islam, madrassahs, South Asian politics, and Bangladeshi politics. His recent publications include *Voting in a Hybrid Regime: Explaining the 2018 Bangladeshi Election* (2019), *Lived Islam and Islamism in Bangladesh* (2017), and *Bangladesh: A Political History since Independence* (2016). He has coedited *Political Violence in South Asia* (2019) and *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Bangladesh* (2016).

Peter Schalk is professor emeritus at Uppsala University. His main area of research is Buddhism and Hinduism and religious expressions of socioeconomic conflicts in contemporary South Asia. Earlier, he worked on Buddhist rituals in a Sinhala Pali tradition, especially on *pirit* and *baṇa*; on Buddhism among Tamil speakers in the precolonial period in South India and Sri Lanka; on Caivam (Śaivism) among Tamil speakers in European exile; on the Väddō (Väddas) of

Sri Lanka; and on the semantic history of the toponym Īḻam. He edited four volumes on Buddhism among Tamils in India and Sri Lanka.

Sthaneshwar Timalsina (Ph.D., Martin Luther University, Halle, Germany) is Professor in the department of Religious Studies at San Diego State University. He works in the areas of Indian religions and philosophies. The primary areas of his research include consciousness studies and tantric studies. Besides four books, *Seeing and Appearance* (2006), *Consciousness in Indian Philosophy* (Routledge, 2009), *Tantric Visual Culture: A Cognitive Approach* (Routledge, 2015), and *Language of Images: Visualization and Meaning in Tantras* (2015), he has published over 80 essays and book chapters in his fields of research. He is currently working in the areas of time and memory, imagination, and emotion.

INTRODUCTION

Historical and contemporary South Asian religions

Knut A. Jacobsen

Historical and contemporary South Asian religions are studied by a number of different academic disciplines globally and constitute vivid and flourishing fields of critical research. There are good reasons for this great worldwide academic interest in South Asian religious traditions. Several of the world's largest religions originated in South Asia, and these religions have had, and continue to have, a significant impact on cultural and social formations not only in South Asia but also in large parts of Asia and increasingly also in the rest of the world. A significant percentage of humanity lives in areas dominated by them. Moreover, South Asian religions are extremely complex, with numerous regional forms and subtraditions. They are continuously changing, and they are part of dynamic and intricate cultures and societies, which they influence and are influenced by. They have an impact on most areas of human life, such as settlement patterns, work, diet, marriage, knowledge traditions, festivals, calendars, art, music, literature and languages, different forms of social organization, economy, law, politics, national identities, and more. Many of these areas and their complexities have attracted extensive academic interest. In general, religious practices are localized, but the strong relationship between religions and nation states and the use of religion for political power has been a striking feature of religion in South Asia during the last decades.

Religions in South Asia

Hinduism and Buddhism are two of the world's largest religious traditions in terms of the number of people identifying or being identified with them, and South Asia is also the geographical origin of two other important religions, although much smaller in terms of numbers of people, Jainism and Sikhism. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism have ancient roots. Mahāvīra and Buddha lived between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE, and the earliest part of the Veda, which is the textual foundation of the early Brahmanical tradition, is 1,000 years older, dated as early as c. 1500 BCE. The founder of Sikhism, Guru Nānak, lived from 1469–1539, and this religion's early development in northwest India was mostly during the Mughal Empire (founded in 1526). While the mosaic of traditions today labelled as Hinduism is the largest of the South Asian religions, Buddhism was a dominant religion for periods in early Indian history and has had a great impact on the Indian civilization. Jainism and Sikhism are smaller religions, but they have for periods dominated or greatly influenced some regions in South Asia. In addition,

South Asia was for many hundreds of years, from the thirteenth century, a centre of the Islamic civilization, and Islam continues to dominate large parts of South Asia. Christianity has a longer presence in South Asia than in most European countries, and its followers are minorities in all nations, although they form majorities in some of the states of northeast India (Nagaland, Mizoram, and Meghalaya). Other religions with a very minor, but continuous, presence here are Judaism and Zoroastrianism, whose followers in India are called Parsis. Buddhism spread early on to other areas of Asia, especially eastern and northern Asia, and Hinduism had a significant presence in historical Southeast Asia. Both Buddhism and Hinduism have over the last 200 years also gained a large global presence because of migration, conversions, and adoptions of ideas and practices derived from Buddhism and Hinduism, such as meditation and yoga.

The names of the different South Asian religions, especially "Hinduism" and "Buddhism," refer to a plurality of traditions and practices, and "Hinduism" above all is better considered a label for an enormous mosaic of religious traditions and practices without a centre, a label for a collection of regional religious traditions, ritual practices, and religious narratives and views (see Jacobsen 2009). Religious traditions have localized forms wherever they are present. Many such localized practices have over time been identified with Hinduism without losing their localized forms. Other and new practices and interpretations have also been added. However, all South Asian religions are composed of multiple traditions, and they are divided by different interpretations. The various religions have separate textual traditions, and in some cases, such as in Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, they are associated with separate founding figures, Buddhism with *buddha*s, Jainism with *tīrthaṅkara*s, and Sikhism with their ten historical human gurus and their living guru, the book *Gurū Granth*. However, in South Asian history, sacred figures, teachers, temples, sites, and festivals have historically attracted devotees across traditions (see the chapter in this volume by Kumar). Ritual clients have in many cases been pragmatic in their attitudes and have been more interested in ritual results than religious doctrines and identities. Although such attitudes have perhaps not always been consistent across the traditions, these sorts of pragmatic attitudes have in modern South Asia increasingly been challenged by identity politics and majoritarian nationalism.

South Asian religions refer to religions of South Asian origin as well as religions of non–South Asian origin present in South Asia. One forerunner of Hinduism, the Vedic religion, arrived with people from outside the region who also brought Indo-European languages to South Asia (see the chapter by C. Lopez in this volume). The speakers of Vedic Sanskrit, which was the language of the Veda, came originally as pastoralist migrants from Central Asia and introduced the Indo-European language to South Asia. While this historical fact first became known through the study of languages, it has also received firm support from genetic research (Joseph 2018). The earliest sacred texts of the Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions were composed in Indo-European languages (in Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit languages). South Asia is a centre for the preservation of religious traditions, with a number of traditions going back several thousand years. However, religion in the early period probably developed in different geographical centres and did not arise from a single source or a single region (for a discussion of this point, see the chapters by Bronkhorst and McGovern in this volume). Christianity and Islam arrived much later but did develop characteristic South Asian religious forms.

Although the labels Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on, which are used in this volume, are modern labels for relatively plural and heterogeneous religious traditions with many different schools and regional and local forms and institutions, their invention had some influence on Western constructions of knowledge, and the labels have also had a significant influence on religious movements in South Asia. The term Hinduism has been accepted by many Hindus, but other terms have also been promoted, such as *sanātana dharma*, Indic traditions, and Dharma

traditions. The Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka used to call their religion Caiva (Śaiva) but are now increasingly using the term Hindu. Notable is their use of the term Hindu for their temple organizations in their global diasporas, which illustrates the success of the modern terms Hinduism and Hindu religion. The modern concepts of Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on also gave rise to new movements that took advantage of the modern terms in order to invent new traditions. A famous Indian case is Navayana Buddhism, created by B. R. Ambedkar (see the chapter by Chatterjee in this volume), which was influenced by the creation of Modern Buddhism, a form of Buddhism understood as different from the religious practices and teachings of contemporary Buddhist countries and identified instead with new interpretations of early Buddhism. The creation of Modern Buddhism also had an enormous influence on Sri Lanka, with Dharmapāla as the main partisan, and here it led to a Buddhist revival and furthermore to political and militant Buddhist nationalism (Seneviratne 1999, and see the chapter by Schalk in this volume). Hindu nationalism was promoted by V. D. Savarkar, who popularized the concept of *Hindutva*. Savarkar was an atheist and advocated a Hindu political identity and Hindu culture and not Hinduism per se. However, in the Hindu nationalist political movement that has unfolded, especially in the last 30 years in India and among Indian Hindus settled abroad, Hinduism has become a main ingredient in the ideology, and increasingly, there has been an attempt to make Hinduism and the Hindutva political agenda equal.

South Asian nations

The geographical region of South Asia is currently (2020) divided into seven nations and includes the country of India and six of its neighbouring countries, Pakistan in the west, Bangladesh in the east, Nepal and Bhutan in the north, and the island nations of Sri Lanka and the Maldives in the south.[1] The name India was before 1947 used for a larger geographical area than the current Indian nation state and also included the areas of today's Pakistan and Bangladesh. Consequently, India in contemporary usage can refer both to the nation state of India and to the historical pre-1947 larger geographical area of the Indian civilization. However, the term South Asia is now commonly used for this larger geographical area to distinguish it from the modern nation state of India, and since South Asia includes also Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives, it is a mistake to call all pre-1947 South Asians Indians as is sometimes done, as Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives were not part of pre-1947 India.

One characteristic of contemporary South Asia is the close connections of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam to the nation states and their ideological power. These religions have probably most often been part of structures of power, but the emergence of the nation as a social form produced radical changes in South Asia. The institution of the modern nation state influenced the contemporary developments of these religions, and religions have become increasingly politicized and politics religionized (see the chapters by Chatterjee, Nanda, Boivin, Riaz, Schalk, Gellner and Letizia, and Naseem in this volume). This does not at all mean that all religious life has been politicized. Ritual food and festival traditions continue to be celebrated in traditional ways (see the chapter by Hüsken), but food also has a symbolic social significance as the marker of purity and pollution and as religious identity. However, it is striking that many of the seven South Asian nation states promote strong religious identities and connect their foundation as well as their history and identity to religion. The dominant majority religions in the South Asian nations are Hinduism (in India and Nepal), Islam (in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives), and Buddhism (in Sri Lanka and Bhutan), and the most significant minority religions are Sikhism, Christianity, and Jainism. However, notably, all the majority religions are also minority religions in other South Asian countries. These religions, therefore, which are

used to dominate citizens in some countries, are at the same time voices of opposition and even victims of persecution in other countries. So while Hindus are dominant in India and a majority in Nepal, they are minorities in the other countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. In South Asia, religions have been used for establishing nations and also for creating political majorities. Since religions promote obedience to and ideas of dependence on supreme divine powers, they may function to legitimate state and ideological power and to some degree as useful tools for creating and maintaining social stability supported by these majorities. Religion is also about identity, and it is notable that the South Asian nations, which are characterized by enormous diversity, including religious diversity, have to such a large degree used religion as a tool for creating nations and majorities within these nations. Accordingly, two nations have made Buddhism an essential part of the national identity of the country (Sri Lanka, Bhutan) and state in their constitutions that they are based on Buddhism. Three nations have adopted Islam as national ideologies and state in their constitutions that they are based on the principles of Islam (Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives). The last two have Hindu majorities (India and Nepal), and although these two nations both have secular constitutions, Nepal was until a few years back the only Hindu kingdom in the world, and India is currently undergoing a quite dramatic Hinduization process under the political rule of the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party. Perhaps the use of religion in this way in the South Asian nations is also a function of their enormous diversity. Religions do give legitimation of power. However, such means of legitimation create tensions between religious majorities and minorities, and such tensions will probably remain part of the developments, with global and international events and trends also influencing the situation.

The national borders in South Asia are recent inventions, and religious traditions therefore naturally cross them. The Īḻam Tamils (Sri Lankan Tamils originating from the northern areas), the Hill Country Tamils of Sri Lanka, and the Tamils of India have a common language and follow similar Tamil religious traditions. The Bengali Hindus live in both the Indian state of West Bengal as a majority and in the nation of Bangladesh as a minority, and both follow Bengali religious traditions. Punjab was divided between Pakistan and India, which meant that the religious centres of the Sikhs became divided between two nation states, with almost all the Sikhs living in India and with the loss of the memory of a shared past of India and Pakistan (Virdee 2016). The historical Greater Punjab is different from the Indian state of Punjab. In this volume, there are separate chapters on the religious developments for each of the different South Asia nations. There are no separate chapters for the many regions, but Chapter 13 by Anne Murphy analyses the historical underpinnings of the Sikh connection to Punjab. Even though religion in India, and also in some other South Asian nations, is better understood as collections of regional traditions, we have not included chapters on all the Indian regions or systematically used the regional approaches, which would be more appropriate for an encyclopaedic methodology that aims to cover all aspects.[2] Instead, in this volume, in the case of India, there are a number of chapters dealing with different research topics, both historical and contemporary, and different religions.

The term South Asia is both geographical and political and perhaps also cultural. Exactly what these cultural commonalities are that have been created by these connections is difficult to establish (Jacobsen and Kumar 2004: ix). One reason for the difficulty of identifying commonalities is that South Asia is one of the most diverse regions in the world in terms of ethnicity, language, and also religion. In her chapter, Chapter 24 on South Asian festivals, Ute Hüsken notes that all South Asian communities are locally specific, and so are their festivals, as can be seen from the importance of a specific festival food for individual participants. The celebrations of local communities tell us about their local groundedness and dynamics, she argues. The interest of Hindu nationalism in the larger India has perhaps also made any search for a commonality

specific to "South Asia" both intellectually and politically problematic. Historically South Asia has not been dominated by any single religion. On the contrary, throughout history, different religions have been culturally and politically dominant in South Asia, South Asia has been shaped by a plurality of traditions, and the distribution of these religions today is quite different from some earlier periods.

Historical South Asian religions: formative developments

The chapters of this Handbook exemplify critical research on a number of important aspects of South Asian religions, and the volume is divided into two main parts, "Historical South Asian Religions" and "Contemporary South Asian Religions".

The first part analyses the early and formative developments of religions in South Asia, how some dominant practices and ideas became established, and how some changes and transformations occurred. The chapters focus on the current research on the Veda, the rise of classical Brahmanism and the Brahman identity in the early period, *dharma* as the dominant concept, religion and rationality, how *pūjā* became the main Hindu ritual, how pilgrimage became an integral part of the Brahmanical Hindu tradition, the place of historical Nepal and Sri Lanka in the history of South Asian religions, Nāth yoga and yogīs, the rise of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti*, Aurangzeb and Islam in India, and Sikhism and the territorialization of Sikh history.

The first chapters of Part I deal with some early formative developments. For the early Brahmanical Sanskrit tradition, the Veda was the textual foundation, preserved for a long time only in an oral form, and the Veda has remained significant as a textual category considered non-human (*apauruṣeya*) in origin throughout the history of the Hindu traditions. In Chapter 1, Carlos Lopez notes that the Veda is the earliest accessible literature from South Asia and that there have been continuous attempts to extend its authority by denoting other texts, both post-Vedic compositions in Sanskrit as well as in vernacular languages, as additional or other Vedas. Lopez points out that *Veda* has "functioned as an indigenous, multi-valent, and expansive category to order the complex cultural, linguistic, political, and social diversity of South Asia". In the post-Vedic period, the Veda was comprehended in two textual categories, *śruti* and *smṛti*. *Śruti* was originally only the Saṃhitā part of each Veda but was expanded to include Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads, and *smṛti* texts, which derived their authority from the Veda, included Vedāṅgas, Epics, Dharmaśāstras, and Purāṇas. Continuous research on the Veda has made more knowledge available on this early period of South Asian history, and Lopez presents some of the current knowledge.

The second chapter analyses the rise of classical Brahmanism, which happened after the Vedic sacrificial tradition had been challenged by Buddhism and other *śramaṇa* traditions. Johannes Bronkhorst notes that from the Brahmanical point of view, the Brahmans considered themselves to always have been at the top of the social hierarchy. Bronkhorst shows, based on a critical analysis of the early history that this claim, which is so essential for the Hindu Brahmanical ideology, is not historically correct. His chapter analyses the Brahmanical response to the ending of the Vedic political order, caused by a succession of political events, which brought an end to the Vedic sacrificial tradition. Subsequently, with the support of the Śuṅga King Puṣyamitra, a new form of Brahmanism was invented, which especially emphasized smaller, individual rites of purity and knowledge of the Veda, and it borrowed a number of elements from the culture of Greater Magadha. This form of Brahmanism spread all over South Asia and beyond. Bronkhorst's chapter describes and analyses this early formative development.

Chapter 3 by Nathan McGovern is also about the early formative development and emergence of those identities that we today recognize as Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain. He is interested in

the references to such terms as Brahman, *śramaṇa*, Nigaṇṭha (Jainism), Ājīvika, and Sakyaputtiya (Buddhism) in early Indian religion and distinguishes between two approaches in understanding early South Asian religion, explaining religious change as an internal dynamic of a single tradition ("orthogenetic approach") and describing religious change in terms of an indigenous substratum ("substratal approach"). McGovern attempts an orthogenetic approach and criticizes the assumption of a metahistorical dichotomy or opposition between *śramaṇa* and Brahman. He argues that the opposition between *śramaṇa* and Brahman emerged over time and that various groups contested the appellation Brahman. McGovern argues in his chapter that "reactionary householder Brahmans undertook a programme, through the twin ideological tools of *varṇa* and *āśrama*, to invalidate ascetic (*śramaṇa*) lifestyles and arrogate the title Brahman to themselves".

In Chapter 4, David Brick and Donald R. Davis give an account of the early developments of the single most important term in classical South Asian religions, *dharma*. They show that *dharma* was a marginal concept in Vedic religion. This goes against the view commonly held in contemporary Hinduism and also older scholarship. This older scholarly belief originated in the Mīmāṃsā view of *dharma*, they argue. The authors show that the rise to prominence of the concept of *dharma* in Hindu traditions was not a natural or gradual cultural evolution from Vedic religion but was caused by the rise of Buddhism and non-Brahmanical ("heterodox") religious traditions and the reign of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka. They explain that it was non-Brahmanical groups, especially Buddhists, who made *dharma* the central term before it had become a main term in Brahmanical Hinduism. Aśoka expressed his worldview in terms of *dharma*, and this led some Brahmans also to attempt to frame their own religion in terms of *dharma*. A whole genre of literature, the *Dharmaśāstra*s, was produced for this purpose. Brick and Davis analyse the concept of *dharma* and its sacred foundation in the *Dharmaśāstra*s and the Hindu Epics and detail the development of *dharma* from ritual to social customs and the law of the king and his state.

In Chapter 5, Sthaneshwar Timalsina investigates the place of reason in South Asian religions, especially in the Hindu traditions, and focuses on *dharma* in Mīmāṃsā and Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta. He investigates interpretations of *dharma* as engagement (*pravṛtti*) and detachment (*nivṛtti*). *Pravṛtti* and *nivṛtti* are the two modes of *dharma* as well as of truth (*satya*), argues Timalsina. He investigates how Hinduism "as *dharma* grounds reasoning in these two apparently conflicting domains" and shows in his detailed investigation of the sources that reason in the tradition of Mīmāṃsā and Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta functions, on the one hand, to explore the limits of desire and provide a method for examination of its moral dimension and, on the other, as a guide for individuals to encounter one's inner structure and recognize human suffering and its transcendence. Timalsina concludes by commenting on the contemporary situation of Hinduism in South Asia, stating that *dharma* differs from faith and does not conflict between the pluralism of voices and the rational inquiry of norms and that the modern transformation of Hinduism into a faith tradition has demanded the sacrifice of reason and a homogenization of identity. Hinduism as faith opens itself mostly to the elements that contradict rationality, concludes Timalsina.

In Chapter 6, Marko Geslani discusses the puzzling relationship between Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) and Hindu image worship (*pūjā*). Geslani wants to resituate the problem of image worship in the study of Hinduism, and he starts his chapter by giving a critical outline of what he argues has been an "iconocentric" pattern of thought in the study of Hinduism. The dominating idea of this "iconocentric" pattern was that image worship represented religious decline. Geslani discusses the politicized discourse of the early European Orientalists, the missionaries' reception of Vedic and Hindu religion, and the preference for textual antiquity in contrast to contemporary Hindu "idolatry", which for these Orientalists and missionaries illustrated barbarism. After discussing

the "iconocentric" pattern of thought in the study of Hinduism, Geslani reviews some new questions that have been raised about the early history of South Asian religions (the period 500 BCE to 1000 CE). The time of the Guptas (320–500 CE) is usually considered the beginning of Hindu temples, with the earlier period being dominated by Buddhist monuments. At the end of the time of the Guptas, we find the earliest great monumental temples. Geslani's main argument is that we should seek the history of the Hindu cult of images among the elite, and in the rest of his chapter, he attempts such a history in relation to institutional and political history and in historical continuation with early Vedic and Brahmanical ritual patterns.

In the next chapter, Knut A. Jacobsen looks at the early history of pilgrimage in South Asia. Sacred sites that were believed to offer rewards to those who visited them have been a feature of South Asian religious traditions probably since at least the first centuries CE. This chapter suggests that some pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic religious rituals in north and central India associated with sacred trees, pools of water, and shrines might also have been objects of ritual travel in pre-historic times. The worship of *yakṣa*s was probably widespread in parts of north and central India, and these *yakṣa*s were possibly guardians and gatekeepers of places and connected to sites. The chapter suggests that perhaps the later Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain pilgrimage traditions were influenced by traditions associated with pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic religious rituals connected to these divine beings. In the chapter, Jacobsen analyses statements about pilgrimage in two early texts that promoted pilgrimage, the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* and the *Mahābhārata*. The chapter suggests that different forms of ritual travel associated with pilgrimage are found and argues that they had different roots, which indicates that perhaps the pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic religious traditions were of some importance for the development of South Asian pilgrimage.

While it is true that Buddhism mostly disappeared from India, it did not disappear from South Asia, and it has a continuous presence in both Sri Lanka (Theravāda) and Nepal (Mahāyāna). The next two chapters analyse the position of historical Sri Lanka and historical Nepal in the history of South Asian religions. In Chapter 8, Justin Henry investigates the early history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and its relations to India and Southeast Asia. Sri Lanka is the oldest continuous place of Buddhism and, as Henry notes, Sri Lanka "distinguishes itself as a unique preserve of Buddhism globally". It has imparted idiosyncratic templates of Buddhist historiography, ritual orthopraxy, and rites of kingship, and these have influenced religious and political life elsewhere in the region. The early history of Buddhism in Sri Lanka is not least important for the understanding of the Buddhist textual traditions and Henry gives a critical discussion of this and the dissemination of canonical, commentarial, and historical Pali works throughout the Buddhist world of South Asia. Henry finally analyses the Buddhist continuum between Sri Lanka and South India and argues that it was especially the relations with Southeast Asia that shaped the Pali Buddhist world.

The religious history of Nepal is dominated by Hinduism and Buddhism. Kathmandu Valley was one of the first areas outside of India where Mahāyāna was established. Hindu traditions came with the immigration of Brahmans from various areas of India. In Chapter 9, on the place of Nepal in the history of South Asian religion, Axel Michaels observes that inscriptions show that Nepal saw itself as part of the Holy Hindu subcontinent, Āryāvarta, but that Nepal was never colonized and also did not allow Western foreigners to enter the country. Nepal is famous for Buddhist-Hindu syncretism, and Michaels notes that "meetings of Hinduism and Buddhism characterize from the very beginning Nepal's place in the religions of South Asia". In his chapter, he explains how different forms of Hinduism and Buddhism are densely interwoven with each other and describes the many ancient ritual traditions that have been preserved only in Nepal.

The next chapters take up selected topics in current research on religion in South Asia in the second millennium. The arrival of Islam and, from the 13th century, the emergence of the Delhi Sultanate and, in the 16th century, the Mughal Empire caused changes in religion. In Chapter 10, Patton E. Burchett explains the dramatic rise to predominance in North India of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* (devotionalism). From the seventh century, writes Burchett, rulers looked to tantric rituals and gurus for empowerment and legitimation, and by the tenth century, temples and *maṭha*s had become central economic, political, and religious institutions. In these traditions, *bhakti* was a subordinated ritual. But, notes Burchett, "tantra's rise to prominence in early medieval India was inseparable from the growth of popular traditions of worship and devotion". Burchett argues for the co-existence in this early period of lay Śaiva devotion and rich and powerful Śaiva lineages. When Persianate Turkish power spread in India from the twelfth century, the relationship between rulers and tantrics declined, and tantra as a mainstream public tradition disappeared and became subordinated to Hindu practices more congenial to the new Islamicate worldviews, Burchett argues. He shows that Sufis played a key role in the development of vernacular literary culture. His chapter attempts to explain the changing religious landscape under the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal Empire.

The next chapter deals with asceticism and yoga. Yogīs gained increased significance from the eleventh century CE. Adrián Muñoz analyses the Nāth Sampradāya, a Śaiva tradition, its history, identity, and understanding of yoga. Nāth Yogīs have been the only ascetic group that have always referred to themselves as yogīs and used that term as their identity marker, which makes them the most important group for understanding the history of yoga in South Asia. Muñoz points out that the identity of the order relies not only on their relationship to yoga but also on groups of legendary yogīs, as well as the Nāth network, especially in northern India. His chapter investigates the shifting nature of Nāth formation in order to shed light on the origins and development of their multiple identities and how at one point their need for sponsorship led to attempts to "canonize" the order. The recent politicization of the Gorakhnāth Mandir, the Nāth headquarters (its head priest is since 2017 the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh), makes it even more important to understand this movement.

In the next chapter, Tilmann Kulke gives a critical assessment of how the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb has been presented in historical literature. Aurangzeb ruled the Mughal Empire for nearly 50 years until his death in 1707 and brought it to its greatest extension. His goal was to finally subjugate the entire Indian subcontinent under the rule of a glorious Mughal dynasty. Instead of being recorded in the history of his dazzling dynasty as the most glorious ruler and conqueror, historiography has presented him as a bigoted tyrant and Muslim fundamentalist who was responsible for the Mughals' demise, the division of India's society, and, moreover, for the Indian-Pakistani separation 240 years after his death, notes Kulke. His chapter presents this complex Indian ruler from a different perspective. He compares Aurangzeb to contemporaries in Europe and classifies the emperor's often controversial decisions in a broader context. In the main part of this chapter, he discusses the problematic parts of the classic narrative of Aurangzeb and presents new and alternative approaches.

In the sixteenth century, a new lineage of gurus was established in South Asia, with Guru Nānak as the first, which later developed into the Sikh religion. Sikhism is closely associated with Punjab, and in Chapter 13, Anne Murphy investigates the historical foundation of the Sikh claim to Punjab and the Sikh community's notions of place making. Murphy asks if this place making is a modern phenomenon, as some have claimed, or if it draws on longer affiliations. The chapter shows how the past and its representation were also important for the Sikhs prior to the nineteenth century and how representation of the past was not only connected to the landscape of Punjab but also that it exceeded this territory. Murphy analyses texts and relics and also

examines developments from the middle of the nineteenth century and central developments of Sikh place making under colonial rule, when the British controlled the territory, which are also important for understanding the present situation.

Contemporary South Asian religions: religious pluralism

The chapters in the second part of this book analyse important aspects of contemporary religion and society in all the South Asian nation states, such as religious pluralism and identities and some religious practices, representations, and examples of global developments. The first four chapters of Part II concern religion and society in India. According to the most recent Indian census from 2011 (the next census is scheduled for 2021), around 79% of India's population are considered Hindus, around 14% Muslims, around 2% Christians, 2% Sikhs, a little less than 1% Buddhists, and less than 0.5% Jains. The total population of India is (in 2020) 1.38 billion, which is more than 17% of the world's total population. In the first chapter of Part II, Chapter 14, Debi Chatterjee takes up the issue of caste and the religion of the most marginalized sections of the Indian populations, the religion of Dalits. Caste is central in Indian society both in terms of ideology and materiality; caste appears both as values and belief and as a set of stable social relationships. In her chapter, Chatterjee shows that Dalits have often attempted to find liberation through religion, either negotiating within Hinduism or searching for dignity outside of this religion, and she analyses several such attempts in Indian history. Chatterjee notes that attempts to negotiate within Hinduism have had a limited effect on wider society, and these movements have remained trapped within the Brahmanical frame. Conversion to other religions has been somewhat more successful, especially in the case of converts to Navayana Buddhism, who have made a significant contribution to the rise of a new awareness and impacted the establishment of new organizations.

In Chapter 15, Mukesh Kumar analyses the teaching and followers of the saint Lāldās, who transcended Islam and Hinduism and also rejected social hierarchy. His teachings appealed to both Hindus and Muslims, and he still has a Hindu-Muslim following in India. The Hindu-Muslim composite culture has been a significant feature of religion in South Asia, but it has been threatened by Hindu and Muslim mobilization on religious identities. However, Kumar argues that shared religious plurality is still a widespread norm in South Asia, and he asserts that the case of the followers of Lāldās complicates the standard definitions of Hindu and Muslim in South Asia as bounded identities. Lāldās preached *nirguṇa bhakti* to the god Rām, followed vegetarianism, and was also a Muslim who established mosques, and, based on fieldwork, Kumar documents how contemporary followers of Lāldās similarly follow these mixed practices.

Chad Bauman's chapter presents the relations of Christians with non-Christians in India and Sri Lanka. The relationship is characterized predominantly by tolerance and mutual respect but also moments of interreligious tensions and conflicts. The chapter deals with these tensions and conflicts. Bauman argues that conversion has been the main issue of conflict, and in his chapter, he traces Hindus' increasingly hostile attitude towards proselytization and religious conversion. The chapter also discusses increased anti-Christian violence in contemporary India, and Bauman shows that violence is also related to the issue of proselytization. The chapter concludes that the dynamics in India manifest in Sri Lanka in very similar ways.

In Chapter 17, Meera Nanda investigates a significant development of Hindu nationalism (*Hindutva*): the idea that Hinduism is scientific or a "religion of science". This is a characteristic of Hinduism from Vivekananda (Vivekānanda) in the last decade of the nineteenth century to the present prime minister of India, Narendra Modi. Nanda shows that this idea of scientific Hinduism is just a restatement of Hindu theology using scientific-sounding words, but the idea

that science was encompassed in the worldview of the Vedas has nevertheless had a deep impact on many aspects of Hinduism and Indian society. It has, argues Nanda, turned science into the handmaiden of Hindu nationalism. The chapter tells the story of how this came about by analysing the arguments used by the Hindu nationalists. These arguments, she shows, are rooted in the history of Hindu apologetics but are also modern in their deployment. The strategies of Vedic orthodoxies have throughout history brought new and alien ideas into the field of the Vedas, and Nanda shows this ancient strategy at work also in relation to modern science.

The next six chapters cover contemporary religion and society in the other six South Asian countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives. Chapter 18 is about Pakistan, a nation created in 1947 that today (2020) has a population of more than 210 million, with Muslims counting for around 90% (75% Sunnis and 25% Shias) and with small Hindu (2%–5.5%) and Christian (2%) minorities. Michel Boivin writes about how society and religion are intertwined in Pakistan and how, beyond "normative Islamist discourses that are prevailing in the public sphere", adjustments are made by different sections of the population. Pakistan was founded in order to protect the interests of the Muslims, but the country soon developed into an Islamist state. Boivin describes and explains how this movement from a state for Muslims to an Islamic state happened. Boivin notes that before the founding of Pakistan, Muslims in this area were more connected to social and tribal customs than by rules relating to Islam, and in the chapter, he focuses on the social structures of Pakistan and the traditional forms of social domination such as the *jāgīrdāri*, *birādarī*, and the *pīrī-murīdī* system. The final part of his chapter deals with the role of the middle class and the spread of a connected piety, which is often linked with migration.

Bangladesh became an independent nation in 1971 after a war of independence against Pakistan. Of a population of approximately 160 million, around 90% are Muslims, around 10% Hindus, and there is also a very small population of Buddhists and Christians. The relationship between religion and society in Bangladesh is multilayered and complex, notes Ali Riaz in his chapter. Riaz argues that interreligious harmony has for centuries characterized the Bangladeshi society and that the Islamic tradition successfully adapted to Hinduism. Riaz also explains that Hindu mysticism strengthened pluralism and closeness to Muslim mysticism but that this interreligious harmony started to wane in the nineteenth century with the rise of identity politics based on religion. Riaz traces the roots of how a Bangladeshi community defining itself primarily as Muslims came about and notes that one reason was that the urban English-educated middle class based in Kolkata was mainly Hindu, while the East Bengal Muslim peasants remained marginalized. Muslim identity became a means of mobilization.

Sri Lanka became independent in 1948 and is a Buddhist majority country, with around 70% Buddhists in a population of around 21 million. Of the minorities, 12% are Hindus, around 10% are Muslims, and around 7% are Christians. In Chapter 20, Peter Schalk argues that the political conflicts between ethnic groups in Sri Lanka have been based on a politicized Buddhism, which has interpreted its role to be the complete cultural sovereignty in the whole country of Sri Lanka. Deep ethnic divisions and a lack of power sharing in a unitary state have created a non-consociational society that is a breeding ground for politicized antagonism between different ethnic and religious groups. Schalk, in his analysis, distinguishes between idealized and politicized Buddhism and argues that in Sri Lanka, politicized Buddhism uses idealized Buddhism for its own purpose. In the last part of the chapter, Schalk examines the role of the Sri Lankan state and the sovereignty of Buddhism and its relationship to religious minorities.

The developments in Nepal, a nation of around 28 million people, have been different from the other South Asian nations, with the abandonment of the state-sponsored religion of what was officially a Hindu kingdom, the emergence of secularism, and its transformation into a

secular republic. Secularism in Nepal has similarities to Indian secularism, which means that the state should support all religions equally. The chapter by David N. Gellner and Chiara Letizia investigates the effects of the concept of secularism in Nepal propagated by the state, especially since 2015, on distinct religions and ethnic groups through three case studies. First, the effect on conversions and the relation of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity to the state and to Hinduism; second, the diverse Hindu responses to secularism; and third, the controversy over animal sacrifices at the Gadhimai Festival. The chapter shows the state having to engage itself on various levels in the legal understanding of religion and religions.

Bhutan is a Buddhist state with around 750,000 inhabitants, with Vajrayāna Buddhism being the official state religion. The chapter by Dorji Gyeltshen and Manuel Lopez covers the consequences of introducing secular education in this country. Education had been the monopoly of Buddhist monasteries for centuries, but in 1959, the country introduced universal secular education. The success of secular education forced religious institutions to rethink the goals and values of Buddhist education, note Gyeltshen and Lopez. The chapter explores in particular how the introduction of universal secular education affected the education of nuns in the country. Gyeltshen and Lopez argue that the historical, cultural, and religious constraints imposed on nuns, as reflected in the lack of full ordination, forced nuns to rely on a transnational network of Buddhist institutions, as well as on local non-governmental organizations, in order to improve their situation. One consequence has been the enormous growth of nunneries in Bhutan.

The island nation of the Maldives was a Buddhist kingdom for over 1,000 years before it became Muslim in the twelfth century. Islam is the only religion practised there, and this religious homogeneity—the population of around a half million is 100% Muslims—has been decisive for the national identity. Only Muslims are allowed to become Maldivian citizens according to the constitution. The chapter by Azra Naseem focuses on how Salafism took over the Maldives. In the 1980s, a phasing-out of the age-old rituals that characterized the almost-syncretic Islam began, and at the end of the 1990s, Salafism emerged as a minority belief, but since the 2000s, wealthy Salafi actors have increased the funding of the Salafi movement, and the Maldives was seen as fertile ground for missionizing this form of Islam. As a result, Maldivian Salafism came to power in 2008. Naseem notes that democracy in the Maldives did not function as an antidote to radicalization; instead, Salafi terrorism followed. In her chapter, Naseem analyses the persecution of those in the Maldives who did not want to follow the Salafi form of Islam.

The large number of festival traditions in the pluralistic societies of South Asia seems to be a characteristic of this geographical region. In Chapter 24, Ute Hüsken notes the ubiquity of festivals in daily life in South Asian societies and argues that religious festivals here are primarily celebrations of local communities and are always unique to their local and historical setting. In her chapter, she discusses a variety of festivals, which allows her to address some issues of special relevance in the South Asian settings. She notes that festivals in general are contact zones between the world of the gods and the human world but are always localized. For instance, local deities might be considered forms of trans-regional deities, but it is the local form that is celebrated. Looking at the diverse modes and ways of celebrating one and the same festival in different regions, one has to recognize the festival as "one festival and many different festivals at the same time", argues Hüsken. In conclusion, Hüsken suggests that, most importantly, festivals accomplish valuable social work, and this becomes especially evident when looking at South Asian festivals celebrated outside South Asia. When people move and make new homes, they tend to take their festivals with them.

Chapters 25 and 26 are about South Asian religions outside of South Asia. Prema Kurien analyses the manifestations of these religions in the United States, and Amanda Lucia analyses the Hindu guru in a global context. In Chapter 25, Kurien shows the importance of religion

in the South Asian migration to the United States. Religion formed migration, communities, and identities. The Indian diaspora in the United States is one of the largest Indian populations outside of South Asia—4 million and growing—and it is also one of the most influential globally. Interestingly, before the 1980s, Indians in the United States assembled in pan-Indian organizations, but with the growth of Hindu nationalism in India, argues Kurien, Indians in the United States started to mobilize around religious organizations instead. Consequently, there are far more religious than secular Indian American organizations. Kurien's chapter discusses how religion shapes the pattern of migration and immigrant community formation and the politicization of Hinduism in the United States by people who support Hindu nationalism. Hinduism has been recast and reformulated. South Asian minorities in the United States mobilized as religious minorities to gain recognition and identity, and, argues Kurien, assertive Hindu identity was one way to contest racial marginalization. The chapter also shows the importance of religion for Sikhs, South Asian Muslims, and Christians, as well as Dalits in the United States.

In the final chapter, Amanda Lucia presents a significant twentieth-century development in Hinduism, the global manifestation of the phenomenon of the Hindu guru. Lucia notes that there is something expansive in the modern guru phenomenon and suggests that the ecumenical universalism of one type of the Hindu guru is a heritage of the betwixt and between theology of the *sant*s and the *bhakti* movement. Another type of Hindu guru is the political Hindu guru, who has increasingly become associated with Hindutva politics, although their Hindu supremacy ideology, argues Lucia, "is thinly veiled by a cryptic universalistic humanism". Her chapter divides the global guru phenomenon into two parts: the global gurus who travelled west and attracted Western devotees, a phenomenon which peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, and a phenomenon that followed after, the global gurus who focused on growth in India, encouraged by the rapid expansion of the Indian middle class, and which is often connected to Hindu nationalism.

South Asia has historically been a centre for religious innovation and expansion, and several of the world's major religious traditions have their roots here. Change and transformations characterize the history of South Asian religions, as well as the present situation. South Asian religions, whether they originated inside or outside South Asia, have been shaped by South Asian cultures and societies, but they have also shaped them. Because of the importance of religions in South Asia, the academic study of South Asian religions past and present constitutes a significant interdisciplinary field of study, and a number of disciplines are engaged in the research of religion in this geographical area. Critical scholarship is continuously evaluating accepted academic models and truths, researchers draw attention to new empirical material, and new insights replace old ones. The chapters in this book present some of these developments of critical scholarship on South Asian religions.

Notes

1 India also shares borders with three other nations, China in the north, which belongs to East Asia; Myanmar in the far east, which belongs to Southeast Asia; and a short border with Afghanistan, a Southwest Asian nation.
2 For such an approach to Hindu traditions in India, see Jacobsen et al. 2009.

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PART I

Historical South Asian religions

Formative developments

1

THE VEDA

Carlos Lopez

The Veda is the earliest accessible body of literature from the region historically known as *Bharata*, encompassing several of the nation-states of contemporary South Asia. Although there is evidence for writing from the Indus Valley Civilization (ca. 3300–1300 BCE) that predates the Veda, its language remains untranslatable. The Veda consists of *mantras* (poetic formulas) and prose that were orally composed and transmitted in Vedic Sanskrit, the earliest attested language of the Indic branch of Indo-Iranian, a major subfamily of Indo-European, in the context of sacrificial performances. The *Ṛgveda*, the earliest Vedic text, understands *veda* (from √*vid* 'to know') as *trayī vidyā* (threefold knowledge)—*ṛc* (verses), *sāma* (melodies), and *yajus* (ritual injunctions)—that were later collected and redacted in the *saṃhitā* collections of the *Ṛgveda* (RV), *Sāmaveda* (SV), and *Yajurveda* (YV), respectively. The *mantras* attributed to the *atharvāṅgirasa* were assembled in the *Atharvaveda* (AV). By the time of the grammarian Patañjali (ca. mid 2nd c. BCE), *veda* referred to the four *saṃhitās* with opening lines *śáṃ no devī́r ábhiṣaye* (AV=PS), *iṣé tvorjé tvā* (YV), *agním īḷe puróhitaṃ* (RV), and *ágna ā́ yāhi vītáya iti* (SV) (Lopez 2010).

The Veda is an oral text in a different sense than improvisational oral-formulaic epic poetry (Lord 1964). Its language is more "condensed, elliptical, grammatically scrambled . . . formulaic in the broad sense, but it makes surprisingly little use of metrically fixed and verbally frozen formulae in the strict sense" (Jamison 1991: 8). The form of the core hymns of the RV was fixed relatively early and preserved with little variation already during the Early Vedic Period, even as new hymns continued to be composed.

In what follows, Veda and Vedas refer to the orally composed and transmitted texts whose principal subject is *yajña* or sacrifice, which are delimited by linguistic and stylistic features of Vedic Sanskrit.

The texts: date, localization, and transmission

The problem of establishing firm historical dates for ancient South Asia generally before the earliest incursion into northwest India by the Islamic Ghaznavid Empire (ca. 977–1186) is well known (Mylius 1970). Beyond the archaeological dates for the Late Harappan/Third Phase Indus Civilization (Cemetery H/Ochre Coloured Pottery; ca. 1900–1300 BCE) (Possehl 2002), the Mitanni Agreement (Mallory 1989; Thieme 1960), evidence for iron in the Atharvaveda (Gullapalli 2009; Possehl and Gullapalli 1999), and some archeologically attestable

textual references to *realia*, there is scant evidence to undisputedly establish the date for the Veda. The current scholarly consensus is that the earliest portions of Vedas were composed as early ca. 1500 BCE, with a *terminus ad quem* date ca. 500 BCE for late Vedic texts, including *upaniṣads*, *gṛhyasūtras*, and *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra* (Parpola 2019).

The texts describe a semi-nomadic, pastoral society engaged in treks (*yoga*) and establishing temporary peaceful (*kṣema*) settlements (*pur*; *grāma*). There is no evidence for permanent structures, such as temples or forts (Rau 1973; Stuhrmann 2008). Only ruins (*armaka*, *mahāvailastha*) are mentioned in the RV. It is in the early *upaniṣads* that one finds references to permanent settlements and cities, which suggests the Second Urbanization period of South Asia (Allchin and Erdosy 1995; Allchin and Allchin 1997).

Vedic śākhās

The Vedic texts were orally composed and transmitted for at least 1200 years through various *śākhās* or ritual schools, each representing a community of Brahmans throughout the territory. *Śākhās* were not theological schools with monolithic orthodox understandings of sacrifice and cultural concepts (Renou 1947). Rather, they shared a general outlook about sacrifice and the hermeneutical approaches to the meaning of words and acts in sacrifice. Each *śākhā* was characterized by the peculiarities and particularities of their dialect of Vedic Sanskrit, recitational styles, ritual techniques, and sacrificial performances. Numerous quotations from other *śākhās* show their mutual contacts and interactions, as well as their knowledge of other schools' traditions (Witzel 1997; Houben 2016).

The accuracy of the oral transmission of each Veda was not universally consistent. The RV has been the most accurately preserved and transmitted text. The collection of *ṛcas* has been transmitted word for word, unchanged, for the last 3000 years or more. The accuracy of the transmission is detected at the level of verse and hymn but also in the precision of the accentuation. Each word and, more importantly, each accent have been carefully preserved unchanged. Today, in different regions of India where the RV recitation continues to be taught, one can hear a virtual "tape recording," down to the accent, of the text that was recited ca. 1200 BCE.

However, the received texts of other Vedas, especially those with a small base of reciters, had increasingly more errors creep into the oral and manuscript traditions. When an oral tradition was weakened, no mechanisms existed to correct errors that became established in the manuscript traditions. In some cases, these errors were transmitted and preserved by reciters who re-learned the recitation secondarily from manuscripts or printed editions. The worst transmission case was the AV, in which the true oral tradition of the two surviving *śākhās* has been lost completely (Witzel 1985).

It is difficult to establish when the Veda began to be preserved and transmitted in writing. Evidence for writing in South Asia is relatively recent when compared to the evidence for writing in other civilizations (Falk 1999). The earliest epigraphic evidence for writing in South Asia only dates to the Maurya Period (ca. 320–185 BCE) (Salomon 1998). The earliest surviving Vedic manuscripts have been found in Nepal and Kashmir, where the climate is more conducive to the preservation of early writing materials, such as palm leaves and birchbark. The earliest Vedic manuscript, a palm-leaf manuscript of *Vājasaneyisaṃhitā* (VS), dated to 1150 CE, originates from Nepal (Witzel and Wu 2018).

The geographical distribution of dialectical particularities of Vedic *śākhās* has been established by Witzel (1989) based on textual references to names of localities, rivers, and mountains well known in Indian antiquity and details of climate, flora, and fauna, as well as references to named tribes or communities. Maps 1.1 and 1.2 show the distribution of the RV, SV, YV, and AV schools in the Middle to Late Vedic Period.
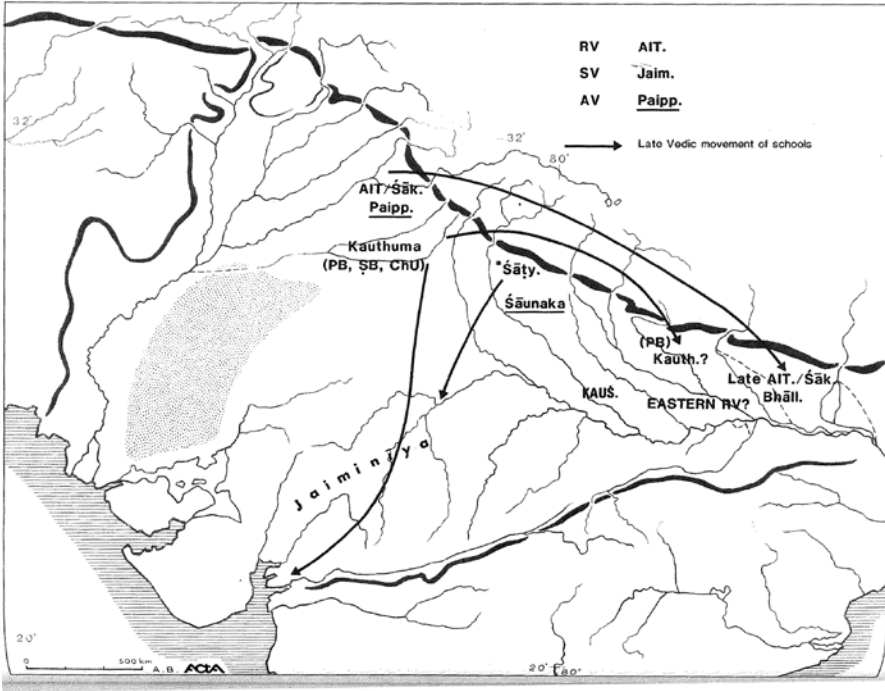
Map 1.1   Schools (*śākhā*) of the Middle and Late Vedic Period: *Ṛgveda*, *Sāmaveda*, and *Atharvaveda*
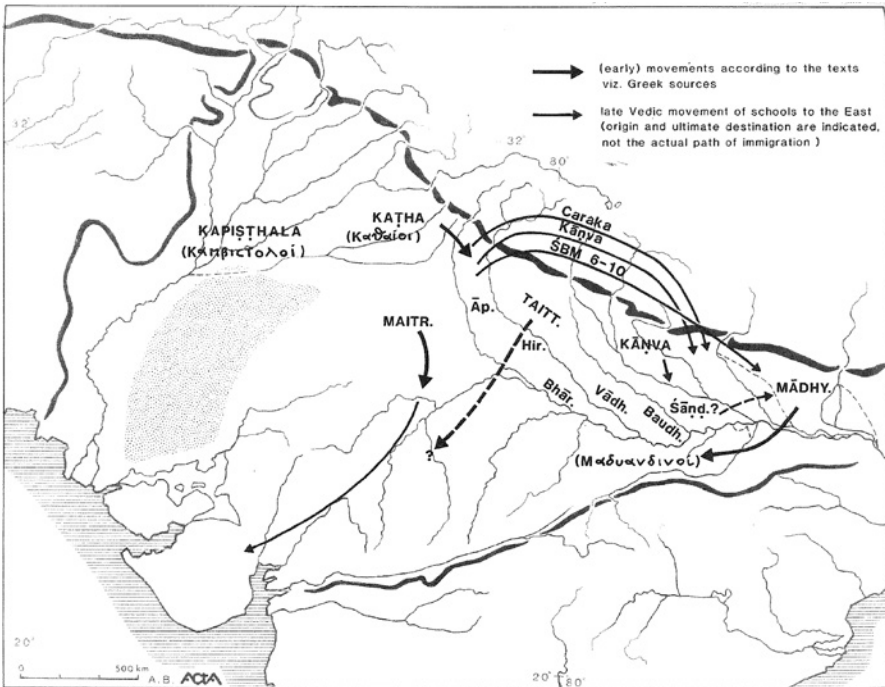
Map 1.2   Schools (*śākhā*) of the Middle and Late Vedic Period: *Yajurveda*

Typology and linguistic chronology of Vedic texts

The post-Vedic typology of the Vedic texts reflects the traditional Hindu analysis of their subject, content, and internal referentiality. It offers insight into the content and the hermeneutic activity of each textual layer but provides little elucidation of the historical context of each layer. The texts are classified into four layers—*saṃhitā*, *brāhmaṇa*, *āraṇyaka*, and *upaniṣad*—with each subsequent layer being engaged in the exegesis of the preceding ones.

The *saṃhitā* is the earliest layer and reflects the recitational style and function of the text in sacrifice. The *saṃhitā* text is recited continuously, with phonological alterations (*sandhi*) between words. Other types of recitation were known from an early period and preserved in post-Vedic recitational handbooks, including *padapāṭhas* and *kramapāṭhas*. The *saṃhitā* is the foundational text upon which subsequent texts engage in analysis and commentary.

Brāhmaṇas present the exegesis in prose of the *saṃhitā* and presuppose in-depth knowledge of the text and its role in sacrifice. However, they are not a systematic exposition of sacrifice, unlike the later *śrautasūtras*, ritual manuals that minutely detailed the preparation and enactment of every aspect of the 'classical' Vedic sacrifice. Through the analysis of words, acts, and physical elements, their goal is to discover the *bandhu* (secret link) between the sacrifice/mesocosmic realm (*adhiyajña*) and heavenly/macrocosmic realm (*adhidevatā*) (Gonda 1965b). The efficacy of the sacrifice was contingent on the ritualist's knowledge of *bandhus* (Smith 1989; Witzel 1979). Indeed, the false claim to knowledge could have devastating consequences, as the story of Śākalya vividly illustrates (BĀU 3.9). Upon being challenged for the role of officiating priest by Yājñavalkya and failing to correctly articulate the last in a series of queries of *bandhus*, Śākalya's head shatters (Brereton 1996; Insler 1989–90; Lindquist 2011; Witzel 1987b). The efficacy of sacrifice and knowledge were explicitly linked.

Āraṇyakas are also engaged in ritual exegesis and the search for *bandhus* but focused on secret and dangerous rituals, such as the Mahāvrata (Rolland 1973) and Pravargya (van Buitenen 1968; Houben 1991), to be performed outside of the village in the *araṇya*, "where one can no longer see the top of the houses" (TĀ 2.9012), a location that is safely away from the people in the village (Gonda 1975). Not only the rituals but even the study and recitation of these texts was to be done outside of the village. The dangerous character of the Pravargya was on display during the Atirātra/Agnicayana (Pañjal 2011; Kodakara 2012) and Somayāga (Pattambi 2016) in Kerala.[1] Upon the public announcement that the Pravargya was about to begin, all women in the public viewing stands left the vicinity of the ritual enclosure and returned only after the ritual was finished. As TĀ 5.6.12 states: a woman who looks upon the Pravargya-fire becomes barren.

Considered *vedānta* 'the end of the Veda,' the *upaniṣads* continued to further develop the exegesis of sacrifice by taking the analysis one step further to discern the interconnection between macrocosmic, mesocosmic, and individual/microcosmic (*adhyātma*) domains. They re-evaluated older concepts connected to sacrifice—*amṛta* (immortality), *karma* (action), *anna* (food), and *ātman/brahman*-, and introduced new ideas, including the contrast of *devayāna* (the path of the gods) and *pitṛyāna* (the path of the ancestors), rebirth, and transmigration (Cohen 2017; Olivelle 1998).

A more secure guide to understanding the historical levels of Vedic texts has been constructed based on grammatical and linguistic features of the texts (Witzel 1989).

Level 1—The *Ṛgveda* represents the last stage of an Indo-Iranian poetic tradition, sharing many linguistic features with Old Iranian texts that disappear in post-Ṛgvedic texts. Significant linguistic markers include the frequent use of the injunctive mood (Hoffmann 1967), the rare

use of *-toḥ* infinitive, and the appearance of *kuru/karoti* (√*kṛ* 'to do') alongside the common Ṛgvedic *kṛṇu/kṛṇoti*.[2]

Level 2—The ***Mantra-level*** is exemplified by the early mantras of the *saṃhitās* of the YV, SV, and AV, which is characterized by developments that distinguish it from Level 1, including the gradual loss of the injunctive mood, the increased usage of *kuru/karoti* in non-Ṛgvedic contexts, and the replacement of *viśva* by *sarva*, both meaning 'every' and 'all.'

Level 3—The ***Saṃhitā Prose-level*** comprises the earliest *brāhmaṇa*-style prose explanations in the YV *saṃhitās*. Grammatical features include the complete loss of the injunctive mood (except for the frozen form *mā* + injunctive), the gradual loss of the aorist moods, the use of periphrastic aorist forms, and the gradual loss of the temporal distinction of the imperfect-aorist-perfect (Ozono 2016).

Level 4—The ***Brāhmaṇa Prose-level*** includes the *brāhmaṇas* proper, the older *upaniṣads*, *anubrāhmaṇas*, and some older *śrautasūtras*. Grammatical markers include the disappearance of periphrastic aorist, the appearance of *yatkāma*-type compounds and *sāyam*-type adverbs, and hyper-characterized subjunctives (Dahl 2016).

Level 5—The ***Sūtra Language-level*** includes texts that are Vedic in content and context rather than linguistically, including the *śrautasūtras*, *gṛhyasūtras* (ritual manuals dealing with domestic rituals and sacrifices) and the late *upaniṣads*. Some linguistic features include the usage of epic forms like *vṛṇute* < *vṛṇoti* and neuter plurals in *-ā*.

Table 1.1 Correlations of the historical levels, linguistic-level chronology, and typology of the Vedic Texts

Historical Period	Linguistic Level	Ṛgveda	Sāmaveda	Yajurveda	Atharvaveda
Early Vedic	Ṛgveda	RV Śākalya and Āśvalāyana			
Middle Vedic	Mantra	RV Khila	SV	Mantra sections: KapS, KS, MS, TS, VS	ŚS, PS
	Saṃhitā Prose			Prose Portions: KapS, KS, MS, TS	
	Brāhmaṇa Prose	AiB, KauṣB	PB, ṢaḍB, MantraB, ĀrṣB, JB	ŚB, KaṭhB, TB VādhAnv	GopB
		AiĀ, ŚāṅkhĀ	JUB	KĀ, TĀ	
		AiU, KauṣU	ChU	BĀU, TU	
			JŚS	BŚS, VādhŚS	
Late Vedic	Sūtra	ĀśvŚS	LāṭŚS, DrāhŚS	MŚS, VārŚS, BhārŚS, ĀpŚS, HirŚS, VaikhŚS, KātyŚS	VaitS
		ĀśvGS, ŚāṅkhGS, KauṣGS	GobhGS, KauthGS, KhādGS, JGS	MGS, VārGS, KāṭhGS/LGS, BGS, ĀgnGS, BhārGS, ĀpGS, HirGS, VaikhGS, PārGS	KauśS, PaiṭhGS
				KaṭhU, MaitU, ŚvetU	PraśU, MāṇḍU, MuṇḍU

The Vedic canon

When thinking about the concept of canon regarding the Vedic texts, it is perhaps more appropriate to speak of various textual canons transmitted independently until a later period, when various strands of tradition were collected in the context of ritual/religious, political, and ideological agendas undertaken under the auspices of the Kuru tribe (Witzel 1995b). The intersection of these agendas is evident in Atharvavedin's effort to cloak their late, extra-sacrificial origins in the garb of orthopraxy through the promotion of their priest, the *Brahman*,[3] to the role of the *purohita* (king's house priest). They argued that the prosperity of the king and kingdom hinged on the appointment of the *Brahman* and his knowledge of *abhicāra* (offensive spells against enemies) and *kṛtyāpratiharaṇa* (repelling spells). They competed against priests of other Vedas as well as those of other AV *śākhās* (Lopez 2010).

The development of the Vedic canon took place in three stages: (1) the compilation of the RV in the Early Vedic Period; (2) the assembly of the mantra-level texts of the YV, SV, and AV in the early Middle Vedic Period; and (3) the textualization of sacrifice—the systematic reorganization of existing texts according to a new conception of sacrifice carried out under the hegemony of the Kurus during the Middle Vedic Period (Witzel 1995b, 1997).

The first stage of the formation of the Vedic canon was the gathering of the *sūktas* of the RV, which were already the private property of families/clans of poets in the Early Vedic Period. These *sūktas* reflected a sense of shared identity—through deities, concepts, values, and ritual practices—of various tribes. Two additional composite collections were appended to the core *sūktas* during the early Middle Vedic Period under the patronage of the Kuru, which makes up the extant Śākalya recension of the RV.

During the second stage, *yajus* and *sāmans*, which were already in circulation at the time of the RV, along with new mantras of the *atharvāṅgirasa*, were assembled and redacted into new *saṃhitās*: YV, SV, and AV. The process of the redaction of these early Middle Vedic Period texts resembles the earlier collection and redaction of the RV. The earliest portions of the RV recollect successive waves migration of *ārya* tribes, especially the Five People—Yadu, Turvaśa, Anu, Druhyu, and Pūru—their unstable alliances, intertribal conflicts, and clashes with indigenous groups (*dasyu*). The political structure was centered on the *rājan* (chieftain), who led fellow members of the *rājanya* (warrior) class. Tribes were localized to the area from Kabul Valley to the Panjab, extending maximally up to the rivers Yamunā and Gaṅgā. The most important event recalled is the Battle of the Ten Kings (*dāśarājña*). Under the leadership of Sudās and the backing of his *purohita* Vasiṣṭha, the Bharata subtribe of the Pūru super-tribe battled against a confederation of tribes led by the Pūru king and the Bharata's former *purohita*, Viśvāmitra. The victorious Bharata settled in the area of Kurukṣetra on the banks of the river Sarasvatī, where Sudās legitimized his supremacy over other tribes by performing the *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice) (Witzel 1995b).

A similar pattern of consolidating cultural/religious, political, and social institutions resurfaces in the mantra-level texts of the Middle Vedic Period. In this new context, the principal political power is Kuru tribe, headed by a king who was given Sudās' title *bharatā rājā* (chieftain of the Bharata, TS 1.8.10.2). Like the ancient Pūru-Bharata, the Kuru was the dominant moiety of the new Kuru-Pāñcāla super tribe, whose political and ritual union was formalized through intermarriage and *vrātyas* (the exchange of young men's groups) (af Edholm 2017; Hauer 1927). The Kuru king's status was legitimated by employing new *rājasūya* (royal coronation) and *aśvamedha* (horse sacrifice) mantras of the YV and AV (Heesterman 1957; Kulke 1992; Tsuchiyama 1990, 2005, 2007).

The final reorganization of the Vedic canon was achieved through the textualization of sacrifice and a new social ideology—the four-fold *varṇa* (class) system—by means of repetition

and adaptation of older RV material, as for example the *Puruṣasūkta* (RV X.90=ŚS 19.7 = VS 30.1–16 = TĀ 3.12). The poetic formulas of the four *saṃhitās* were inscribed onto the new social class system—*brahmin* (priests), *rājanya* (nobility), *vaiśya* ('the people'), and *śudra* (servants)—that mirrored the new collaborative relationship among ritual specialist of each Veda—*hotṛ* (RV), *udgatṛ* (SV), *adhvaryu* (YV), and *Brahman* (AV). New royal coronation mantras reinforced the new alliance of *brahmins* and *rājanyas* against the *vaiśyas* (and by extension against the *śudras*), whom they jointly exploited (Rau 1957). The nobility sponsored sacrifices performed on their behalf by *brahmins*, who were financially and socially compensated with *dakṣiṇā* (sacrificial fee) by the *yājamāna* (literally, he for whom the sacrifice is being performed) or sacrificer, who in turn accumulates the salvific benefits of the correctly performed (*sukṛta*) sacrifice. The new ritual, political, and social order was realized by still semi-nomadic Vedic tribes, who had trekked from the Greater Panjab eastwards into the area of the Doab of Yamunā and Gaṅgā.

The mantra-level collection of *sāmans* (melodies) of the SV grew out of its close relationship to the RV, from where the numerous *ṛcas* were lifted unchanged. The prestige of the SV collection was rooted in the perception of a deep connection to the RV.

The mantra-level YV *saṃhitās* consists of mantras and some of the oldest exegetical-prose fragments. These mantras were organized according to their ritual usage based on the type of offering: *iṣṭi/haviryajña* (milk product, vegetable, or meat offerings) and *somayajña*. They were sequenced in two small ritual collections—*dārśapauṃamāsa* (the new and full moon sacrifice) and *agniṣṭoma* (soma sacrifice)—which function as *prakṛti* (paradigm) for other sacrifices, including the *agnihotra* (daily fire offering), *rājasūya* (the coronation ritual), and *vājapeya* (drink of

Table 1.2 Overview of the typology of *śrauta* sacrifices with important major academic studies

prakṛti	iṣṭi		somayajña	
type	haviryajña			
oblation	vegetable/dairy	animal	soma	
			ekāha (one-day)	multiday
	Darśapūrṇamāsa (Hillebrandt 1879; Rustagi 1981)	Paśubandha (Schwab 1886; Proferes 1999)	Agniṣṭoma (Caland and Henry 1906)	Sattra (Falk 1985)
				Mahāvrata (Rolland 1973)
	Cāturmāsya (Bhide 1979; Einoo 1988)		Jyotiṣṭoma (Bodewitz 1990)	
				Rājasūya (Heesterman 1957)
	Āgrayaṇa (Lindner 1888)		Pravargya (van Buitenen 1968; Houben 1991, 2000, 2007)	
				Aśvamedha (Dumont 1927)
	Agnihotra (Bodewitz 1976)			
				Agnicayana/Atirātra (Staal 1983)
	Agnyādheya (Krick and Oberhammer 1982)			
				Vājapeya (Weber 1892)
	Pitṛmedha			

strength). The ritual-based arrangement, as opposed to the deity-focused order of the RV, highlights the cooperation between the YV priestly proprietors of the ritual mantras (*adhvaryu*) and Kuru political establishment. The latter's influence made explicit by the inclusion of royal rituals that legitimated the status of the king (Witzel 1997).

Ṛgveda

The RV is the earliest orally composed and preserved poetry in Vedic Sanskrit and part of a long Indo-European poetic tradition, as can be seen through comparison with the Avesta. It contains 1028 *sūktas* collected into ten *maṇḍalas* (cycles or books) in the Śākalya and Āśvalāyana recensions. Its structure and arrangement disclose much about its compositional chronology (Oldenberg 1888). The patterns of refrains and names of poets and chieftains show the relationship among various tribes and clans to specific books, suggesting that the RV was composed within five to six generations (Witzel 1995a). Limited external evidence from the Hurrian-Mitanni Agreement, the date of the Late Harappan/Third Phase of the Indus Valley Civilization, and the date for iron in South Asia indicates the composition of the hymns took place from 1400 to 1000 BCE (Witzel 2014).

References to rivers—Kabul and Kurran in modern Afghanistan, the Indus and its major tributaries, and the Gaṅgā—localize the RV to an area ranging from the northwest of the subcontinent (Kabul Valley) eastward to the Greater Panjab, where the rivers flow westwards (RV X.75), as the territory where the *sūktas* were composed (Witzel 1987a).

The "family books"—*maṇḍalas* II–VII—were originally the private poetic property of families or clans of poets—Gṛtsamāda, Viśvāmitra, Vāmadeva, Atri, Bharadvāja, and Vasiṣṭha, respectively. Each family collection is internally organized according to (1) the deity being praised—Agni, Indra, and then other gods; (2) meter (primarily: *triṣṭubh*, *jagatī*, *gāyatri*, and *anuṣṭubh*), and (3) decreasing number of stanzas per hymn.

As Figure 1.1 shows, the family books are framed by two composite assemblages. The poems of *maṇḍala* VIII, which are not too different in style from those of the family books, are divided into two groups based on the clan of composers: Kaṇva hymns (1–66), which also includes the Vālakhilya collection (49–59), and Āṅgirasa hymns (67–10). Their arrangement prioritizes authorship over metre (Oldenberg 1888).

In *maṇḍala* I, authorship is the ordering principle, as can be seen in the 15 groups of clan/family-authored hymns. Hymns I.1–50 are divided into six clan collections—Madhucchandas, Medhātithi, Śunaḥśepa, Hiraṇyastūpa, Kaṇva, and the ritual-focused Praskaṇva—each internally ordered according to the deity addressed. The arrangement of hymns I.50–191 generally follows the deity-metre-decreasing number of stanzas principle of the family books.

Maṇḍala IX is a collection of hymns to the god Soma, the deified drink offered to the gods in sacrifice, especially to Indra, to invigorate him into action against enemies (Houben 2009). This ritual collection was appended to *maṇḍalas* I–VIII during the early Middle Vedic Period under the hegemonic agenda of the Kuru.
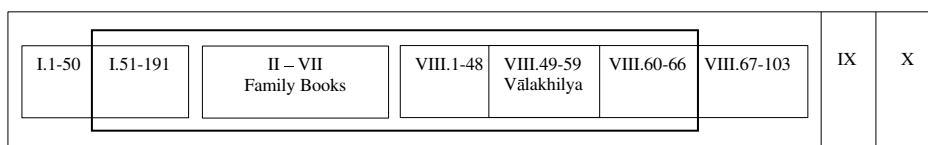
I.1-50	I.51-191	II – VII Family Books	VIII.1-48	VIII.49-59 Vālakhilya	VIII.60-66	VIII.67-103	IX	X

Figure 1.1 The structure of the *Ṛgveda*

The mantra-like appendix 10th book incorporates *sūktas* by traditionally well-known poets (Āṅgirasa, Vāsiṣṭha, Vaiśvāmitrā, etc.), as well as otherworldly/divine authors, including Sarparajñī (the Queen of Snakes), Hiraṇyagarbha (the Golden Embryo), Vāc (Divine Speech), Indra, and Yāma and his sister Yāmī. Their language, content, and arrangement show their late character. These hymns were likely composed after the Bharata's rise to dominance among the RV tribes, as suggested by references to Kuruśravaṇa Trāsadasyava (X.32), a descendant of Trasadasyu, who ruled after the reunification of the Pūru-Bharata following Sudās's victory in the Ten Kings' Battle (Witzel 1997).

The RV contains various types of poetic compositions that serve distinct purposes. Most are ritually structured praise hymns: (1) the invocation and invitation of the god; (2) recitation of the deeds of the god; and (3) the requests from the god for *yaśas* (fame), *prajā* (progeny), cows (= wealth), and *āyus* (long life in this world and deathlessness in heaven); the main concerns of the poets (Jamison and Brereton 2014). Some hymns aim to make the divine present by producing a mimetic circle in which the performance of a *sūkta* is a re-enactment of the speech-act of a deity, which transforms the singer into a proxy for the deity on the ritual ground (Smith 2016, 2017). Other hymns are explicitly connected to specific ritual sequences, such as the whole of *maṇḍala* IX and the Aprī hymns (animal sacrifice) (Proferes 1999, 2003; van den Bosch 1985). Riddle hymns pose several questions, which may or may not be answered, but focus

Table 1.3 Texts of the *śākhās* of *Ṛgveda* with standard editions and translations. The mark ⋆ indicates a lost tradition or text which is known from references in other Vedic texts

śākhā	*Śākala*		*⋆Bāṣkala*	*Āśvalāyana*	*⋆Māṇḍūkeya*
saṃhitā	RV			RV	
	Ed: Aufrecht 1877; van Nooten and Holland 1994;			Ed: Chaubey	
	Tr: Geldner 2003; Jamison and Brereton 2014			2009	
	RV Khila				
	Ed: Scheftelowitz 1906				
brāhmaṇa	AiB	KauṣB			
	Ed: Aufrecht 1879;	Ed-Tr: Lindner 1887;			
	Tr: Keith 1920	Tr: Keith 1920			
āraṇyaka	AĀ	KauṣĀ=ŚāṅkhĀ			
	Ed-Tr: Keith 1909	Ed-Tr: Friedlaender 1900;			
		Keith 1908			
upaniṣad	AiU	KauṣU=ŚāṅkhĀ 3–6			
	Ed: Limaye and Vadekar	Ed: Limaye and Vadekar			
	1958; Tr: Olivelle	1958; Tr: Olivelle 1998			
	1998				
śrautasūtra	ĀśvŚS	ŚāṅkhŚS			
	Ed: Vidyāratna 1874;	Ed: Hillebrandt 1885;			
	Ed-Tr: Mylius 1994	Tr: Caland and Chandra 1953			
gṛhyasūtra	ĀśvGS	KauṣGS			
	Ed-Tr: Stenzler 1864	Ed: Chintamani 1944			
	Tr: Oldenberg 1886	ŚāṅkhGS			
		Ed: Sehgal 1960;			
		Tr: Oldenberg 1886			

on the authority of the respondent, sometimes through a rephrasing of the question (Brereton 1999; Thompson 1997, 1999). The tension-filled *ākhyāna* (dialogue) hymns involve exchanges between human and divine participants of different genders and sometimes animal participants, such as Vṛṣākapi (monkey) (Jamison 1996).

The *Hotṛ* (the offerer) is the principal priestly representative of the RV, whose primary function in sacrifice is to recite the *śāstra*, the appropriate ritual portion of the RV. In complex sacrifices, such as the Agnicayana, he is assisted in the recitation by *Maitrāvaruṇā* (reciter of hymns to Mitra and Varuṇa, which are connected to animal sacrifice) (Minkowski 1992), *Acchāvaka* (inviter), *Grāvastut* (praiser of the stone), and *Potṛ* (purifier).

Sāmaveda

The chief concern of the collection is the *sāmans* (melodies) in which *ṛcas* (stanzas) are to be sung during the sacrificial performance. The Sāmavedic tradition understands the *ṛc* as the *yonī* (source) out of which the *sāman* is produced. At the core of the Sāmavedic ritual is the performance of the *stobha*, the modifications performed upon a Ṛgvedic stanza while being sung, which may involve lengthening, interpolations, or repetition of syllables, apparent nonsensical words (*hoyi*, *hūva*, *hōi*), and short sentences (*svar jyotiḥ*). One such seemingly nonsensical syllable, OM, has become arguably the most important mantra in Hindu tradition (Moore Gerety 2015).

In the Kauthuma recension, the SV *saṃhitā* contains 1549 stanzas found primarily in *maṇḍala* VIII and IX of RV. It consists of the four *gāṇas* (songbooks)—the *grāmageya* (to be sung in the village) and the *araṇyageya* (to be sung in the wilderness), while the *uhāgeya* and the *ūhyageya* organize *sāmans* according to their ritual usage—and the two *arcikas* (collection of *ṛcas*)—the Pūrvārcika and the Uttarārcika. The Pūrvārcika consists of 585 stanzas from the RV and 45 non-RV stanzas. Each verse in the Pūrvārcika corresponds to a single *sāman*, whose name is derived from the name of *ṛṣi* who first saw the chant, which is found in *grāmageya* and *araṇyageya*. In a style that closely imitates the RV, the stanzas are arranged according to poet-deity-meter in three chapters: *agneyakāṇḍa*, *aindrkāṇḍa*, and *pāvamānakāṇḍa*. The Uttarārcika consists of 1224 stanzas from the RV and 31 non-RV stanzas divided into nine major sections (*prapāṭhaka*), each with up to three sections consisting of sets of three stanzas (*ṭṛca*) organized according to the sequence of the principal soma sacrifices.

The Kauthuma *śākhā* can be localized to the northwestern region by numerous references to Kurukṣetra and other well-known places in the region (Plakṣa Prāsravaṇa, Khāṇḍava, and the river Dṛṣadvatī), locations farther east (Vibhundaka, Naimiśa, Videha), and references to rain and lightning in the north as well as excessive snow. This localization is also supported by a close association with the YV, as suggested by KapS mantras found in PB (Gonda 1975; Parpola 1973).

The Jaiminīya/Talavakāra *śākhā* had a much wider geographical outlook. From the Kuru-Pāñcāla core territory, the Jaiminīya's geographical horizon was framed by the Thar Desert to the west and the Mahāvṛṣa tribe to the northwest. Like the Kauthumas, Jaiminīyas had intimate knowledge of numerous localities in Kurukṣetra and explicitly advised a father wishing to resettle a son to another region to do so in the north. The eastern region of Kausalya, Kāśī (modern Varanasi), Videha, which was disparaged for their dialect of Sanskrit, and Vidarbha, south of the Vindhya Mountains, were known to the Jaiminīyas. Their geographical outlook includes all northern and central India (Witzel 1987a).

The chief priest of the SV, *Udgatṛ* (singer), sings the *stotras* during the sacrifice. In complex *soma* rituals, he is assisted by additional singers—the *Prastotṛ* (eulogist; responsible for the

Table 1.4 Texts of the *śākhās* of the *Sāmaveda* with standard editions and translations

śākhā	*Kauthuma = Rāṇayānīya*	*Jaiminīya = Talavakāra*	
saṃhitā	SV Ed: Sharma 2000; Ed-Tr: Benfey 1848		
brāhmaṇa	PB=TāṇḍB Ed: Śāstrī 1935; Tr: Caland 1931	JB Ed: Raghuvīra and Chandra 1954; Oertel 1897–1909; Ed-Tr: Caland 1919; Tsuchida 1979; Tr: Bodewitz 1973, 1990	
	ṢaḍB MantrB Ed: Jörgensen 1911; Stönner 1901	ĀrśB Ed: Burnell 1878	
āraṇyaka		JUB Ed-Tr: Oertel 1921	
upaniṣad	ChU Ed: Limaye and Vadekar 1958; Ed-Tr: Böhtlingk 1889b; Tr: Olivelle 1998	KenaU Ed: Limaye and Vadekar 1958; Tr: Olivelle 1998	
śrautasūtra	LāṭŚS Ed: Kashikar 1982; Tr: Parpola 1969	DrāhŚS Ed: Raghuvīra 1940; Tr: Parpola 1969	JŚS Ed-Tr: Gaastra 1906; Ed: Shastri 1966
gṛhyasūtra	GobhGS Ed-Tr: Knauer 1884; Tr: Oldenberg 1886 KauthGS Ed: Sūryakānta 1956	KhādGS=DrāhGS Ed: Sastri and Śrīnivāsācārya 1913; Tr: Oldenberg 1886	JGS Ed-Tr: Caland 1922

chanting the *prastāva*), *Pratihartṛ* (averter; chants the *pratihāra sāman*), and *Subrahmaṇya* (the one connected to the good brahman, who recites the *āhavāna* to Indra). In multiday soma rituals, the singing of the *stuti* (praise) by the Sāmavedin priests is performed in a separate enclosure, the *sadas*, and is followed by the recitation of the *śāstra* by the Hotṛ (Staal 1961, 1983).

Yajurveda

The YV is the largest and most complex of the Vedas due to its prominent role in sacrifice. It contains *yajus* (ritual injunctions) recited during the sacrifice. By the Middle and Late Vedic Period, the YV *śākhās* had spread throughout northern India from the area of the seven rivers (the Indus and its major tributaries) and the Panjab eastward beyond the Doab of the rivers Yamunā and Gaṅgā into the Kosala and Videha. The northern limit of their territory is the Himalayas, with its frequent rains.

The YV was transmitted and preserved in two major branches, the *kṛṣṇa* (black) and the *śukla* (white), which are distinguished by their arrangement. The White YV was redacted in the easternmost area of the Vedic territory, in Kosala and Videha. This mantra-only collection was preserved in two subrecensions, Mādhyaṃdina and Kāṇva. The arrangement mimics the verse-only organization of RV, while its encyclopaedic approach to sacrifice is directly connected to the eastward spread of Kuru orthopraxy and orthodoxy. The ŚB amassed exegetical discussions

Table 1.5 Texts of the *śākhās* of the *Yajurveda* with standard editions and translations. The mark ⋆ indicates a lost tradition or text which is known from references in other Vedic texts

	Śukla (White) Yajurveda		*Kṛṣṇa (Black) Yajurveda*			
śākhā	*Vājasaneyī*		*Maitrāyaṇī*	*Kaṭha*	*Kapiṣṭhala*	⋆*Caraka*
sub-śākhā samhitā	Mādhyaṃdina VS Ed: Weber 1852; Tr: Griffith 1899	Kāṇva VS Ed: Weber 1852	MS Ed: von Schroeder 1881; Tr: Amano 2009,	KS Ed: von Schroeder 1900	KapS Ed: Raghuvīra 1968	
brāhmaṇa	ŚB Ed: Weber 1852; Tr: Eggling 1882	ŚB Ed: Caland 1926		⋆KaṭhaB Ed: Rosenfield 2004		
āraṇyaka				KĀ Ed-Tr: Witzel 2004		
upaniṣad	BĀU Ed-Tr: Böhtlingk 1889a; Ed: Weber 1852; Tr: Olivelle 1998	BĀU Ed: Pérez Coffie 1994	MaitU Ed: Limaye and Vadekar 1958; Tr: Hume 1921	KaṭhU Ed: Limaye and Vadekar 1958; Tr: Olivelle 1998		
	ĪśāU Ed: Weber 1852; Tr: Olivelle 1998			Kaṭha⋆-ŚikṣaU		
śrautasūtra	KātyŚS Ed: Weber 1852 Tr: Ranade 1978; Thite 2006		MŚS Ed: Knauer 1900; Ed-Tr: van Geldner 1985	VārŚS Tr: Caland and Raghuvīra 1933		
gṛhyasūtra	PārGS Ed: Bākre 1982; Tr: Oldenberg 1886		MGS Ed: Sastri 1926; Ed-Tr: Knauer 1897	VārGS Ed: Raghuvīra 1982; Tr: Rolland 1971	KāṭhGS= LGS Ed: Caland 1925	

of all-known *śrauta* sacrifices and perspectives, as can be seen from its presentation of the opinions of other ritualists.

The Black YV includes prose exegetical commentaries along with mantras. The mantras were arranged according to two paradigmatic rituals: *darśapūṇamāsa* (the Full and New Moon sacrifice), and *agniṣṭoma* (the praise of Agni). The *darśapūṇamāsa* entailed the twice-monthly vegetable offering at the junction of the full moon day and new moon day. The *agniṣṭoma* involved three pressings of soma—*prātaḥsavana* (early morning pressing), *mādhyaṃdinasavana* (midday pressing), and *tṛtīyasavana* (third or evening pressing). In addition to the expository prose in the YV *saṃhitās*, additional large sections of expository prose were collected separately in *brāhmaṇas*.

Table 1.6 Texts of the Taittirīya *śākhā* of the YV with standard editions and translations

Kṛṣṇa (Black) Yajurveda

śākhā	*Taittirīya*					
sub-śākhā samhitā	Baudhāyana	Vādhūla	Bhāradvāja	Āpastambha TS	Hiraṇyakeśin	Vaikhānasa
	Ed: Weber 1871; Tr: Keith 1914					
brāhmaṇa			TB			
	Ed: Sastri 1908; Ed–Tr: Dumont 1948, 1951, 1954, 1957, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963a, 1963b, 1964, 1965, 1969					
āraṇyaka			TĀ			
	Ed: Sastri and Raṅgācārya 1900; Ed–Tr: Malamoud 1977; Tr: Houben 1991					
upaniṣad			TU = TB 7–9			
	Ed: Limaye and Vadekar 1958; Tr: Olivelle 1998					
			ŚvetU			
	Ed–Tr: Oberlies 1995, 1996, 1998; Tr: Olivelle 1998					
śrautasūtra	BŚS Ed: Caland 1904; Ed–Tr: Kashikar 2003	VādhŚS Ed: Ikari 1995, 1996, 1999; Ed–Tr: Voegeli 2010; Tr: Sparreboom and Heesterman 1989	BhārŚS Ed–Tr: Kashikar 1964	ĀpŚS Ed: Garbe 1882; Tr: Caland 1921; Tr: Thite 2004	HirŚS=SatŚS Ed: Āgāśe 1907	VaikhŚS Ed: Caland 1941
gṛhyasūtra	BGS Ed: Sastri 1920	ĀgnGS Ed: Varma 1940	BhārGS Ed: Salomons 1913	ĀpGS Ed: Winternitz 1887; Tr: Oldenberg 1886	HirGS Ed: Kirste 1889; Tr: Oldenberg 1886	VaikhGS Tr: Caland 1929

The ritual scope of the YV *śrautasūtras* entails everything from the planning, construction, and consecration of the *vedi*; fashioning of ritual implements; and preparation and offering of oblations.

The *Adhvaryu*, the main priest of the YV, is the most important actor in the sacrifice, who recites *yajus* and performs all the ritual actions. In complex rituals, he is assisted by the *Pratiprasthātṛ* (whose actions during the sacrifice are often connected to the *patnī*) (Jamison 1996), the *Neṣṭṛ* (who leads the *patnī* in the ritual enclosure), and the *Unnetṛ* (who draws out the soma cups) (Caland and Henry 1906).

Atharvaveda

The *Atharvaveda* (AV) is distinguished from the *trayī vidyā* primarily in content. It does not treat *śrauta* sacrifices as its main topic and largely represents the "popular" side of Vedic culture and religion (Bloomfield 1899).

The earliest portions of the AV were composed in the Kuru-Pāñcāla area. The major tribes known to AV are the central Kuru-Pāñcāla, the Kāśi and Aṅga in the east, the Magadha in the

southeast, the Gandhāra and Mahāvṛṣa in the northwest, and the Bāhlīka in the extreme northwest beyond the Hindukush. The eastern fringes known to the PS is Kāśī; while for the ŚS, it is Aṅga, farther east. The northern border is the Himalayas, where the non-*ārya* Kirāṭa people live. The AV reflects a shift eastward from the Gandhāra/Panjab area to the eastern borders of the East Panjab (modern Haryana and Uttar Pradesh) where large rivers—Beas (Vipāś), Sarsūti (modern Ghaghar-Hakra)—flow westward. The home of the AV was enclosed by the Thar Desert to the west, the Beas to the northwest, the Himalayas to the north, and the Yamunā to the east.

The date of the AV has been established by the textual and archaeological evidence of *kṛṣṇa* or *śyāmas ayas* (black metal = iron). Iron is attested in the archaeological record c. 900 BCE. The evidence suggests *ad quem* date of ca. 1000 BCE. for portions of the AV.

The AV was transmitted through nine *śākhās*—Brahmavāda, Cāraṇavaidya, Devadarśa, Jājala, Jalad, Mauda, Paippalāda, Śaunaka, and Stauda (according to *AV Pariśiṣṭa* 49.4). Only the Paippalāda and Śaunaka have been preserved textually. The ŚS is the better known and studied recension, as it was one of the earliest Vedic texts to be critically edited (Roth and Whitney 1856). However, the *śākhā*-affiliation of the edited Atharvaveda remains unclear, since no colophon establishes a connection to the Śaunaka *śākhā* but only to an 'Atharvaveda'.

The evidence for the Paippalāda and other AV *śākhās* comes from several sources, including the YV *Caraṇavyūha*, AV *Pariśiṣṭa*, Patañjali, and the *Divyāvadāna*, a Buddhist text dated to 265 CE (Lopez 2010). Epigraphic evidence also shows the geographic spread of AV *brahmins* during the medieval period (Schmiedchen 2007). The birchbark manuscript of the PS was discovered by Roth (1875) in Kashmir in 1873 (Slaje 2007). The tradition also survives in contemporary Orissa, where manuscripts of the *saṃhitā* and other Paippalāda texts were discovered beginning in the 1950s (Bhattacharya 1957; Griffiths 2003, 2007; Griffiths and Sumant 2018; Rotaru 2016; Sumant 2016).

Bloomfield (1899) divides the material of AV into ten categories according to their use according to KauśS: (1) *bhaiṣajya* (for curing disease and possession), (2) *āyuṣya* (for long life and health), (3) *ābhicāra-kṛtyāpratiharaṇa* (against demons, sorcerers, and enemies), (4) *strīkarma* (concerning women), (5) *sāṃmanasya* (for harmony), (6) *rājakarma* (royal rituals), (7) interests of Brahmans, (8) *pauṣṭika* (prosperity and freedom from danger), (9) *prāyaścitta* (expiation), and (10) cosmogonic.

The priest of the AV, the *Brahman*, is considered the 'doctor' of the sacrifice and theoretically oversees all aspects of the sacrifice. He silently observes all ritual events for any errors, which he corrects by employing the appropriate *prāyaścitta* (expiatory mantra). The *Brahman* was expected to have knowledge not only of the AV but of all four Vedas.

The Veda and sacrifice (*yajña*)

Sacrifice, its performance, and its meanings are the central subject matter of the Veda. The material therein is either liturgical—about the actual performance—or exegetical—about the sacrifice but external to its performance. However, the system of sacrifice is not monolithic. The texts of the various *śākhās* display different but related schemes and conceptions of sacrifice. Disjunctions and continuities may be observed between the relatively basic guest worship/hospitality ritual of the RV and later more complex 'classical' Vedic sacrifice analysed by the *brāhmaṇas* and minutely detailed by the *śrautasūtras*.

The RV is not a handbook-like description of sacrifice. Rather, the *sūktas* offer bits of information that help to sketch out some of the physical and performative elements of sacrifice

and their meanings. The basic ritual of the RV is guest-worship or hospitality. The gods are invited to attend the ritual and are praised with *bráhman* (verbal formulations of truth) and offerings, including clarified butter, sacrificial cakes, and *soma*, which they consume. They are offered a comfortable seat on soft grass (*barhis*; Avestan *barhiz*) that has been spread on the ritual ground. The RV suggests that the offering ground was characterized by the three

Table 1.7 Texts of the *śākhās* of the *Atharvaveda*, with standard editions and translations

śākhā	*Śaunakīya*	*Paippalāda*	
saṃhitā	AV/ŚS	PS	
	Ed: Roth and Whitney 1856;	Kāṇḍ. 1	Kāṇḍ. 10, 11, 12
	Tr: Whitney and Lanman 1905	Ed: D. M. Bhattacharya 1964; D. Bhattacharya 1997	Ed: D. Bhattacharya 1997
		Kāṇḍ. 2	Kāṇḍ. 13, 14
		Ed: D. M. Bhattacharya 1970; D. Bhattacharya 1997; Ed-Tr: Zehnder 1999	Ed: D. Bhattacharya 1997; Ed-Tr: Lopez 2010
		Kāṇḍ. 3, 4	Kāṇḍ. 15
		Ed: D. Bhattacharya 1997	Ed: D. Bhattacharya 1997; Ed-Tr: Lelli 2015
		Kāṇḍ. 5	Kāṇḍ. 16
		Ed: D. Bhattacharya 1997; Ed-Tr: Lubotsky 2002	Ed: D. Bhattacharya 2008
		Kāṇḍ. 6, 7	Kāṇḍ. 17, 18
		Ed: D. Bhattacharya 1997; Ed-Tr: Griffiths 2009	Ed: D. Bhattacharya 2011; Ed-Tr: Selva 2019
		Kāṇḍ. 8, 9	Kāṇḍ. 19
		Ed: D. Bhattacharya 1997; Ed-Tr: Kim 2014	Ed: D. Bhattacharya 2016; Ed-Tr: Griffiths 1998
			Kāṇḍ. 20
			Ed: D. Bhattacharya 2016; Ed-Tr: Kubisch 2012
brāhmaṇa	★GopB (100 prapaṭhakas) GopB Ed: Gaastra 1919; Mitra and Vidyābhushaṇa 1872; Tr: Patyal 1969		
āraṇyaka upaniṣad	★Atharva Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad Māṇḍūkya, Muṇḍaka, Praśna Ed: Limaye and Vadekar 1958; Olivelle 1998		
		Nīlarudra (= PS 14.3–4) Ed-Tr: Lopez 2010; Tr: Lubin 2007	
śrautasūtra	VaitS Ed-Tr: Garbe 1878; Tr: Caland 1910	★Agastya S.	
gṛhyasūtra	KauśS Ed: Bloomfield 1972; Tr: Gonda 1965; Caland 1900; Weber 1859	PaiṭhGS Ed: Rotaru 2016	

ritual fires. As the *purohita* (chief priest) and *hotṛ* (offering priest), Agni is the intermediary between the human sacrificer and the gods. After sacrifice ends, the gods are asked to depart and to bestow gifts on the sacrificer. This is the basic paradigm of the modern Hindu *pūjā* (Tachikawa et al. 2001).

The 'classical' Vedic sacrifice detailed in the *śrautasūtras* grew in complexity through the accretion of ritual sequences from the ritual-mantra sections of the early YV *saṃhitās*. Vedic sacrifice may be described as bilaterally symmetrical—multiple ritual frames within other ritual frames (Witzel 1987c). Entering through the outermost ritual frame, the *yājamāna* moves sequentially through each subsequent ritual frame toward the defining ritual act at the centre of the sacrifice. From the centre of the sacrifice, the sacrificer then moves outwardly, completing and closing off each previously opened subsidiary ritual frame until each ritual frame is completed and closed off.

The sacrifice requires an appropriately chosen area and structure, as well as a set of visible and invisible participants. The physical locus, the sacrificial enclosure, contains the *vedi* or sacrificial altar (a special *mahāvedi* 'the great altar' was required some rituals), described as having the shape of a woman. It was bound by three fire altars—*gārhyapatyāgni* (round, cooking fire), *dakṣiṇāgni* (semicircular, southern fire), and *āhavanīyāgni* (square, offering fire) (see Figure 1.2).

Together with his *patnī* (wife), the *yājamāna* sets the sacrifice in motion and assumes all expenses, most importantly the payment of the *dakṣiṇā* to *ṛtvijs* (the priests who perform the sacrifice on his behalf). A *yājamāna* must be a male of the upper three *varṇas* who has completed the traditional Vedic education (*brahmacarya*), has married, and has become *āhitāgni* (one who has established his sacrificial fires). Only the ritual couple—*yājamāna* together with his *patnī*—is qualified to sponsor the sacrifice; without a wife, a man may not sponsor *śrauta* sacrifices. Upon the death of his *patnī*, the *yājamāna* must extinguish his sacrificial fires, and his sacrificial activity comes to an end until such time when he remarries and establishes his new ritual fire (Jamison 1996).
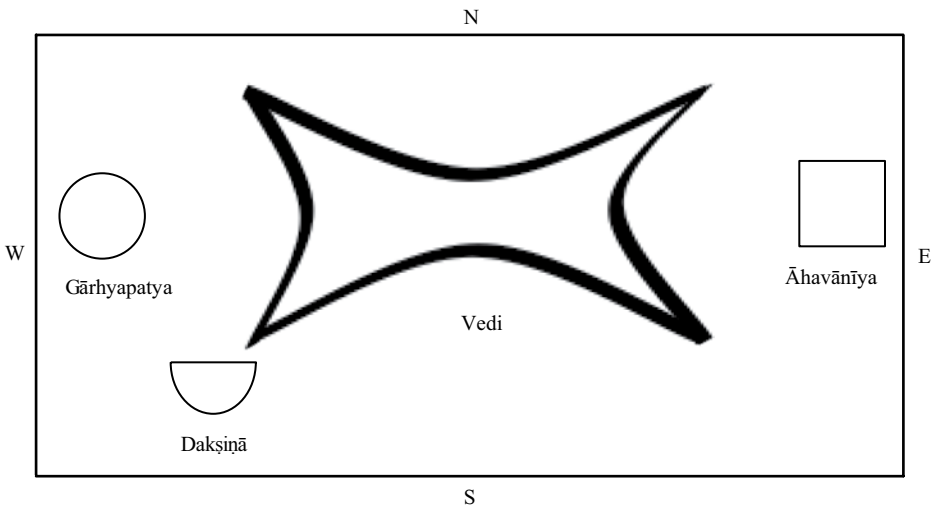

Figure 1.2   Vedi or sacrificial altar

The Vedic sacrifice entailed both a textual and ritual division of labour. The speech of each Veda and the ritual actions of its representative priest were required to produce the desired results. As idealized in the YV *saṃhitās* and *brāhmaṇas*, the four priests (sometimes up to 17) worked together to orchestrate the sacrifice; all actors somehow knowing the exact moment when their actions were to be performed. The later *śrautasūtras* provide a more realistic picture of this complicated undertaking. The recent Agnicayana/Atirātra and Somayāga performances in Kerala were stage-managed by a ritual specialist of the YV Nambudiri community renowned for his deep knowledge and expertise of all aspects of sacrifice. Along with a multitude of help-ers, he directed the *ṛtvijs* through the multiday sacrificial spectacle (Mahadevan and Staal 2002; Staal 1983).

Like the Ṛgvedic sacrifice, the gods are invoked to attend and sit on a comfortable couch made of *barhis*. With these minimally required participants and elements, the specific sacrifice may be carried out according to the *prakṛti* form, as shown in Table 1.2.

The *brāhmaṇas* show a dramatic change in the conception of sacrifice from the RV. Whereas in the Ṛgvedic ritual, the goal is to induce the gods to give something in return to the *yājamāna* in exchange for praise and oblations, the classical Vedic sacrifice of the *brāhmaṇas* is conceived in more mechanistic and transactional terms. The results of sacrifice were under-stood as the automatic effect of correct performance with concomitant correct knowledge. It is the ritual itself, rather than the gods' desire to compensate the sacrificer, that is the opera-tive force. The sacrifice itself compels the gods to reciprocate the *yājamāna*'s offerings. The idea of an automatically effective and creative sacrifice is implicit in the closing verse of the Puruṣasūkta: *yajñéna yajñám ajayanta devā́ḥ* (with the sacrifice, the gods sacrificed the sacrifice for themselves).

The Vedic sacrifice operates as a closed system of contingent exchange, expressed by the injunction *dhehi me dadhāmi te* (Give to me! I will give to you; TS 1.8.1.4). The exchange takes place through the mechanism of sacrifice between two groups of interdependent beings: the human sacrificer vs. *devas* (gods), *pitṛ* (ancestors), and *ṛṣis* (ancient poets). Their symbiotic relationship is mediated through transactions of code-substances, as oblations undergo ritual transubstantiation and ultimately sustain both parties (Marriot 1976). As VādhB 4.19 explains, the human sacrificer offers *anna* (food = milk products, soma, and animal products) into the fire, which transforms it into *medha* (aroma) and *asu* (life force). The gods feed on the *medha* by smelling it, as noted by KĀ 2.143. The gods and ancestors depend on ritual transactions for their continued existence in their respective heavenly regions.

The ritual offering is also transformed into ritual byproducts crucial to the well-being of the *yājamāna* in the other world. As code-substances, *sukṛta* (what is ritually well done) and *iṣṭāpūrtā* (what is offered and given away) are deposited in the other world (*svarga, paraṃ vyoman, amuṣmiṃ loke*) to guarantee the sacrificer's *amṛta* (deathlessness). In the RV, deathlessness in heaven is regarded as a permanent condition, but by the later Vedic texts, this condition was understood to depend on the stored ritual byproducts, which diminished even in the other world (Lopez 1997).

Ritual exchange is contingent and bidirectional. In return for *anna/medha*, the gods give rain, which underpins the agricultural cycle and makes sacrifice possible. The *pitṛs* reciprocate with progeny, which guarantees their continued existence in the other world through con-tinuing ritual offerings by the next generation (Knipe 1977). In the *brāhmaṇas*, the system of exchange was extended to include the *ṛṣis* (ancient seers), since the recitation of the Veda was only possible because of their original act of perceiving the Veda. The *ṛṇa* (debt) the sacrificer

owes to *ṛṣis* is paid through the recitation of sacred text, in return for which they give back renewed inspiration. The *ṛṣis* inclusion of the sacrificial transactional system completes the symmetry of the three-fold (four-fold in ŚB) *ṛṇa* theory that serves to justify the sacrificial system (Malamoud 1996; Sayers 2013).

The sacrifice is the mechanism by which the *yājamāna* is transformed, especially upon death. In imitation of the gods, who attained heaven through sacrifice, the *yājamāna's* continued life in the other world is fashioned through sacrificial means. He fashions his own *loka* (heavenly world) (Gonda 1967). The Agnihotra transports the *yājamāna's* *ātman* (self) to the other world, where he can deposit his store of goods resulting from sacrifice (Bodewitz 1976).

Although earlier texts suggest that *amṛta* is permanent, later Vedic texts illustrate a different perspective: the stored result of ritual activity was believed to diminish and with it the sacrificer's long life in heaven. The late *brāhmaṇas* and *āraṇyakas* address this concern in terms of *punarmṛtyu* (repeated death), which can only be overcome by replenishing the heavenly supply of merit through sacrifice. The repeated death was conceived as taking place in heaven and leading to the situation in which the accumulation of ritual byproducts through sacrifice in this world would be possible. As such, it is not connected to the later upaniṣadic concept of rebirth. Indeed, in the context of defeating the repeated death, the implicit wish is to return to the other world and never die again (Bodewitz 1996).

Vedic mythology

The mythology of the Veda is fragmentary and complex. Narratives about the gods' deeds must be pieced together from references scattered throughout hymns and the exegetical commentary on the sacrifice. Gods appear in multiple mythic contexts: as main protagonists, as helpers, or mentioned in passing. The gods of the RV have been classified as major or minor based on the number of times they are mentioned and the number of hymns partly or wholly dedicated to a deity (Hillebrandt 1891; Macdonell 1897). The following is an overview of the mythology of the Veda, with special attention to some of the deities of the RV that became significant in the later Vedic texts.

The foursome of heavenly kings (*rājan*)—Agni, Indra, Mitra, and Varuṇa—is at the centre of the praise poetry of the RV. Foremost is Indra, the demon-trouncing king of the gods and the national hero of the *ārya*, who is victorious against human (*dasyu*) and divine (*dāsu*, *paṇi*) enemies (Gonda 1990). As *vṛtrāhan* (the beater of Vṛtra), Indra's defeat of Vṛtra is a demiurgic act. Described as *ahi* (serpent), Vṛtra enclosed the life-giving waters, as well as the basic elements of the ordered universe—sun, heaven, and earth. With his *vajra* (mace), Indra slayed Vṛtra, releasing the cosmic waters and bringing forth the cosmos (Apte 1956). In the Vala myth cycle, Indra rescues the cattle, which represent the heavenly waters and poetry (*bráhman*), from the Paṇis, who concealed them in the cave (*vala*). With the help of Āṅgirasa, Indra as *bṛhaspati* (lord of poetic formulations) frees the cows (Schmidt 1968).

Agni, 'fire' (Latin *ignus*), is the most important *deva* and the most common word in the RV. As a god and as the sacrifice itself, Agni is the house priest, the invoker, the great giver of treasures. He traverses and transcends the three levels of the cosmos—heaven, intermediate space, and earth. His epithets express his relationships to humans and gods: as Jātavedas (the sacrificial fire) he knows all creatures, especially the members of the sacrificer's family; as Vaiśvanāra, he is the sun, the fire connected to all people; as Narāśaṃsa, he receives people's praise; and as Kravyād, he is cremation fire.

If Indra represents divine and temporal martial authority, Varuṇa is the deification of judicial and moral authority, as the god who moves along the heavenly waters (= Milky Way), gazing down on people's *satyānṛta* (truth and falsehood) with aid of his *sparśa* (celestial spies = the stars). As an Āditya, Varuṇa is connected to *ṛta* (the active power of truth), the ordering principle of the cosmos (Gonda 1957). The association of *ṛta*, the heavenly waters, and Varuṇa is stressed in several hymns (Kuiper 1979; Lüders 1951; Witzel 1996).

Mitra represents the social concept of agreement, contract, or alliance. He is invoked in the context of forging agreements: "on being called, Mitra arranges the people" (RV III.59.1). As such, Mitra is the first Indo-Aryan god—followed by Varuṇa, Indra, and the Aśvins—named in the Mitanni Agreement (Gonda 1972; Thieme 1957).

Viṣṇu's significance in the RV is limited to his comradeship (*sakhya*) with Indra in the context of battling demonic enemies, including Vṛtra, Śambara, Varcin, and Dāsa. There are only five hymns dedicated to Viṣṇu. His principal mythic act is the three-wide strides with which he measures out the triple-cosmos (Kuiper 1962). His third step is the highest, beyond the flight of birds, and the highest place of Agni. In the *brāhmaṇas*, Viṣṇu becomes progressively more significant, culminating with his status as one of the *trimūrti* or divine trinity—Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva—of puranic mythology, where he is recast as an Indra-like demiurgic demon-slayer (Gonda 1954).

With only three hymns, Rudra has a very limited status in the RV. He is described as fierce, feared, and malevolent. Controlling his anger is a central concern of the poets. Rudra is requested *not* to cause harm and to avert his malevolence and the anger or evil of other gods, while also asked to produce welfare and to heal. The more positive aspects of Rudra's personality are emphasized in the epithet *śiva* 'kindly, auspicious one,' which occurs for the first time in RV X.92.6 and becomes his principal name by the *purāṇas* (Doniger 1981).

The Ādityas, the sons of the goddess Aditi, form an important group of deities in the Veda. The seven sons (sometimes eight; RV X.114; X.72) are the hypostatization of abstract social principles that uphold the order of Vedic society (Brereton 1981). Along with Varuṇa and Mitra, Aryaman, whose name is derived from the word *arya* (noble; a term that distinguishes their community from the indigenous population) + the abstract suffix -*man*, points to the prominence of customary laws for regulating the social relations among members of the *ārya* community (Thieme 1957). Bhaga and Aṃśa represent aspects of the notion of distribution. Bhaga is the share of wealth, while Aṃśa signifies "the share that fortune brings" (Brereton 1981: 309). Finally, Dakṣa is the deification of skilfulness. The YV *saṃhitās* elaborate the story and list of the Ādityas, which include Indra as the seventh and *mārtāṇḍa* (the aborted fetus), from which comes Vivasvant, the father of Manu, the first human being (Hoffmann 1976).

The twin Nāsatyas or Aśvins, who receive 50 hymns and are mentioned 400 times in the RV, may be ranked fourth in importance after Indra, Agni, and Soma. With a clear Indo-Iranian/Indo-European origin (Gk. *dioskouroi*), they are associated with the soma sacrifice, especially the Pravargya (the offering of *gharma* 'hot milk') ritual. Their chariot, fashioned by the Ṛbhus, is described as having three chariot-boxes, three wheels, and three turnings and is compared to the soma sacrifice, which involves three pressings of soma (Brereton 2012). Together with Indravāyū and Mitrāvaruṇā, the Aśvins receive a share in the morning pressing of soma. They appear in numerous narratives dealing with searching, rescuing (Bhujyu, Atri Saptavadhri, Viṣṇāpū), and restoration (Cyavāna, Kali, Ṛjrāśva) (Zeller 1990).

In the RV, there are few female deities as compared to their male counterparts. Most goddesses are either deified natural phenomena—Āpas (heavenly waters), Pṛthivī (earth), Rātrī

(night), Sarasvatī and other rivers—or abstract principles—Vāc (sacred speech) and Śraddhā (confident intention in the efficacy of sacrifice) (Lopez 2015; Rao 1974). Vāc, Śraddhā, and Sarasvatī become more prominent in the post-Ṛgvedic texts.

Praised in 21 hymns and mentioned hundreds of times, Uṣas (dawn) is the most prominent goddess in the RV. She is described as beautiful and "wearing ornaments like a dancing girl," who appears in the sky riding a chariot. She is the dispeller of darkness and enemies and the bringer of refreshment (*iṣ*) to the sacrifice of soma.

The goddess Vāc, deified sacred speech and the reputed author of RV X.125, extols herself as the supreme ruler and the preeminent mover, supporter, and sustainer of the gods and the cosmos and the bestower of all gifts to the sacrificer (Malamoud 2005).

Several other gods are sometimes praised independently—Pūṣan (Gonda 1985), Savitṛ, Sūrya, Tvaṣṭṛ, Vāyu—as dual deities (Gonda 1973)—Indrāgnī, Dyāvāpṛthivī, Mitrāvaruṇā—or are linked to important *devas*, especially Indra, as assistants or helpers, such as the Maruts, Ṛbhus, and Trita Āptya.

The Veda in post-Vedic South Asian traditions

The Veda has functioned not only as text but also as an indigenous, multivalent, and expansive category for ordering the complex cultural, linguistic, political, and social diversity of South Asia. In the post-Vedic period, those who acknowledged the validity of *veda* viewed its authority through the lens of two connected textual categories: *śruti* (what is heard) and *smṛti* (what is remembered). Originally, *śruti* denoted the *saṃhitās* but later came to include their *brāhmaṇas, āraṇyakas*, and *upaniṣads*. Deriving its authority from *śruti*, *smṛti* incorporated *vedāṅga* (post-Vedic ancillary texts), *itihāsa* (epics), *dharmaśāstras* (expositions on *dharma*), and *purāṇas* (classical Hindu mythologies). Post-Vedic exegetical traditions, especially the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, equated *veda* and *śruti* as the knowledge perceived by the *ṛṣis*, which was *apauruṣeyatva* (authorless), *anādinityatva* (eternal), and *pramāṇya* (valid means of knowledge). Through *śruti*, the scope of *dharma*, "the cosmic ordering principle that upholds and promotes the evolution of the universe as a whole and of each of its individual parts" (Holdrege 2004: 213), was expanded beyond the confines of sacrificial activity (*yajña*) to broader sociocultural domains (*varna, āśrama, puruṣārthas*).

Authority and prestige were granted to the Veda from the early composition and collection of the *sūktas* of the family books of the RV. However, its authority was not monolithically universal, as can be seen in the acknowledgment of other valid perspectives and conclusions regarding ritual practices and their meanings within the texts. Hindu texts composed in the post-Vedic period in Sanskrit and vernacular languages were construed as *veda* through the "vedicization" of *dharma* (Narayanan 1994; Pollock 1990, 2005). For other traditions in South Asia, such as Buddhism and Jainism, *veda* was a category in the discourses through which they distinguished themselves from the traditions that relied on the authority of the Veda.

List of Abbreviations

ĀgS	Āgastya Sūtra
ĀgnGS	Āgniveśya Gṛhya Sūtra
AiĀ	Aitareya Āraṇyaka
AiB	Aitareya Brāhmaṇa
AiU	Aitareya Upaniṣad

ĀpGS	Āpastamba Gṛhya Sūtra
ĀpŚS	Āpastamba Śrauta Sūtra
ĀrśB	Ārṣeya Brāhmaṇa
ĀśvGS	Āśvalāyana Gṛhya Sūtra
ĀśvŚS	Āśvalāyana Śrauta Sūtra
AV	Atharvaveda
BĀU	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad
BGS	Baudhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra
BŚS	Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra
BhārGS	Bhāradvāja Gṛhya Sūtra
BhārŚS	Bhāradvāja Śrauta Sūtra
ChU	Chāndogya Upaniṣad
DrāhŚS	Drāhyāyaṇa Śrauta Sūtra
GobhGS	Gobhila Gṛhya Sūtra
GopB	Gopatha Brāhmaṇa
HirGS	Hiraṇyakeśin Gṛhya Sūtra
HirŚS	Hiraṇyakeśin Śrauta Sūtra
ĪśāU	Īśā Upaniṣad
JB	Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa
JGS	Jaiminīya Gṛhya Sūtra
JŚS	Jaiminīya Śrauta Sūtra
JUB	Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa
KĀ	Kaṭha Āraṇyaka
KapS	Kapiṣṭhala–Kaṭha Saṃhitā
KaṭhB	Kaṭha Brāhmaṇa
KāṭhGS	Kāṭhaka Gṛhya Sūtra
KaṭhU	Kaṭha Upaniṣad
KātyŚS	Kātyāyana Śrauta Sūtra
KauśS	Kauśika Sūtra
KauṣB	Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa
KauṣGS	Kauṣītaki Gṛhya Sūtra
KauṣU	Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad
KauthGS	Kauthuma Gṛhya Sūtra
KenaU	Kena Upaniṣad
KhādGS	Khādira Gṛhya Sūtra
KS	Kāṭhaka Saṃhitā
LāṭŚS	Lāṭyāyana Śrauta Sūtra
LGS	Laugākṣi Gṛhya Sūtra
MaitU	Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad
MāṇḍU	Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad
MantraB	Mantra Brāhmaṇa
MGS	Mānava Gṛhya Sūtra
MŚS	Mānava Śrauta Sūtra
MS	Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā
MuṇḍU	Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad
PaiṭhGS	Paiṭhīnāsi Gṛhya Sūtra
PārGS	Pāraskara Gṛhya Sūtra

PB	Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
PraśU	Parśna Upaniṣad
PS	Paippalāda Saṃhitā
RV	Ṛgveda
RV Khila	Ṛgveda Khilāni
ṢaḍB	Ṣaḍviṃśa Brāhmaṇa
ŚāṅkhĀ	Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka
ŚāṅkhGS	Śāṅkhāyana Gṛhya Sūtra
ŚāṅkhŚS	Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra
SatŚS	Satyāṣāḍha Śrauta Sūtra
ŚB	Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
ŚS	Śaunaka Saṃhitā
SV	Sāmaveda
ŚvetU	Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad
TāṇḍB	Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa
TĀ	Taittirīya Āraṇyaka
TB	Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
TS	Taittirīya Saṃhitā
TU	Taittirīya Upaniṣad
VādhAnv	Vādhūla Anvākhyāna
VādhŚS	Vādhūla Śrauta Sūtra
VaikhGS	Vaikhānasa Gṛhya Sūtra
VaikhŚS	Vaikhānasa Śrauta Sūtra
VaitS	Vaitāna Sūtra
VārGS	Vārāha Gṛhya Sūtra
VārŚS	Vārāha Śrauta Sūtra
VS	Vājasaneyi Saṃhitā
YV	Yajurveda

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Notes

1 The author attended the Atirātra/Agnicayana (Pañjal 2011, Kodakara 2012) and Somayāga (Pattambi 2016).
2 The radical is being used to mark the fact that *kṛ* is a verbal root.
3 In this chapter, the anglicized *brahmin* is used to refer to the social class (*varṇa*), while *brahman* refers to poetry or the cosmic principle, and *Brahman* refers to the priest of the AV.

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2

THE RISE OF CLASSICAL BRAHMANISM

Johannes Bronkhorst

Brahmans play a prominent role in Hinduism in most of its forms. They constitute a caste-class (*varṇa*) and claim descent from the seers who "saw" the ancient Vedic hymns. They officiated in Vedic times at the sacrifices that were (or aspired to be) an essential part of political life. Their vital role in all kinds of rituals continued beyond those days, well into the present.

From a Brahmanical point of view, the history of Brahmans and of the institutions for which they have been responsible is continuous. From their perspective, Brahmans were there from immemorial time to look after the ritual aspects of society, incorporating traditional knowledge and wisdom and advising rulers on the correct way to run society and their kingdoms. What is more, Brahmans considered themselves to be, and to have always been, at the top of the social hierarchy.

An inspection of the historical evidence shows that this vision of the past is not correct. Such an inspection brings up a far more complex picture, in which the rise of Brahmanism was a long and difficult process, with several ups and downs.

Our point of departure is the late Vedic period, the period during which texts were composed dealing with complex rituals—we'll call them Vedic sacrifices. These Vedic sacrifices were carried out by sacrificial priests, the Brahmans, for the benefit of rich and powerful patrons. This happened in the northwestern regions of the Indian subcontinent, including regions that now lie in Pakistan. This sacrificial and priestly tradition was closely associated with the political order in those regions, just as the sacrificial and priestly traditions of ancient Egypt and of ancient Mesopotamia were part of the political systems in those parts of the world.

The sacrificial and priestly traditions of ancient Egypt and ancient Mesopotamia did not survive the collapse of those political systems. One might have expected the same in South Asia, but this is not what happened. The following pages will consider how the Vedic political systems came to an end and how the responses of those primarily affected, the Brahmans, led to something altogether new.

A succession of political events effectively put an end to the Vedic sacrificial tradition. The first one we know about in some detail is the invasion of the Indian subcontinent (327–325 BCE) by Alexander of Macedonia, often called Alexander the Great. He and his army did not penetrate deeply into the subcontinent; in fact, their movements were confined to what is now

Afghanistan and Pakistan and never reached present-day India. But the regions they did visit, especially in what is now Pakistan, had an influential population of Brahmans, and we learn from the Alexander historians that conflicts between them and Alexander arose on various occasions. Indeed, it appears that Alexander and his army slaughtered large numbers of Brahmans. It seems safe to assume that the political changes that resulted from Alexander's invasion undermined the Vedic sacrificial tradition to a considerable extent.

This was only the beginning. The regions of the Indian subcontinent that Alexander had conquered became, a few years after his death, part of the newly created Maurya Empire. This empire had its capital and cultural centre in the eastern part of the Ganges valley, in the city—Pāṭaliputra—that was primarily capital of the region called Magadha. Magadha and its surroundings ("Greater Magadha") had been and continued to be the seat of a culture altogether different from the culture to which the Vedic sacrificial tradition belonged. Among the features that distinguished the culture of Greater Magadha, the belief in rebirth and karmic retribution is prominent. It is this belief, along with the desire to escape from rebirth and karmic retribution, that was responsible for the appearance of a number of religious movements—among these Buddhism and Jainism—that taught methods to bring about such an escape. Vedic sacrifices played no role in this part of the subcontinent, and Brahmans did not here receive the respect they expected and received in the Brahmanical heartland.

The Maurya Empire was—to the extent this was possible in an age where long-distance communication was slow and arduous—highly centralized. It appears that it did not keep local rulers in charge of their regions but rather replaced them with administrators sent from the capital. As a result, Vedic sacrifices lost their political and financial support. To make matters worse, one of the emperors—the famous Aśoka—made it known that animal sacrifices were no longer tolerated. Vedic sacrifices thus lost the support without which they could not be carried out. And the Brahmans, who embodied this sacrificial tradition, lost the main justification for their special place in society.

The collapse of the Maurya Empire (around 185 BCE) did not bring relief to Brahmans either, at least not to many of them. The northwestern regions which, until Alexander's invasion and perhaps beyond, had been a centre of Brahmanical culture (perhaps the most important one), underwent once again violent invasions, by Indo-Greeks and Scythians in particular. The Brahmans in those regions who had somehow survived the preceding two centuries while maintaining a separate identity experienced these invasions as so destructive— both physically and culturally—that they (or at least a number of them) believed the end of the world was near and gave expression to that belief in a text from that period that has survived, the *Yugapurāṇa*.

Brahmans in certain other parts of the now-defunct Maurya Empire were luckier. The ruler of one of its successor kingdoms, the Śuṅga King Puṣyamitra, is known to have performed a Vedic sacrifice (the *aśvamedha* "Horse Sacrifice", probably twice) and supported Brahmanical culture. And this was only the beginning. Over time, a reinvented form of Brahmanism succeeded in gaining the upper hand well beyond its original area, spreading all over the subcontinent and even into Southeast Asia. To understand how this was possible, it is necessary to see what modifications Brahmanism had undergone.

Brahmanical culture had already begun to change before the arrival of sympathetic rulers, that is, during the earlier, difficult centuries. That is to say that, no doubt under the pressure of unfavourable circumstances, Brahmanism had reinvented itself. The demand for expensive Vedic sacrifices had diminished, but rather than disappearing from the historical scene with them, Brahmans found themselves different roles in society. They did not, of course, reject their connection with those sacrifices, but this link became more and more hypothetical. With

reduced support from and interaction with the outer world, Brahmanism entered into a period of interiorization, which expressed itself in various ways.

Most obvious, perhaps, was the shift of emphasis to smaller rites that individuals could perform in their homes. This is the period during which the Gṛhyasūtras, manuals for household ceremonies, were composed.

Ritual purity had always been a requirement for participation in a sacrifice. The Brahmans now made this into a central concern of their way of life, both within and outside sacrificial contexts. Newly composed texts, the Dharmasūtras, regulate all details of their lives, from birth to death (and even the periods preceding birth and following death). Purity implied minimal interaction with non-Brahmans, who were considered less pure. In fact, using a categorization that may have been invented earlier, Brahmans now strictly distinguished between others with whom ritual interaction was possible, the so-called Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas, and those with whom this had to be avoided, the Śūdras. Brahmans, Kṣatriyas, and Vaiśyas jointly came to be called 'twice-born', unlike the Śūdras.

The emphasis on purity was behind an idealization of the Brahman that became very important in literature and had interesting effects in the real world. The ideal Brahman does not interact with society at all. He lives in the forest and survives on what he finds there, essentially roots and fruits. He is often depicted as living in a hermitage (Sanskrit: *āśrama*), which he has presumably created himself, independently of society. He maintains the sacred fire that he has brought with him, recites Vedic texts, and is in the possession of supernatural powers.

In this idealized form, perfect Brahmans may not have been many in number, or they may not have existed at all. However, the *āśrama* that figures in literature corresponds to what is called *agrahāra* in inscriptions. An *agrahāra* is a royal donation of land or of a village to one or more Brahmans, along with the obligation of the inhabitants of that land or village to pass on their earnings to those Brahmans. Unlike the *agrahāra*, the *āśrama*s described in literature are never presented as donations. This difference is easily explained: as a whole, *āśrama*s occur in literature composed by Brahmans, *agrahāra*s in inscriptions composed by or on behalf of rulers. The Brahmans' non-interaction with society would be compromised by the acceptance of gifts, so they conveniently overlooked that their *āśrama*s had, more often than not, been donated (Bronkhorst 2016).

The emphasis on purity also manifests itself in the requirement of pure descent. In classical Brahmanism, there is essentially only one way to become a Brahman, namely by being born from parents who are both Brahmans. The story of Mataṅga told in the *Mahābhārata* illustrates this. He is brought up as a Brahman but discovers one day that he really is an outcaste (*caṇḍāla*), because his mother had committed adultery with one. Austerities do not help him to gain Brahmanical status.

A further key requirement for being a Brahman was and remained, at least in theory, knowledge of the Veda. Every Brahman is supposed to know his Veda (of which there came to be four) or a portion thereof. Preserving the Vedic texts became a central concern that was all the more demanding since Vedic texts are ideally only preserved orally. A whole literature arose dealing with the phonetic peculiarities of each Veda. Along with it, treatises on phonetics in general and on the grammar of Sanskrit came into being.

This preoccupation with the Veda and its language underwent a significant development, probably after the collapse of the Maurya Empire. Brahmanism now claimed that both—the Veda and its language—are eternal, that is, beginningless. This claim was apparently based on the more general, but often implicit, assumption that the whole world is eternal; that is, that it has no history in any meaningful sense. The claim that the Veda is eternal became the basis for its interpretation, carried out by the specialists of Mīmāṃsā, who took this claim very literally.

They observed that the Veda, since it has no beginning, has no author either, considering that an author stands at the beginning of the work he produces. For the same reason, it cannot refer to historical events, for the Veda was already infinitely old when those presumed events occurred. Being without an author, it is not possible to find the meaning of a Vedic passage as intended by its author; there is no such meaning. The Veda became in this way pure language, whose interpretation required sophisticated efforts so as to avoid falling in the trap of treating it like other texts, which we read (or listen to) in order to find out the intentions of their authors or to learn about things that happened in the past. The Mīmāṃsā interpreters had to avoid these pitfalls by interpreting many Vedic statements metaphorically. In the end, they accepted that only injunctions must be taken literally.

The claim that the world, the Veda, and its language are eternal is closely related to the conservative tendency of Brahmanism. Really new things cannot arise, and if they do, they are ignored to the extent possible. An example is writing. This was introduced late in most of the Indian subcontinent (Falk 2018). Brahmanism avoided mentioning it, even when it used it, pretending for a long time to continue a purely oral tradition (Bronkhorst 2011b).

A few more words must be said about the ideal Brahman as he is depicted in literature. He preferably lives in his hermitage, avoids contact with the world, recites the Veda, and is, because of all that, extraordinarily powerful. This is a recurring theme and may have played a crucial role in the almost miraculous growth and spread of Brahmanical influence during the centuries following their recovery. This image of sometimes irritable but nonetheless awe-inspiring and fearsome Brahmanical sages is omnipresent in such literary productions as the great Sanskrit epics: the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Unlike certain other forms of literature produced during the period—such as the Gṛhyasūtras and Dharmasūtras mentioned earlier, which were primarily for internal use—the epics and other such texts addressed a far wider audience. Indeed, it seems likely that the public recitation of these narrative texts contributed in no small degree to the idea of Brahmans as wise, holy, and extremely powerful. This, in its turn, encouraged rulers to invite Brahmans to their kingdoms under favourable conditions. We have seen that this often took the form of offering them *agrahāra*s.

But Brahmans had also developed other skills that made their presence attractive to rulers. Presumably during this same period of transition, they had started producing books dealing with governance. The most important text of this genre that has survived is the *Arthaśāstra*. Its received version was completed late (perhaps third century CE; Olivelle 2013) but stands at the end of a long tradition. The pragmatic, even Machiavellian, nature of this text has struck modern commentators and reminds us that Brahmanical political advisors were in for business, not for defending morality (except, of course, the sacrosanct position of Brahmans in society).

The internal changes within Brahmanism described previously did not take place in a political vacuum; this we have seen. Indeed, changing political circumstances appear to have given them their initial impetus. Nor did they take place in a cultural vacuum. Our knowledge of those cultural circumstances is limited, but the confrontation and interaction with the culture of Greater Magadha stands out.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the culture of Greater Magadha, as observed previously, was the belief in rebirth and karmic retribution, a belief unknown to Vedic culture. This belief underlay a variety of religious movements that originated in Greater Magadha—among them Buddhism, Jainism, and Ājīvikism—whose shared goal was to put an end to the potentially endless cycle of rebirths determined by one's actions. Jainism represents the perhaps most typical response to the challenge: Its path to liberation from rebirth culminates in the candidate's physical and mental immobilisation. Forms of asceticism in which all forms of activity, or certain

forms of activity (such as breathing or thinking), are reduced to the extent possible became a prominent feature of Hinduism in many of its manifestations.

The emphasis on absence of activity, on immobility, left place for another belief, the belief that the core of one's being, one's real self, is by its nature inactive. Some considered the realisation that one's self is not involved in the actions carried out by body and mind sufficient to put an end to karmic retribution. This concept of an inactive self came to play an extremely important role in Indian thought, either in combination with immobility asceticism or without it.

The Vedic tradition was not acquainted with the belief in rebirth and karmic retribution until it underwent the influence of the culture of Greater Magadha. And even then, not all Brahmans welcomed the new belief. The most orthodox representatives of the Vedic tradition (most notably the followers of Mīmāṃsā) resisted and refused to accept it until the middle of the first millennium CE or perhaps even later. Other branches of Brahmanism, however, yielded more readily to the new belief, which they initially tried to incorporate into more traditional ways of Vedic thinking.

Those Brahmans who accepted the belief in rebirth and karmic retribution (they may have been the majority) were now confronted with two idealized lifestyles. We already met the ideal Brahman who does not interact with society, lives in a hermitage in the forest, and survives on what he finds there. This way of life had nothing to do with rebirth and karmic retribution. Those, on the other hand, who seriously strove to put an end to rebirth and karmic retribution opted for a different lifestyle altogether. Like the ideal Brahman depicted previously, they too left society, but not in order to withdraw to the forest. They rather survived by begging (as did the Buddhists, the Jainas, and other religious mendicants from Greater Magadha), which means that they continued to stay in contact with society. And unlike the idealized Brahman depicted previously, they did not spend their life in the pursuit of purity, and they did not maintain a sacred fire and so on. Their prime concern was not ritual purity but liberation from rebirth. As a means of reaching that goal, they engaged in the search for their real self.

How did the Brahmanical tradition choose between these two lifestyles? It didn't. It accepted both as legitimate ways of living one's life. In fact, it proposed four possible ways of life: (1) as a lifelong student of the Veda (*brahmacārin*), (2) as a wandering religious mendicant (*parivrāja*), (3) as a forest-dweller (*vānaprastha*), or (4) as a householder (*gṛhastha*). This is the order in which these four ways are presented in what is perhaps the earliest surviving Dharmasūtra, the *Āpastambadharmasūtra*, which also uses this terminology. This order is not a temporal sequence. The *Āpastambadharmasūtra*, as do other Dharmasūtras, presents a simultaneous choice out of four, not four stages of life. Options (2) (*parivrāja*) and (3) (*vānaprastha*) stand respectively for the seeker of liberation and for the ideal Brahman who totally withdraws from society. (Interestingly, the *Āpastambadharmasūtra* distinguishes between two kinds of forest-dweller: (3a) the ascetic who aims at suppressing activities and ends his life through a fast to death, a way of life that clearly betrays the influence of the culture of Greater Magadha, and (3b) the ascetic who maintains his fire and continues performing his rites, aiming at supernatural powers.) Option (2) is clearly a non-Vedic way of life, the one borrowed from the culture of Greater Magadha (the *Āpastambadharmasūtra* admits that this way of life is "opposed to the scriptures" [2.9.21.15–16]).

This *choice* of four possible ways of life became over time a *sequence* of four stages of life: (1) religious student (*brahmacārin*), (2) householder (*gṛhastha*), (3) forest-dweller (*vānaprastha*), (4) wandering religious mendicant (*parivrāja*; later the term *saṃnyāsin*, 'renouncer', came into use). This sequence of four stages (confusingly also called *āśrama*, but not meaning 'hermitage' this time) became part of Hinduism, at least in theory (Bronkhorst 1993).

The spiritual practice of Yoga is related to the ascetic ways of life considered but is often treated separately in Brahmanical texts. The term and the practices it designates make their

appearance in the *Mahābhārata* and other contemporary Brahmanical texts. The term does not occur in this sense in non-Brahmanical texts from that period or before. It is used in Brahmanical texts to designate practices whose historical link with Greater Magadha is beyond doubt: practices in which mental or physical inaction, or inaction of both, take a central place. No such practices feature in earlier Vedic texts, nor does the word 'Yoga' occur there in this sense. It would indeed appear that this term is the most important Brahmanical contribution to Yoga (Bronkhorst 2011a).

The culture of Greater Magadha believed in rebirth and karmic retribution, that is, in the regular return of individual living beings. It similarly believed in the regular return of the world as a whole. That is to say, the world goes through time-cycles. We find the notion of immensely long periods, often called *kalpa*s, in the early writings of Buddhism and Jainism and even in the scarce information we possess about Ājīvikism. This cyclical view of time was accompanied by a vision of the universe in which Mount Meru is situated at the centre, being surrounded by a number of continents. Nothing of the kind is found in Vedic literature, and there are strong reasons to believe that this complex of ideas belonged to Greater Magadha before it found its way into Brahmanical literature, first perhaps in the later portions of the *Mahābhārata* (González-Reimann 2002; Satinsky 2015).

Perhaps the first reference to cyclical time in surviving Brahmanical literature occurs in the *Yugapurāṇa*, a text mentioned earlier. It was composed by Brahmans under duress, who feared that the Brahmanical order of society was being destroyed by a succession of calamities, most prominently invasions by various groups of barbarians. Interestingly, these Brahmans thought that the world was about to come to an end, and they formulated this fear in terms of cyclical time: The present world period was coming to an end, but a new period would follow the total destruction of the world sometime soon. The most remarkable aspect of this testimony is that Brahmans who borrowed the notion of cyclical time from outside the Vedic tradition adjusted it to the desperate situation in which they found themselves, meanwhile making tremendous reductions to the lengths of the recurring periods. (The text has not forgotten that very long time cycles exist, because its concluding verse states that a hundred times a hundred thousand years (?) constitutes a *kalpa* and that a *kalpa* amounts to a thousand *yuga*s; Mitchiner 2002: 48–49).

Traces of the belief in recurring cycles of short duration survive in a few other Brahmanical texts: the *Mānavadharmaśāstra*, some early Purāṇas, and the *Mahābhārata*. But soon Brahmanism, too, started thinking in terms of time cycles of immense duration. The classical picture that we find in the more recent Purāṇas gives precise lengths to these durations: a total duration (*caturyuga*) of 4,320,000 (human) years is divided into four *yuga*s that succeed each other and whose duration is 1,728,000; 1,296,000; 864,000; and 432,000 years, respectively (Rocher 1986: 124). In other words, the acceptance of periods of immense lengths that had been part of the culture of Greater Magadha ended up becoming part of Brahmanical culture. This was not without its advantages, even for orthodox Brahmanical thinkers. For example, it allowed legal scholars to relegate rules of behaviour that they found objectionable to a previous world age and thus make them inapplicable to contemporary times (Olivelle 2017: 36f.).

There was, however, a problem. The notion of cyclical time is at first sight in contradiction with the idea of a world that never changes, a world in which the Veda was handed down from teacher to pupil from beginningless time. Brahmanical thinkers were aware of this apparent contradiction and proposed ways in which the eternal Veda could bridge the gap between succeeding world periods. Few, with the notable exception of certain orthodox Vedic interpreters (Mīmāṃsakas), held on to the belief that the world had always been as it is today. Detailed descriptions of world periods and their divisions, their characteristics, and their durations are

a central feature of the Purāṇas, texts that on account of their number and size constitute an important part of traditional Brahmanical literature.

Classical Brahmanism is known for its different schools of philosophy. The most well known of these schools nowadays is no doubt Advaita Vedānta. It is important to remember that this is probably the most recent of the classical schools of Brahmanical philosophy. Neither Advaita Vedānta nor any other school of Vedānta is mentioned in Indian philosophical literature until roughly the middle of the first millennium CE. At that moment, other schools of philosophy had been in existence for centuries.

Virtually without exception, all classical Brahmanical schools of philosophy share one feature: the concept of a soul, or self, that is inactive. This feature is common to the ontology of Vaiśeṣika and of Vedānta in most of its forms but is most prominently present in the philosophy of Sāṃkhya. This philosophy divides all there is into two separate categories: the soul and everything that can act. The former is often called *puruṣa* in the texts of this school; it is pure consciousness, not affected by any activity, including mental activity. The other category is often called *prakṛti*: 'Nature' or *pradhāna*, and it covers everything that acts, including mental activity.

This notion of an inactive soul or self suggests, once again, that the culture of Greater Magadha influenced the basics of Brahmanical philosophy. This does not mean that the different philosophies as we have them were borrowings from Greater Magadha; clearly they were not. However, there is a further reason to think that the Sāṃkhya philosophy, more than, say, Vaiśeṣika and Vedānta, remained close to a predecessor that once existed in that non-Brahmanical part of India. This is the circumstance that Sāṃkhya is almost invariably associated with the name of Kapila, the primordial sage who supposedly promulgated this philosophy for the first time. Kapila appears in the early literature as a demon, an inhabitant of hell, and an opponent of the Vedic tradition.

Brahmanism did not only *undergo* the cultural influence of its surroundings, it also *exerted* influence. Brahmanical influence on Indian culture in general came to be extremely important. We have seen that Brahmanism created a literature on Dharma that initially confined itself largely to regulating the details of the Brahmans' life. This is still their primary focus in the early Dharmasūtras, but as time went on, texts on Dharma dedicated ever more space to the rules by which others must live. Political guidance for rulers, for example, gets more attention over time, and the rules of Dharma become ever more rules for society at large. Here, too, the concern with purity is central, and purity of descent receives much attention. Mixture of caste-classes through intermarriage (*vaṃasaṃkara*) is a certain way to guarantee a lower position in society to the offspring (Brinkhaus 1978).

These restrictions on behaviour came to exert an amazing influence on Indian society at large. This is confirmed quite independently by genetic research. A recent study of the genomes of a large number of individuals in India comes to the conclusion "that the practice of endogamy was established almost simultaneously, possibly by decree of the rulers, in upper-caste populations of all geographical regions, about 70 generations before present, probably during the reign (319–550 CE) of the . . . Gupta rulers" (Basu et al. 2016). Also, an earlier study has found evidence for a shift to endogamy at different moments for speakers of Indo-European languages (on average 72 generations) and those of Dravidian languages (108 generations) (Moorjani et al. 2013). The authors of this study translate these numbers of generations into 1900 and 3000 years before the present, respectively. It is virtually impossible to determine the exact average length of a generation, yet it seems safe to conclude that a shift to endogamy took place during the first half of the first millennium CE, at least in northern India, and it is permitted to assume that the growing influence of Brahmanism played a role in this shift.

This chapter is to a large extent based on work published in my two books *Greater Magadha* (Brill, Leiden 2007; reprint: Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 2013) and *How the Brahmins Won* (Brill, Leiden 2016), which contain detailed further references.

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3

IDENTITY IN EARLY INDIAN RELIGION[1]

Nathan McGovern

One of the most vexing questions of Indian history is that of the historical relationship between the major religions of the ancient period. Three of what are now considered "world religions" emerged from ancient India: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. A fourth religion, Ājīvikism, also arose in ancient India and continued into the medieval period but died out before modern times. The former three, however, were not generally known by these terms throughout and even by the end of antiquity, which, following convention, I define as the fall of the Gupta dynasty in the sixth century CE. The Buddhists were known as Śākyas or Śākyaputrīyas (Pali: Sakyaputtiyas), the Jains were known as Nirgranthas (Pali: Niganṭhas), and there was no term of identity corresponding to what we now call Hinduism, although many scholars argue that the seeds of a "Hindu" identity can be dated back to the Gupta period (Lorenzen 2005). The key religious divide in Indian late antiquity, already emerging prior to the turn of the Common Era and well established thereafter, was between śramaṇas, or ascetics, and Brahmans, the priestly class. Buddhism and Jainism arose out of śramaṇa movements. The proto-Hindu identity that was crystallizing in the Gupta Empire, on the other hand, centred on the authority of Brahmans and, having for centuries been in tension with śramaṇic asceticism, was finally by that time demarcated in explicit opposition to the Buddhists and Jains.

How exactly did these ancient Indian religions arise? Concomitantly, how did it come to be that what we retrospectively through modern Western categories would regard as "religious" practitioners were divided between śramaṇas and Brahmans? Scholarship on these questions has typically taken one of two approaches. One approach is "orthogenetic"; this approach sees the development and changes in Indian religion over the centuries as due to the internal dynamic of a single tradition tracing itself back to the earliest Vedic texts (Biardeau 1976; Heesterman 1985; Witzel 2005). Other scholars, however, have sought to explain religious change in ancient India in terms of influences from an indigenous substratum or substrata (Bronkhorst 2007; Samuel 2008). Although both of these approaches have their merits, and their applicability depends in large part on the way one defines the mainstream tradition, my own methodology for the study of early India leans toward the orthogenetic, for two reasons. First, for this time period, the evidence for substral influences is virtually nonexistent, rendering any non-orthogenetic approach mostly speculative. Second, close examination of the Vedic tradition usually yields clear antecedents for later religious innovations; such innovations, whatever their relationship to any non-Vedic indigenous practices, did not arise *de novo* from the perspective of the "mainstream" tradition.

Whether more or less orthogenetic in their approach, however, most scholars of ancient India have treated religious identities metahistorically, in particular assuming an intrinsic distinction and opposition between the categories *śramaṇa* and Brahman. This manifests, in the orthogenetic approach, as, for example, in Heesterman's *Inner Conflict of Tradition* (1985), an intrinsic tension between householder and renouncer in the Vedic and Brahmanical tradition. In the substratal approach, it manifests as Bronkhorst's culture of Greater Magadha (2007). In my own work (McGovern 2019), I have criticized the assumption of a metahistorical dichotomy and/or opposition between the *śramaṇa* and Brahmana. Drawing from the theoretical work of Jean-François Bayart (2005), I argue that identities are not essences but rather dynamic fabrications reflecting the circumstances of any particular period in time. I argue specifically that the opposition between *śramaṇa* and Brahman was not intrinsic but emerged over time as various groups contested the appellation *Brahman*.

In this chapter, I will contextualize my work on the emergence of the *śramaṇa*-Brahman distinction within the broader history of religious identity in ancient India in order to show the value of a dynamic model of identity for making sense of early Indian religions. I will begin with the thought-world of the Vedas, showing that there was a clear intellectual development leading to the innovations associated with the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. Then, I will turn to what I call the "long fifth century BCE," during which the *śramaṇa* movements arose. Instead of an opposition between two distinct groups, I will portray this time period in terms of a single Brahmanical field characterized by a range of ideologically inflected modes of praxis. In the next section, I will then argue that reactionary householder Brahmans undertook a program, through the twin ideological tools of *vaṇa* and *āśrama*, to invalidate ascetic (śramaṇic) lifestyles and arrogate the title Brahman to themselves. This program led to the perception of an opposition between *śramaṇa* and Brahman by the time Patañjali wrote his grammar in the late second century BCE. Next I will turn to internal forms of identity among *śramaṇa*s, focusing on the ways in which Nigaṇṭha, Ājīvaka, and Sakyaputtiya identities arose and situated themselves vis-à-vis one another during the imperial period. I will then return to the reactionary Brahmanical tradition and its accommodation to śramaṇic asceticism during the time between the empires. Finally, in the last section, I will discuss the rise of explicit and bilateral opposition between the emerging Brahmanical mainstream and śramaṇic others during the Gupta period, setting the classical foundation for modern Hindu identity.

The Vedic thought-world

The main source for the earliest religious ideas, worldviews, and practices of India is an extensive (originally oral) literature known as the Vedas, which was composed roughly from the very late second millennium BCE to the middle of the first millennium BCE. The oldest element of that literature is the *Ṛgvedasaṃhitā*, which consists of hymns to various gods composed (or rather cognized) by bards mythologized by the later tradition as *ṛṣi*s. It reflects a society of semi-nomadic pastoralists, composed of clans speaking an Indo-Aryan language, which modern scholars have dubbed Vedic Sanskrit, during the course of their migration into the Indian subcontinent, at a point at which they dwelled in the general region of the Punjab (Witzel 1997: 262–263). In the course of their praises of the gods, the hymns of the *Ṛgvedasaṃhitā* make ancillary reference to various sacrificial practices, known to the tradition as *yajña*s. These *yajña*s involved the sacrifice of various foodstuffs to the gods, including both animal and vegetal offerings, through immolation in a sacred fire known as the god Agni. These sacrifices took place in the open air in temporary sacred enclosures. As the tradition of *yajña* developed, one of the most important offerings was of soma, a psychoactive plant that was also conceived of as a god

but whose earthly identity is now unknown, although there is some evidence that it could be identified with ephedra (Witzel 2005: 74).

According to the theory of Michael Witzel, the various practices of *yajña* were systematized and institutionalized under the auspices of the Kuru (Witzel 1995). The result was a professional class of priests known as Brahmans (Skt. *brāhmaṇa*), as well as three, later four, sacred literary collections (*saṃhitā*) passed down orally: the *Ṛgveda*, whose hymns were compiled at this time; the *Yajurveda*, consisting of sacred formulas or *mantra*s used during the *yajña*; the *Sāmaveda*, consisting of hymns from the *Ṛgveda* set to music; and (added later) the *Atharva Veda*, consisting of hymns used in more "magical" rites. These corresponded to four roles played by different Brahmans in the *yajña*: the *hotṛ*, or invoker, who invited the gods to the sacrifice by reciting hymns from the *Ṛgveda*; the *adhvaryu*, the ritual specialist who actually performed the rites while pronouncing *mantra*s from the *Yajurveda*; the *udgātṛ*, who sang hymns from the *Sāmaveda*; and the *brahman* (not to be confused with *brāhmaṇa*, which is rendered in English here as Brahman), who silently oversaw the ritual to look for errors and was nominally connected to the *Atharvaveda*.

As the Indo-Aryan clans continued to migrate eastward into the Ganges Basin, Brahmans brought with them the oral Vedic Saṃhitās and knowledge of the ritual practices of the *yajña*. They also composed new oral texts, speculative commentaries on the *yajña* known as Brāhmaṇas. These commentaries are not explanations of how to perform the various types of *yajña*s *per se* but rather the beginnings of a "pre-modern science" (Oldenberg 1919) in which the origins and deeper significance of the *yajña* and all of its components were explicated through *bandhu*s, "connections" between (to modern thinking, seemingly unrelated) elements of the microcosm of the ritual and the macrocosm of the universe. The transmission of Vedic Saṃhitās and composition of Brāhmaṇas was not centralized but rather carried out by various groups of Brahmans known as *śākhā*s, or branches, that settled in various parts of North India (some later moving to the South). Each of the four Vedas has more than one *śākhā*, and while all *śākhā*s composed Brāhmaṇas, some near the end of the Vedic period (seventh to sixth centuries BCE) also composed appendices to their Brāhmaṇas known as Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. The Āraṇyakas are Brāhmaṇa-style commentaries on more esoteric rituals relegated to the wilderness (*araṇya*), while the Upaniṣads focus more specifically on philosophical questions that arose out of earlier speculations on the *yajña*. These later texts provide the immediate preceding context for the rise of *śramaṇa* (ascetic) practices in the fifth century BCE.

Modern scholars have often misunderstood the Upaniṣads as representing an abrupt break from the earlier Brāhmaṇas, but the tradition considers the former to form a part of, or else to be an extension of, the latter, and there are clear intellectual continuities between the two (Thite 1975: 2–6). The basic worldview of the earlier Vedic texts is as follows. The world has three basic parts, created at the beginning of time by one or another of the gods, as narrated variously by different hymns of the *Ṛgveda*. These are the earth itself, the sky or firmament, and the "intermediate region" (atmosphere). Life after death is not an overriding concern of the earlier texts, but there are passages that indicate that one is "reborn" when cremated on the funeral pyre and has a new life in the other world in the sky, to which the smoke from the pyre ascends just as it does in transporting offerings to the gods in the *yajña* (ŚBM 11.2.1.1, cited by Ikari 1989: 156). This is not the same as the classical understanding of rebirth as a continuous cycle of birth and death in (usually) *this* world, but it served as the starting point for the classical concept of rebirth to develop. Likewise, speculations on the *yajña* in the Brāhmaṇas, which included discussions of the fruits of the sacrifice for the sacrificer (*yajamāna*), developed the idea that one of the purposes of the sacrifice is for the *yajamāna* to build his immortal self (*ātman*) for his life in the other world (Tull 1989).

The basic model, therefore, was that one prepares through sacrifice for life in the other world after death, but various anxieties led to further speculations on specifics of this model of the afterlife. First, based on a principle of reversal of fortunes in the afterlife common to many cultures, anxieties arose over the violence inflicted on animal offerings, with the expectation that those animals would inflict violence on people in the other world. In the Brāhmaṇas, ritual means were offered to neutralize this danger, but in time, this anxiety gave rise to the principle of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) and the ideal of vegetarianism (Schmidt 1968: 643–650). Likewise, anxieties over the finitude of the rewards of sacrifice led to the concept of *punarmṛtyu* or "second death." If the sacrificial efforts of a man in this life were finite, he would live in the other world for a time, only to die again and return to this world (Schmidt 1968: 650; Witzel 2005: 84). It was a short intellectual leap from speculations on the immortal self, reversal of fortunes after death, and second death to the classical concepts of karma (general retribution for all actions) and rebirth (continual birth and death, according to the dictates of karma), which are found in the Upaniṣads (Witzel 2005: 84–85; Cohen 2018: 64–81, 158–171).

The Upaniṣads are a natural extension of the speculations of the Brāhmaṇas; while the latter make connections (*bandhu*s) to elements of the universe in order to explain their main focus, the microcosmos of the *yajña*, the Upaniṣads simply continue these speculations while shifting their focus to the macrocosmos, the universe at large. The main theme of the Upaniṣads, arguably, is the *ātman*, a key theme among many in earlier speculations on the fruits of the *yajña* that now becomes a deep philosophical question in its own right. Various Upaniṣads and passages thereof define *ātman* in different ways, but particularly influential via the much later Vedānta philosophical school are those that identify the *ātman*, the self of the human individual, with the *brahman*—a word that originally referred to the power of ritual speech but came to refer to the ultimate reality of the universe (ChU 6.9.4, 8.7.4, 8.10.1, 8.11.1; MāU 2; MtU 6.17). As already noted, the concepts of karma and rebirth are stated in their classical form in the Upaniṣads, thus serving as the basis for the classical Hindu model in which, when a person dies, their true self passes to a new body, human or otherwise, with the conditions of the new life being determined by their actions (karma) performed in the past. Modern scholars sometimes refer to this shift as the "ethicization" of the ritual; to perhaps be more faithful to the logic of the Vedas, the ritual is not so much ethicized as is the entirety of life conceived of in terms of ritual. The beginnings of an ideal of renunciation are also found in the Upaniṣads in the form of the famous teacher Yājñavalkya's decision to "go forth"—that is, abandon his home and possessions in pursuit of the *ātman* (BĀU 2.4.1).

The long fifth century BCE

The latest scholarly opinion places the life of the Buddha, and thus also of Mahāvīra, his contemporary, during the fifth century BCE (Bechert 1991–1992; Cousins 1996). The time period in which these important teachers lived is an important but little-understood period in India's history, stretching from when the prose Upaniṣads were composed in (perhaps) the sixth century BCE to the unification of North India under the Nandas in the mid-fourth century BCE, which I will dub the "long fifth century BCE." This period witnessed enormous changes in North Indian society, propelled by the "second urbanization"—a reurbanization of North India after the much earlier collapse of the Indus Valley Civilization but this time centred in the Ganges Valley (Erdosy 1995). Politically, North India at this time was divided into city-states known as *janapada*s, conventionally said to have numbered 16 in total. These *janapada*s increasingly came to vie with one another for power, with Magadha ultimately conquering the other *janapada*s in the fourth century BCE under the Nanda Dynasty. The long fifth century BCE in

India was thus somewhat similar to the Warring States Period in China, in which the various dukedoms of the Zhou Dynasty vied for power, culminating in the unification of China by the state of Qin (from which we get the word *China*) in 221 BCE.

The urbanization of this period led to increased opportunities for wealth accumulation; this, in turn, led to a split between householder and ascetic ideals that was characteristic of the age and became a key theme in Indian religions from then on. The Vedic texts contain passages supportive of both ideals: On the one hand, they speak of material prosperity (Thite 1975: 222–228) and the duty to produce children (TS 6.3.10.5; ŚBM 1.7.2.1–6; Olivelle 1993: 46–53); on the other hand, aspects of Vedic practice involve celibacy and ascetic-like renunciation (McGovern 2019: 104–112). In the semi-nomadic society that produced the Vedic texts, these two ideals could coexist in productive tension with one another, but the increased wealth accumulation that urbanization allowed appears to have led to a bifurcation between them. Some were quite happy to take advantage of the opportunity to accumulate great wealth, while others, who came to be known as *śramaṇa*s, were highly critical of the accumulation of wealth (witness the railing against so-called *mahāsāla* Brahmans in Buddhist sources such as Sn. 2.7[2]) and embraced more or less extreme renunciatory ideals in response. The word *śramaṇa* comes from the verbal root √*śram*, which means to "toil" and/or "become tired." The meaning implied is thus quite close to that of the English word *ascetic*, by which it is commonly translated.

Most modern scholarship has assumed that the *śramaṇa*s arose in opposition to the Brahmans, who were committed to this-worldly values and slow to accept the supposedly new values of renunciatory asceticism. In my own work (McGovern 2019), I have argued that this model is predicated on a methodological error and an anachronistic reading of the evidence. Buddhist and Jain *sūtra*s from before the Common Era are highly critical of Brahmans who do not renounce, and the second-century-BCE Brahman grammarian Patañjali gives *śramaṇa-brāhmaṇa* as an example of an "oppositional compound" whose members are characterized by "eternal strife" (commentary on Aṣṭ. 2.4.9). Scholars have taken this as evidence of the opposition between *śramaṇa*s and Brahmans, and indeed it is clear that *śramaṇa*s and Brahmans came to be seen as opposed in ancient India, but there is no reason to assume that this was always the case. To do so is to treat these two identities as metahistorical essences, but following Bayart, I prefer to treat them as dynamic articulations responding to the immediate conditions of any point in history.

Reaching a clear understanding of the social conditions of the long fifth century BCE during which *śramaṇa* first became a key moniker of identity is difficult due to a dearth of sources. The early Buddhist *sūtra*s are the best source for the period immediately after the composition of the early Upaniṣads, but they were passed down orally for centuries, and in the form they come down to us, they probably reflect the somewhat later imperial period (McGovern 2019: 48–50). As I have argued, however, there is plenty of evidence in the earliest Buddhist and Jain sources, as well as the edicts of Aśoka, for the terms *śramaṇa* and *Brahman* being used in a non-mutually-exclusive, non-oppositional manner. The most plentiful example is the compound *śramaṇa-brāhmaṇa* (variously spelled according to the relevant Pali or Prakrit), which, contrary to what Patañjali claims, is never used in an oppositional way. Instead, the compound is used both by Buddhists and by Aśoka to treat *śramaṇa*s and Brahmans as a single category of people worthy of gifts and honour; in addition, Buddhists use the compound to treat them as a single category of people with various wrong views (McGovern 2019: 70–82). Moreover, I have argued on the basis of the very oldest Buddhist and Jain texts, the *Aṭṭhaka Vagga*, *Pārāyaṇa Vagga*, *Āyāraṅga Sutta*, and *Sūyagaḍaṃga Sutta*, that early Buddhists and Jains claimed that their respective founders and those who achieve liberation in their respective dispensations are Brahmans (McGovern 2019: 87–99). While earlier scholars have taken such passages as representing a "co-opting" of

the prestige of the Brahmans, I argue that we should take the early Buddhists and Jains seriously as Brahmans because *that is what they claimed to be*. Their claim was by no means illogical; it appears to be based on the Vedic concept of *brahmacarya*, the initiatory process for a Brahman that requires celibacy and a degree of renunciation (McGovern 2019: 99–112).[3] As Tim Lubin has argued, some Vedic passages seem to imply that at one time, *brahmacarya* is what made a person a Brahman (Lubin 2005: 85).

I therefore propose that the religious world of North India during the long fifth century BCE should be understood as a single Brahmanical field consisting of a loose system of teachers attracting pupils. That this was the actual situation is obscured by the fact that all of our sources for the period deliberately efface the embeddedness of their founders and movements within the broader social world of the time. Jain and Buddhist sources, on the one hand, attempt to portray their respective founders as having become Awakened *sui generis* and thus downplay the links they had to other teachers and exaggerate their independent followings. Brahmanical sources, on the other hand, engage in a process of hyper-Vedicization and ignore for centuries the existence of groups who operated under different *imaginaires*. An important source for discerning the actual structure of North Indian religious society during the long fifth century BCE is the *Isibhāsiyāiṃ* (Vinaysagar 1988), an old but obscure Jain text that scholars have noted is rather unique in its portrayal of ancient Indian religious teaching. It consists of verses attributed to a variety of "seers" (*isi*s), several of whose names can be identified with figures that came to be associated with specific sectarian traditions: Yājñavalkya and Nārada from the Brahmanical tradition, Śāriputra (or perhaps the Buddha himself) and Mahākāśyapa from the Buddhist tradition, Vardhamāna and Pārśva from the Jain tradition, and Makkhali Gosāla from the Ājīvaka tradition. Although the verses attributed to all of them have a somewhat Jain cast, unique doctrines nonetheless sometimes appear in particular cases, and the teachers are all treated on equal footing as independent authorities, not ranked or otherwise grouped according to supposed sectarian affiliation. Given that the Jains (or Nirgranthas) composed their scriptures relatively late compared to the Buddhists and (as we will see) probably had a more protracted process of solidifying their identity, it is possible the *Isibhāsiyāiṃ* represents an early attempt to project identity in a manner that differed from that of the Buddhists and of later Jains—not by valorizing a single putative founder but by putting one's own spin on the actual variegated religious landscape (more akin to the Brahmanical *āśrama* system, which I will discuss in the next section).

A loose system of teachers, all claiming to be Brahmans or to show the way to Brahmanhood, would necessarily have shown a great deal of diversity in ideology and practice. I propose that this diversity can be represented by dividing the Brahmanical teachers of the long fifth century BCE into three broad categories. First, there was an *avant-garde*, consisting of the most radical, hard-core *śramaṇa*s. These teachers and groups embraced the most innovative ideas and practices of the time—*saṃsāra*, karma, the search for the self and its liberation, meditation, asceticism, celibacy—and ran with them. They made use of the vernacular, not necessarily out of any conscious opposition to Sanskrit, but simply since that was the practical mode of communication at that time, which was well before the "birth" of Sanskrit as a classical language (Pollock 2006). In addition, although their ideas and practices were indebted to the earlier Vedic tradition, as we saw in the last section, they made little reference to it because, as is the case in an *avant-garde*, it did not interest them to do so.

The second group would have been reactionary Brahmanical householders. These I identify with the authors of the Brahmanical Sūtra literature, in particular the Dharmasūtras. These teachers were committed to a householder lifestyle, and, as such, they rejected the asceticism of the *śramaṇa*s, especially their commitment to lifelong celibacy, arguing that there is a Vedic injunction that all men must sire children. Unlike the *avant-garde*, they did make constant

reference back to the Vedic tradition, even as they were innovative in their appropriation of it. They were, as such, committed to the maintenance of the *yajña* and the language of the Vedas, Sanskrit, in the face of their increasing irrelevance.

Finally, although these first two groups most clearly represented the divide between renunciatory and householder values, there was a third group that I would characterize as a conservative mainstream. These are the practitioners that Buddhist texts refer to by the slang term *jaṭila* (referring to their matted hair) and that the Dharmasūtras refer to by the more descriptive term *vānaprastha* ("forest dweller"). These groups embraced the newest ideas of the age while still maintaining a connection to the Vedic tradition through their maintenance of a sacred fire; they thus represented a conservative continuity with the world of the Upaniṣads, neither radically breaking from the Vedic past nor taking a reactionary stance against the *avant-garde*.

The householder Brahman reaction

The age of the *janapada*s came to an end in the mid-fourth century BCE when the Nanda Dynasty of Magadha, a *janapada* located in modern-day Bihar, conquered much of North India. The Nanda Dynasty was overthrown by Candragupta Maurya in 322 BCE, who expanded the empire to the northwest; in the third century, his grandson, Aśoka Maurya, conquered virtually the entire Indian subcontinent. The Mauryan Empire at this extent did not last long, and the dynasty was overthrown in 185 BCE when the last Mauryan emperor was assassinated by the Brahman Puṣyamitra Śuṅga, but this imperial period was a crucial turning point in Indian history. It was in this period that writing, using the Brahmi script that is the basis of all modern South Asian scripts, was introduced in India for the first time since the collapse of the Indus Valley Civilization. In addition, although a subcontinent-wide polity would only be reintroduced intermittently in later history, Aśoka's unification of the region, however brief, served as the basis for a unified albeit diverse Indian culture. Finally, the Mauryas' patronage of *śramaṇa* groups served as an impetus driving the reactionary efforts of householder (non-śramaṇic) Brahmans.

Although the anonymous post-Vedic literature of the Brahmans, like the Vedas themselves, is notoriously difficult to date, it was around the imperial period that a vast literature in Sanskrit (in spite of the drift of the vernacular away from the language of the Vedas) was composed, both about Sanskrit itself and about the *yajña*, which was also becoming increasingly obsolete. It seems safe to assume that certain Brahmans in this era were concerned, due to their reactionary tendencies, to maintain traditions that were falling into disuse as the intellectual currents of their day moved past them. The dating of the grammatical literature on Sanskrit is the most certain: The first grammar of Sanskrit (or any language in India), the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, was composed in the mid-fourth century BCE by Pāṇini, and an extensive commentary on the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the *Mahābhāṣya*, was composed by Patañjali during the reign of Puṣyamitra Śuṅga in the mid- to late second century BCE. As it happens, these two major grammatical works serve roughly as bookends for the imperial period. Around the same time, Brahmans composed Sanskrit works explaining the *yajña* in a new genre, the *sūtra*—a pithy, almost bullet-point-like format useful for detailed explanations. These texts fall into two classes: the Śrautasūtras, which explain the extensive *yajña* rites found in the Vedas, and the Gṛhyasūtras, which explain simplified household rituals derived from the former.

Although the grammatical works and ritual *sūtra*s reflect the reactionary concerns of the householder Brahmans, these concerns find their culmination in a third class of *sūtra* literature, the Dharmasūtras. Modern scholars usually characterize the Dharmasūtras as the beginning of the tradition of Indian law (the Dharmaśāstra), which indeed they are, but within their immediate context, they were an ideological response to the concept of *dharma* found among the *śramaṇa*s (Hiltebeitel

2011: 184). While *dharma* for the *śramaṇa*s was universalistic and oriented toward the ultimate goal of liberation from *saṃsāra* that would only be attained by a few, *dharma* for the Dharmasūtras and later Dharmaśāstra tradition was particularistic, even if subsumed under the authority of the Veda. It focused on ordinary life and was differentiated among various social groups.

In the Dharmasūtras, reactionary Brahmans created two ideological tools whose purpose was to combat śramaṇic ideology and establish the supremacy of the householder lifestyle. These two tools were *varṇa* and *āśrama*, the twin pillars of the *varṇāśramadharma* that would become a central tenet of classical Hinduism. Although issues of birth can be found in earlier Vedic texts, the antiquity of the *varṇa* system as a rigid system of four classes determined solely by birth has, I have argued, been grossly exaggerated, and can only be found explicitly stated for the first time in the *Āpastambadharmasūtra* (McGovern 2019: 140–151). The purpose of defining it in this rigid sense was to divorce Brahmanhood from the practice of celibacy and asceticism, as implied by certain Vedic texts on *brahmacarya* and seized upon in śramaṇic conceptions of Brahmanhood as rooted in *brahmacarya*. The second ideological tool, the *āśrama* system, then served to define the major forms of religious practice in ancient India for the purpose of rejecting all except that of the householder. As was shown by Olivelle (1993), the *āśrama* system in the Dharmasūtras is not a series of four stages of life but rather of four life-long options, three of them (*brahmacārin* or "student," *vānaprastha* or "forest dweller," and *parivrājaka* or "wanderer") celibate and one (*gṛhastha* or "house dweller") not. Note that the term *āśrama* is based on the same verbal root √*śram* as is *śramaṇa*; the Dharmasūtra authors cleverly characterized the life of a householder as a form of "asceticism" and then made the audacious claim that it was the best or only valid form of asceticism because it alone satisfied the Vedic injunction to produce children (ĀDhS 2.23.3–2.24.14, GDhS 3.36, BDhS 2.11.27–34, VDhS 8.14–17).

The evidence shows that by the end of the imperial period, when Patañjali characterized the *śramaṇa* and Brahman as being opposed in "eternal strife," the reactionary householder Brahmans were fully successful in arrogating the appellation *Brahman* to themselves. They did so by relentlessly referring to their own form of Brahmanism as the only valid form of Brahmanism and by ignoring the terms and claims of identity made by *śramaṇa*s. Buddhists, on the other hand, produced a significant literature portraying the Buddha debating with householder Brahmans. While these texts, which I call "encounter dialogs," are arguably more logically cogent than the claims made by householder Brahmans, they served mainly to provide free advertising to the latter's claims, in particular the *varṇa* system, a gift that the householder Brahmans did not reciprocate (McGovern 2019: 193–216). In any case, major *śramaṇa* groups, including the Buddhists, the Jains, and the Ājīvakas, effectively ceded claim to the term *Brahman*, thus creating the opposition between the identities *śramaṇa* and Brahman that was in full force by the time Patañjali wrote his grammar in the second century BCE.

Identity among the *Śramaṇa*s

As the opposition between the identities *śramaṇa* and Brahman became increasingly bifurcated, identities formed among the *śramaṇa*s to distinguish them from one another. I will begin with the ascetics referred to as *vānaprastha*s ("forest dwellers") in the Dharmasūtras, or by the slang term *jaṭila* (referring to their matted hair) in Buddhist texts. I characterize these ascetics as forming the "conservative mainstream" of ancient Brahmanism. To be clear, by "mainstream," I do not mean to imply that they were the majority, only that they represented a natural continuity with the general thrust of Vedic thought and practice. This mainstream was "conservative" in that it was neither radical in its pursuit of new ideas like certain *śramaṇa* groups, nor was it reactionary in opposing them like the householder Brahmans. A variety of practices are attributed

to *vānaprastha*s/*jaṭila*s in the Dharmasūtras and Buddhist texts, among them living in the forest, keeping matted hair, subsisting on clothes and food derived from the forest, and maintaining a sacred fire (McGovern 2019: 112–122). It seems that often they were celibate but at times would dwell in the forest with a wife.

It is difficult to ascertain the precise doctrines of these ascetics, who indeed were probably quite diverse, because they did not produce a literature of their own in the same way as the Jains, Buddhists, and reactionary Brahmans. Unlike the *śramaṇa* groups that I will turn to next, the *vānaprastha*s/*jaṭila*s did not develop a strong sense of self-identity (both of the terms for them were applied by outsiders), and in fact, they ultimately did not participate in the separation of *śramaṇa* identity from Brahmanical identity. Instead, they maintained their links to Vedic traditions sufficiently that they were absorbed into the classical Brahmanical synthesis as it became more accommodating to ascetic lifestyles, as I will discuss in the next section.

The more radical *śramaṇa* group that is arguably most closely related to the *vānaprastha*s is the Buddhists, although this is not the name that they were known by in ancient India. Instead, they called themselves the *samaṇā sakyaputtiyā* (DN III.84), or "ascetics who are sons of the Śākya," and they were known as such, or simply as Śākyas, for centuries. The name refers to the fact that the founder of their order, or *saṅgha*, was from the Śākya clan along what is now the border between India and Nepal. According to the early Buddhist or "Śākya" literature, the founder of the order, named Gotama, studied with two teachers, Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, who appear to have participated in the same intellectual milieu that much later developed into Sāṃkhya. These two teachers taught him two successive levels of meditative attainment, the sphere of nothingness and the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, which they respectively claimed to represent the final goal of liberation (MN 26). Gotama, however, was dissatisfied with these attainments and is said to have discovered a yet-higher attainment, the cessation of perception and feeling, which instead he claimed constituted Awakening (MN 111). Alexander Wynne (2007) has shown that the meditative techniques Gotama was trained in are similar to those described in Brahmanical texts, and I argue that on this basis we can see Buddhism and Sāṃkhya as sharing distant intellectual roots (McGovern forthcoming). Although Buddhist philosophy developed quite quickly even before the Common Era, originally, the evidence would suggest, it was based on a simple act of super-enthronement (à la Sanderson 1986)—an act of inclusivism in which one's own ultimate is simply placed above that of a rival system—involving not deities but states of meditative attainment.

More radical than the Śākyas in the Brahmanical *avant-garde* were extreme materialist ascetics who practiced renunciation to the point of going about completely naked and ultimately ending their lives by self-starvation. The earliest forms of identity for these ascetics, however, are somewhat difficult to parse. According to modern terminology, they consisted of two groups: the Ājīvakas, who died out before the modern period, and the Jains, who constitute a world religion today. This is not how their identities were taxonomized in ancient times, however. In ancient India, there were two terms of identity for these groups: *nirgrantha* ("without bonds," P. *nigaṇṭha*) and *ājīvaka* ("lifer"). The Jain scriptures make use of *nigaṇṭha* as a term of self-identity, but not *ājīvaka*, implying a straightforward transition of two distinct groups once called Nir-granthas and Ājīvakas, later Jains and Ājīvakas, but as recent research has demonstrated, the relationship between these terms of identity is more complex. Bronkhorst has shown that in the early Buddhist scriptures, *ājīvaka* refers to naked (*acelaka*) ascetics, while *nigaṇṭha*s are invariably described as wearing a single garment. Likewise, although the Buddhist texts identify the leader of the *nigaṇṭha*s as Nāṭaputta, whom the Jain tradition (as Prakrit Nāyaputta) identifies with the twenty-fourth Tīrthaṅkara Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, he is said to have taught a fourfold restraint

(Bronkhorst 2000: 516–517). According to the Jain scriptures, however, the very distinction between Vardhamāna and his predecessor, the twenty-third Tīrthaṅkara Pārśva, was that the latter (like the Nāṭaputta of Buddhist texts) taught a fourfold restraint and wore a garment, while the former taught a *fivefold* restraint and went naked (Dundas 2002: 31).

There is ample evidence that the Ājīvakas were an important *śramaṇa* group in ancient India, including the fact that no less than Aśoka donated caves to them (Balcerowicz 2016: 6). According to the early Buddhist *sūtra*s, Ājīvakas recognized three preeminent teachers as having attained liberation: Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Saṅkicca, and Makkhali Gosāla (AN 6.57). These three teachers are also listed in Buddhist texts together with the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta, Pakudha Kaccāyana, and Pūraṇa Kassapa as six teachers with wrong views (DN 2). There is evidence that Pūraṇa Kassapa and Pakudha Kaccāyana, although little is known about them, were in some way connected to the Ājīvakas (Basham 1951: 80–93), so the inclusion of the Nigaṇṭha Nāṭaputta in this list implies a connection as well. Indeed, this is also implied by a passage in the Buddhist *sūtra*s that attributes to the Ājīvakas the belief that *nigaṇṭha*s wearing a garment were of a certain attainment but below those of the three liberated beings (Nanda Vaccha, Kisa Saṅkicca, and Makkhali Gosāla) and their naked followers (AN 6.57).

Balcerowicz, in a recent publication, has shown that there was likely a relationship between Mahāvīra and Gosāla that is preserved in the Jain scriptures but distorted to glorify the former and denigrate the latter. Chapter 15 of the *Bhagavatī Sūtra* (*Piyāvaṇṇatti*), known as the *Teya-nisagga*, narrates in great detail the six years of association, plus other interactions, between Mahāvīra and Makkhali Gosāla, reporting that Mahāvīra reluctantly took Gosāla as his disciple and later broke off his association and forbade his disciples contact when the latter falsely claimed to have attained Jinahood. Based on the obvious polemical bent of this text, the fact that six years of association are inexplicable in the context of the story; and the fact that Mahāvīra apparently gave up clothing and began receiving alms in the palms of his hands (like an Ājīvaka) in his second year of asceticism, at the same time that he began this association, Balcerowicz argues that Mahāvīra was originally a clothed Nirgrantha in the order of Pārśva who then became a disciple of Gosāla for a time, leading to a lasting influence of Ājīvakism on Jainism whose memory was later expunged (Balcerowicz 2016).

Balcerowicz's revisionist reading of the *Teya-nisagga* may be overly literalistic, but he is likely correct that the connection between the Jains and Ājīvakas was once much closer than Jainism came to admit. He also does not have a particularly convincing explanation for the fact that the Buddhist texts portray Nāṭaputta as a Pārśvaite, or even as Pārśva himself—that is, as wearing a garment and maintaining the fourfold restraint—chalking it up to Buddhist misperception of the complicated relationship between Pārśva, Mahāvīra, and Gosāla. If we abandon the attempt to take the *Teya-nisagga*, even de-polemicized, as literal history, then it can be read as an old but nonetheless post-facto attempt to make sense of the complicated relationship between the Nirgranthas and the Ājīvakas. Balcerowicz's insight that the tension between Nirgrantha and Ājīvaka practice and even to a certain extent doctrine is reproduced to this day *within Jainism* in the Śvetāmbara-Digambara split (2016: 319) is surely on the right track. It need not be explained, as Balcerowicz does, however, in terms of a literal temporary conversion of Mahāvīra to Ājīvakism that brought in Ājīvaka practice and teaching and a lasting tension between the Ājīvaka imports and old Nirgrantha teachings within Jainism. Rather, this tension within Jainism can be explained by assuming that what we now call Jainism is the product of an ancient religious milieu that consisted of a close association between garment-clad Nirgranthas and naked Ājīvakas, with a fluid allegiance to a multitude of teachers, and for reasons that are now obscure, this religious culture became unified under allegiance to Vardhamāna Mahāvīra, a

character likely partially mythologized and partly based on one or more historical figures (Mette 1995), with allegiance to alternative figures like Gosāla under the rubric "Ājīvaka" eventually dying out.

In the period we are concerned with, then, there was a variegated landscape of extreme materialist ascetics, with a multitude of teachers claiming followings, divided roughly into two identities according to mode of ascetic practice: Nirgranthas who wore garments and Ājīvakas who went naked. The Buddhist passage cited previously implies that the latter saw the former as engaging in a valid form of asceticism but less rigorous than their own. Based on the teachings recorded in the Jain scriptures, this milieu of extreme materialists, while having various doctrines, probably shared the general belief that karma is a physical substance that weighs down the soul, keeping it trapped in *saṃsāra* and preventing it from floating to the top of the universe and attaining its innate state of bliss and omniscience. The path to liberation, therefore, ultimately necessitated the cessation of all physical action, the basis for the Jain practice of *sallekhanā* (religious death by starvation). Bronkhorst (2007: 38–52) has convincingly argued that the "fatalism" attributed to Gosāla and Ājīvakism probably referred to the doctrine that past karma must simply be allowed to come to fruition over a multitude of lifetimes before liberation is possible, in contrast to what became the standard Jain view, that austerities can be used to burn off past karma and thus hasten liberation.

More research clearly needs to be done on the relationship between ancient forms of identity among *śramaṇa*s and the medieval and modern forms of identity that developed out of them. In spite of the assumption otherwise, close examination makes it clear that the relationship between the two is not linear, and there were major reconfigurations of identity in antiquity and later on. As I noted previously, Gotama the founder of the Śākyas (Buddhists) may have begun as a student who studied under teachers in the Brahmanical *avant-garde* and then claimed Awakening on the basis of a simple act of meditative super-enthronement. The fully developed Buddhist scriptures of the *Tripiṭaka*, however, show significant development from such simple beginnings. The teaching of the "Middle Way," later incorporated into the Buddha's biography in the form of his life as a prince and subsequent six years of austerity, appears to intentionally stake a position for the Śākyas between the extreme asceticism of the materialists (Nirgranthas and Ājīvakas) and the indulgence of the *mahāśāla* (householder) Brahmans. It is also quite possible that the Śākyas incorporated Nirgrantha/Ājīvaka conceptions of *saṃsāra* (which were not necessarily native to the milieu in which Gotama was trained), turning them on their head, however, by replacing radical materialism with idealism, encapsulated in the Buddha's reported teaching, "It is intention that I call karma" (AN 6.63). Moreover, as already discussed, there must have been a complex process by which the radical materialists known as Nirgranthas and Ājīvakas coalesced into the Jains; in addition, the process by which the "mainstream" teaching of the conservative *vānaprastha*s was reabsorbed by reactionary Brahmanism is worthy of further study (but see McGovern forthcoming).

Reactionary Brahmanism accommodating asceticism

The period between the fall of the Mauryan Empire in the second century BCE and the foundation of the Gupta Empire in the third century BCE, which scholars have recently dubbed the period "between the empires" (Olivelle 2006), witnessed a significant change in reactionary Brahmanism's strategy toward śramaṇic practice, which would become central to the identity of classical Hinduism. The basic reactionary project continued apace but with a particular literary turn, coinciding with the "birth of Sanskrit," through which reactionary

Brahmans valorized Sanskrit as an eternal language and, as Bronkhorst has dubbed it, "colonized the past" by writing their ideology, especially the *varṇa* system, but also the importance of *yajña* and Vedic mythology in general, into narratives of the past, most significantly the epic *Mahābhārata*. Nevertheless, the project in this age was more accommodating to asceticism than it had been in the Dharmasūtras.

Two examples of this accommodation to śramaṇic lifestyles serve to illustrate the point. The first is the revision of the *āśrama* system in the *Mānavadharmaśāstra* (Laws of Manu). Students of Hinduism are usually most familiar with the *āśrama* system as found in this text, in which there are four stages of life: Vedic student (*brahmacārin*), householder (*gṛhastha*), forest dweller (*vānaprastha*), and wanderer (*parivrājaka*). As Olivelle (1993) showed, however, this was a modification from the earlier formulation found in the Dharmasūtras, in which the *āśrama*s are *options* of four life-long vocations to choose from. This modification is significant: It signals a shift from rejection of śramaṇic lifestyles to accommodation of them within certain limits. Essentially, pursuit of liberation within a celibate, ascetic lifestyle is permitted, so long as one satisfies the Vedic injunction to produce children first (McGovern 2019: 215).

Various Brahmanical texts produced in this period between the empires advanced *varṇāśrama*, with *āśrama* modified in this way, as the pinnacle of *dharma*, thus laying the groundwork for it to become a central principle of classical Hinduism. Perhaps the most important example is the *Mahābhārata*, which frequently extols the importance of *varṇa* and *āśrama* throughout its narrative. Within the epic, the *Bhagavadgītā* advances the project of accommodation to asceticism in a different way, and I give it here as the second example of reactionary Brahmanism's accommodation to śramaṇic lifestyles. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, Kṛṣṇa describes three *yoga*s, or religious paths: *karmayoga* (the path of action), *jñānayoga* (the path of knowledge), and *bhaktiyoga* (the path of devotion). He states that all three are valid, but the third is the best. The inclusion of *karmayoga* and *jñāna-yoga* on equal terms indicates a synthesis of this-worldly and renunciatory values. Kṛṣṇa rejects the very possibility of non-action, in an obvious swipe at the Ājīvakas/Nirgranthas, but in its place he enjoins renouncing the *fruits* of action—that is, acting without concern for the result or reward (*Bhagavadgītā*, Chapter 3). Traditional Vedic sacrifices are accepted and even encouraged under the rubric *karmayoga*, but the text clearly accepts the śramaṇic premise (already implicit in the later Vedic literature itself) that sacrifice brings limited rewards (*Bhagavadgītā* 2.43). The inclusion of *jñānayoga* indicates the acceptance of meditative, as opposed to harsh mortificatory, forms of ascetic practice, with Kṛṣṇa specifically adopting the language of proto-Sāṃkhya (*Bhagavadgītā*, Chapter 13). The inclusion of *bhaktiyoga*, however, as the "best" of the three *yoga*s represents an audacious act of inclusivism that allows for the ultimate synthesis of this worldly and renunciatory values. Yes, you can and should engage in ritual and other action, but it brings limited rewards, and you should renounce those rewards anyway. Yes, you can engage in the pursuit of the *ātman*, but it is difficult. It is best to simply devote yourself to God in the person of Kṛṣṇa, and he will liberate you from the suffering of *saṃsāra* (BG 4.9–11).

Conclusion: sectarian confrontation in the Gupta age

Although the sense of opposition between *śramaṇa*s and Brahmans was clearly quite strong by the second century BCE, as attested by Patañjali, and *śramaṇa*s had developed internal terms of identity by that time as well, it is interesting that, throughout the period between the empires, reactionary Brahmans did not engage with *śramaṇa*s on the latter's own terms. The converse was not true: Jain and especially Buddhist texts from the very beginning engage directly with the claims of reactionary householder Brahmans. The fact that the latter did not reciprocate for

many centuries appears to have been part of a deliberate strategy to portray the entire world in (reactionary) "Brahmanical" terms (Bronkhorst 2011; McGovern 2019: 195–196). This situation finally changed during and after the Gupta Empire (late third century to 543 CE). As Verardi has argued, the Gupta Empire was the realization of the (reactionary) Brahmans' hopes and dreams (Verardi 2011: 128–196), as expressed so frequently in the literature of the period between the empires. Eltschinger has argued more specifically that during the Gupta Empire, there was a shift in the theory of *yuga*s from concern about *mleccha*s (barbarians) in this *kali yuga* to concern about *pāṣaṇḍa*s (sectarians). This, he argues, was due to the fact that foreign invaders were less of a concern during a period of stable indigenous rule, and under the highly sympathetic patronage of the Bhāgavata Guptas, Brahmans turned their attention instead to enemies within. From the sixth century onwards, we finally see specific references to *śramaṇa* groups in the Brahmanical literature, with the Mīmāṃsa under Kumārila Bhaṭṭa in particular reforming as a direct polemical refutation of "heretical" systems, including those of the Śākyas and Nirgranthas (Eltschinger 2014: 70–72).

Thus was completed the transformation of śramaṇic and Brahmanical identity into the form in which we know it today. *Śramaṇa* began as a form of Brahmanical identity that embraced a vision of Brahmanhood rooted in celibacy and renunciation. This vision was opposed by reactionary Brahmans who insisted on the need to produce children. They were successful in arrogating the identity "Brahman" to themselves, but eventually they were forced to accommodate on the issue of renunciation, allowing for it in certain circumstances and re-absorbing the conservative mainstream of śramaṇic practice. With the triumph of reactionary Brahmanism in the Gupta Empire, Brahmans finally articulated their own identity in such a way as to make explicit their opposition to specific forms of śramaṇic identity: those of the Buddhists and Jains. And this, of course, was the foundation of the religious identities that we recognize today as having emerged from Indian antiquity: Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain.

Notes

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2 In this text, several old, wealthy (literally *mahāsālā*, "having great halls") Brahmans approach and ask him whether they properly follow the tradition of the Brahmans of old. The Buddha responds that they do not, that the Brahmans of old were free of sensual desire, celibate, and only performed vegetal sacrifices. In time, however, they became greedy of the wealth of kings and persuaded the latter to perform elaborate animal sacrifices so that they could enrich themselves.
3 This is evident in the earliest strata of the Buddhist scriptures. In the full form they come down to us, the Buddhist texts reflect a situation in which the social existence of the *varṇa*s was taken for granted (McGovern 2019: 165–192).

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4

DHARMA IN CLASSICAL HINDUISM

David Brick and Donald R. Davis, Jr.

No term or concept within the Hindu religious tradition is more important than *dharma*. Indeed, *dharma* has been regarded as the single most important term and concept in classical Indian religions generally, not only in Hinduism (Olivelle 2009a: vii). By all accounts, *dharma* has a wide range of meanings; and the various meanings and their historical relationship have been difficult for scholars to pin down. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the word *dharma* has been the subject of several penetrating studies in recent decades (Halbfass 1988; Matilal 2002; Fitzgerald 2004; Olivelle 2005, 2009a; Davis 2007; Hiltebeitel 2011). This chapter synthesizes the most compelling and significant conclusions of these scholarly studies and provides an account of the early development of the concept of *dharma* within the Hindu religious tradition.

The classic senses of *dharma*

We start with an account of what the word *dharma* generally means. Though no single standard or classic meaning exists, we might reasonably speak of a standard *set* of related meanings of the term *dharma* within early Hinduism. The range of common translations illustrates the problem: law, duty, merit, right action, virtue, justice, and righteousness (all of these often capitalized to indicate the special, sacred character of Hindu *dharma*). These are the basic meanings found in Hindu texts composed in the period when *dharma* first became the central and organizing term of Hindu religious discourse (c. 300 BCE—300 CE). Since these related meanings persist throughout later historical periods and had an enduring influence on Hindu religious culture, we might think of the set as the classic senses of the word *dharma* within Hinduism.

Drawing on the *Mahābhārata*, James Fitzgerald (2009) brings some order to the semantic complexity of the word *dharma*. Although he focuses on the great epic, we believe that his conclusions also apply to other Hindu texts, including the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Purāṇas. Therefore, the complex, yet bounded understanding of Hindu *dharma* that he presents amounts to a generally accurate and satisfactory account of the term in its most historically influential senses—its classic set of meanings. Fitzgerald (2009: 251–253) identifies the unifying theme of *dharma*, in its sundry uses within the epic, as something that is transcendentally good to do or to be. Drawing on the work of Paul Hacker (2009 [1965]), he then argues that the word has three more specific, yet still basic, senses, all of which are anchored to this unifying theme. First, *dharma* can denote action, specifically a variety of good action. In this sense, it is closely related to the idea

of *karma*, action, especially ritual action, that brings good results when performed correctly or properly. Second, it can denote the abstract quality of goodness, righteousness, or justness. This is the normative foundation of *dharma* in which it becomes a rule defining what makes an action good. And, third, it can denote good personal qualities or attributes, in which case "virtue" is an apt translation. Here, *dharma* becomes the religious substance created by a good act. It builds up in a person and forms their character and disposition. In addition, Fitzgerald (2009: 254) contends—rightly in our view—that, of these three basic senses of *dharma*, the first—*dharma* as action—is the core idea from which the other two are semantic expansions. *Dharma* is, more than anything else, a species of action: good action. And it is not just good action but *transcendentally* good action (Fitzgerald 2009: 251–252). In other words, *dharma* pertains to forces and realities beyond ordinary human experience.

One may also think about this threefold categorization of *dharma* chronologically. Paul Hacker (2009 [1965]: 486) observes that in classical Hindu texts, *dharma* denotes the three temporal aspects of good or right action—before, during, and after its performance. For instance, it refers not only to good action itself but also to the continuing existence of good action after it is performed in the form of substantive *karma*—something close to "merit." Such a meaning of the term *dharma* is intended when, for instance, the *Nandi Purāṇa* (cited at *Dānakāṇḍa* 12.131) instructs a man who has paid for the copying of a sacred book and duly given it away to dedicate the *dharma* (merit, good act) to his ancestors. In most actual usage, however, the normative aspect of *dharma* is emphasized and, thus, the term refers to the rule prescribing a particular good action before it is done. It is this prescriptive sense of *dharma* that has made "law" a standard English rendering of the word *dharma*. When accepted and internalized by an individual, an external rule or command becomes an obligation or duty—the latter word being another common translation of the word *dharma* (Fitzgerald 2009: 254). One feels this duty internally prior to carrying out an action. These related categorizations portray *dharma* as a composite either rule–act–merit or righteousness before–during–and–after.

From these categorizations, we may highlight other important aspects of *dharma* in classical Hindu sources. Due to its link with *karma*, *dharma* pertains to behaviour, particularly human behaviour, as opposed to beliefs, attitudes, doctrines, or other cultural or cosmic phenomena. In Buddhist thought, *dharma* often refers to the teachings of the Buddha and the doctrines of Buddhism. By contrast, classical Hindu *dharma* stresses that action is essential, while knowledge serves or supports action. Neither is Hindu *dharma* the dictate or revelation of a particular god or divine figure. Nevertheless, *dharma* is still normative. It is about how people *should* act, not how they do act; it commands us. Finally, *dharma* as proper behaviour is fundamentally connected with social good and soteriology. Specifically, both seen and unseen mechanisms cause one's actions to produce corresponding results in this world and the next, respectively. The effects of *dharma* thus transcend its performance.

To summarize, *dharma* expresses one or more of the following aspects of transcendentally good action: a rule prescribing a good action ("Law"), the felt need to carry out such a rule of good action ("Duty"), the good action itself ("Right Action"), or the results of such good actions ("Merit"). As noted, many uses of *dharma* do not intend for the word *dharma* to denote just one of these specific aspects of good action but instead to refer to all of them more or less at once (Fitzgerald 2009: 256). Finally, *dharma* denotes at times not only various aspects of good *action* but also the abstract quality of goodness ("Righteousness") as well as good personal qualities that do not necessarily involve discrete actions ("Virtue"). Such a meaning of *dharma*, for instance, seems to be at work when the *Mahābhārata* (12.63.7) states that "the *dharma* prescribed for a Brahman consists of self-control, purity, and rectitude." This set of distinct, yet related, concepts comprises Hindu *dharma* in its classic senses.

Dharma in the Veda and the Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā

Hindu traditions often proclaim a close connection between *dharma* and the Veda, the primordial sacred scripture of Hinduism. The linguistic predecessor of classical Sanskrit *dharma* is Vedic *dhárman*. The *Ṛgveda* uses *dhárman* exclusively, while later Vedic texts increasingly prefer *dharma*, as do all classical Sanskrit works. Both nouns derive from the verb root √*dhṛ* ("to hold, support"). Thus, etymologically, *dharma(n)* denotes a support, prop, or foundation. As Brereton (2009: 27) explains, the term is likely a more recent coinage than other key terms of Vedic culture. That is, *dharma* was not a culturally significant word during the Indo-Iranian period that preceded the composition of the *Ṛgveda*. A term that was important in earlier Indo-Iranian thought was *ṛta*, "order" or "truth," especially in a cosmic sense. However, the frequent connection made between Vedic *dhárman* and *ṛta* does not withstand textual or historical scrutiny. Halbfass (1988: 314–315) points out that, as an action noun often used in the plural, Vedic *dhárman* has little to do with a singular cosmic order. As a result, "The connection between *ṛta* and *dharma* is certainly much more elusive and problematic than it appears in numerous attempts to derive *dharma* from *ṛta*, or to explain it as its later 'equivalent.'" Modern authors connected the two based on a loose semantic resonance between them. *Dharma*, however, was a linguistic and cultural creation of the early speakers of Indo-Aryan languages, though it did not become a central idea until after the Vedic period. As for *dhárman* in the *Ṛgveda*, Brereton shows that it denotes foundations of several types: a foundation for a ritual, a foundation created by a ritual, a cosmic foundation, and—most importantly for its later usage—royal authority as a foundation for social life. Hence, the earliest attested usages of the word *dharma* in Indic literature are quite closely connected to its etymological source.

After the *Ṛgveda*, however, occurrences of the word *dharma* are rare in the rest of the Vedic corpus—far rarer than one would expect considering the term's central importance in the major works of post-Vedic Hinduism, particularly the Sanskrit epics and the Dharmaśāstras. Contrary to the older scholarly views, *dharma* was a marginal concept in Vedic religion. Patrick Olivelle's pioneering research (2009b) in this area has led to the most significant scholarly advancements in our understanding of the history of the term *dharma* in recent decades. Prior to Olivelle's article, the standard scholarly view had been that the authors of Vedic texts considered themselves deeply concerned with *dharma* but that they held *dharma* to pertain largely to the sacred rituals delineated in the Vedas. According to this view, the later use of *dharma*—particularly in the Dharmaśāstras and Sanskrit epics—to refer to a broader set of social behaviours represents a gradual expansion of the Brahmanical Hindu concept of *dharma* beyond ritual to all human activities. The historical error in this widely held view lies in the fact that Vedic texts virtually never present their explanations of ritual or myth as explanations of *dharma*. In this regard, they stand in marked contrast to the later tradition of Vedic hermeneutics known as Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā, which served as the dominant lens through which the later Hindu tradition engaged with Vedic texts. The older scholarly view of *dharma* as a Vedic ideal originates in the Mīmāṃsā view of *dharma*. Mīmāṃsā considers the Veda to be the ultimate source of all knowledge of *dharma* and to have as its fundamental purpose the articulation of *dharma*. Hence, the famous opening words of the *Pūrvamīmāṃsā Sūtra* (1.1.1): "Now, subsequently, the investigation into *dharma*" (*athāto dharmajijñāsā*). Modern scholars ignored the marginality of *dharma* in actual Vedic texts and instead imagined the term to be central to the Veda. More precisely, we anachronistically read the later Mīmāṃsā understanding of the Vedas back into the Vedas themselves.

Although *dharma* is a marginal term in the texts of the middle and late Vedic periods, its few occurrences provide a reasonable understanding of its meaning and usage before a momentous transformation made it the central and organizing term of Hindu religious discourse, roughly

around the third century BCE. In this period, *dharma* is primarily associated with the human king and his divine counterpart in his role as arbiter of justice, namely the god Varuṇa. Two passages from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* illustrate the general meaning and usage of the word *dharma* (Olivelle 2009b: 73–74). The first (ŚPB 5.3.3.9) deals with the royal consecration or *rājasūya* rite. When a king offers a ritual barley-cake to Varuṇa, the lord of *dharma*, Varuṇa in turn makes the king the lord of *dharma*. As a result, people come to him in matters of *dharma*, here meaning the law administered by a king. The second passage of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (11.1.6.24) affirms a substantive interpretation of *dharma*. It states that the rains are, in fact, the *dharmas* and justifies this esoteric equation as follows: "When waters come to this world, this entire world is in accordance with *dharma*. But when there is no rain, the strong take from the weak." Here *dharma* is a material carrier of morality. When the law administered by a king prevents the strong from stealing from the weak, the people still flourish, in spite of the lawlessness that drought brings.

The emergence of *dharma* as a Hindu ideal

Given the marginal status of *dharma* in Vedic religion, its subsequent rise to prominence within the Hindu tradition cannot be treated as matter of natural or gradual cultural evolution, because nearly all Hindu texts composed in the post-Vedic period (c. 300 BCE—300 CE) treat *dharma* as a central and organizing concept. The genre of classical Hindu law known as Dharmaśāstra, which likely emerged around the third century BCE, takes *dharma* as its main subject. Yet the Vedas do not presage this major shift—something deliberate and sudden happened. In order to explain why Brahman authors of the post-Vedic period wrote texts centrally concerned with *dharma*, we must look outside of the Vedic tradition. Two major historical events present themselves, both of which Olivelle (2009b: 82–84) discusses in detail. The first of these is the historical rise of the so-called heterodox religious movements in classical India, especially Buddhism; the second is the reign of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka in the third century BCE.

Around the fifth or sixth century BCE, a number of non-Brahmanical or non-Hindu religious movements arose in India, two of which survive to this day as important modern religions: Buddhism and Jainism. Both denied the sacred status of the Vedas and the special privileges of Brahmans. Plus, these new religious movements shared a number of prominent characteristics, especially a deeply ascetic orientation. One of these shared features of the new religions was their use of the word *dharma* to mean "core teaching" or doctrine. To explain why the heterodox groups used this term, Olivelle (2009b: 82–83) points out that, in portraying themselves and their founders, these groups drew upon existing royal vocabulary and existing royal symbols. For example, early Buddhist texts describe how the Buddha was born with all of the special physical marks of a world-conquering emperor (*cakravartin*), and they call his first sermon "the discourse setting in motion the wheel of *dharma*" (*dharmacakrapravartanasūtra*), wherein "wheel" connotes a royal chariot wheel. Noting the association of *dharma* with kingship, Olivelle (2009b: 82–83) argues that when heterodox groups chose the term *dharma* to refer to their teachings and doctrines, they merely repurposed another royal term and symbol for their own sectarian religious ends. In any case, whatever their reasons, it was non-Brahmanical groups—Buddhists in particular—who made *dharma* the central term in their religious vocabulary at a time when it still played a marginal role in Brahmanical Hindu religion.

Pivotal in the extant historical sources are the edicts of ancient India's most famous king, the Mauryan emperor Aśoka in the mid-third century BCE. Aśoka presents himself in his surviving edicts as both a lay-follower of the Buddha and a ruler who has rejected conquest through violence. Instead he dedicates himself to promoting adherence to *dharma* throughout his kingdom

and beyond. While the *dharma* vigorously promoted by Aśoka in his edicts approximates a universalistic moral code, not a distinctively Buddhist doctrine, his decision to make *dharma* the central term of his public policy is connected with his personal inclination toward Buddhism.

Consequently, Brahman intellectuals in the third century BCE would have found themselves living in a polity of unprecedented size and power ruled by a man who expressed his fundamental worldview in terms of *dharma*. In such a context, it is easy to understand why many Brahman intellectuals would also be inspired to frame their own religious tradition and worldview as *dharma*. And this they did in two ways. First, they reconceptualized the Vedas as the ultimate source of *dharma*. Post-Vedic Hindu texts, especially Mīmāṃsā, stress the Vedas as the foundation of knowledge, action, and salvation. Second, they created new kinds of texts— the Dharmaśāstras and Sanskrit epics—that strive to articulate a Brahmanical Hindu vision of *dharma*. Much of the Brahmanical literature composed in the following centuries represents an attempt to re-forge a strong connection between Brahmans and the ruling elite.

Dharma in Dharmaśāstra

Often referred to as Hindu law, Dharmaśāstra is the *śāstra*, or expert tradition, that takes *dharma* as its subject. Thus, *dharma* conceptually structures the whole Dharmaśāstra tradition. Furthermore, Dharmaśāstra provides the most comprehensive and influential articulation of *dharma* within all of Hinduism (Davis 2007). Chronologically, the tradition spans more than two millennia, from roughly the third century BCE to the eighteenth century CE. During this time, Dharmaśāstra works were composed in all areas of the Indian subcontinent.

Despite Dharmaśāstra's focus on *dharma*, its canonical definition within the tradition comes not from Dharmaśāstra itself but instead from the closely associated Mīmāṃsā tradition. The *Pūrvamīmāṃsā Sūtra* (1.1.2) defines *dharma* as a "benefit indicated by Vedic injunction" (*codanālakṣaṇo 'rthaḥ*). In other words, it is a rule of right conduct that, when properly carried out, produces positive results and, when violated, produces negative results. In this sense, *dharma* corresponds to just one of the classic senses of the term that we outlined earlier, namely "law." While certain passages in Dharmaśāstra use the word *dharma* in another of its classic Hindu senses, such passages are exceptional. Another feature of this definition is its basis in scripture. Nearly all Dharmaśāstra texts agree that there are three sources or means of knowing *dharma*. The first and most authoritative source is the Veda, the oldest and most sacred collection of Hindu scripture. The Vedic corpus contains hymns of praise to Vedic deities, detailed descriptions and rules for Vedic rituals, and philosophical speculations about the nature of the self and the divine. The second source of *dharma* is Smṛti, post-Vedic Hindu scriptures, especially Dharmaśāstra. Though many texts fall under this category, the works of the Dharmaśāstra tradition systematically prescribe the *dharma*s of Brahmanical Hindu life to which other texts and traditions respond. The third source of *dharma* is the customs of good people (*sadācāra*), the normative practices of elite, orthodox Brahmans. Thus, according to Dharmaśāstra, scripture in the form of the Vedas and the Smṛtis comprises the two most authoritative sources of knowledge about *dharma*. Custom, by contrast, plays a theoretically subsidiary role, although scholars have recently argued that it was, in reality, the primary source of Dharmaśāstra rules (Lariviere 2009 [1997]; Wezler 2009 [1999]; Lubin 2016).

Following Mīmāṃsā even further, the Dharmaśāstra tradition declares all knowledge of *dharma* to be based upon the Vedas. Using a fictive act of inference, Dharmaśāstra holds that the extant Vedas, those that are recited today, constitute just a part of the Vedas that once existed. In other words, there are lost Vedic texts to which human beings no longer have direct access. The tradition holds, however, that one can infer some of the contents of these lost Vedic texts

by examining the Smṛtis and the customs of those people who preserve and follow the extant Vedas. That is to say, if good people faithfully do everything that the Veda tells them to, but also observe certain other practices that the extant Veda neither prohibits nor enjoins, then one can safely infer that those other practices are also based upon Vedic texts that are now lost. Both Smṛti texts and prevailing customs acquire authority through this inference. Via the legal fiction of inferred Vedic texts, Dharmaśāstra reduces all knowledge of *dharma* to the Vedas alone. The emphasis on the Vedas creates a dissonance, because, among the three accepted sources of *dharma*, the extant Vedas had the smallest impact on the content of Hindu *dharma* due to their focus on a limited set of increasingly antiquated rituals. Consequently, the inference of Vedic texts, like other legal fictions, is more a strategic exegetical device than a historical claim about the nature of *dharma*. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake, based upon a modern historical perspective, to discount the Dharmaśāstras' claim that all *dharma*s are ultimately rooted in the Vedas. For although the contention is untenable from a historical point of view, it does tell us something important about classic Hindu worldviews: true *dharma* was necessarily based upon a primordial and transcendent foundation.

The importance of transcendence and soteriology to *dharma* becomes clear through another concept called *adṛṣṭārtha*, "having an unseen purpose." This Sanskrit term has two related but different meanings. On the one hand, *adṛṣṭārtha* means that *dharma* has an invisible purpose, meaning it brings a reward that one cannot empirically connect to the act and is, therefore, of a soteriological nature. On the other hand, *adṛṣṭārtha* also means that *dharma* has no visible purpose; it is non-utilitarian. To qualify as *dharma*, a rule must prescribe an act that people are not inclined to perform naturally or for mundane reasons. For example, a rule stating that a person should urinate when they feel the need would not qualify as *dharma*. However, a rule, such as *Manu-Smṛti* (4.50), that enjoins a man to urinate facing northward during the day and southward during the night does count as *dharma*, because it has no discernible rationale. Thus, the *adṛṣṭārtha* requirement indicates that *dharma* must be both transcendental and, strictly speaking, irrational.

Now, transcendence and irrationality might work when it comes to rules for toilet etiquette or funerary rites, but it would make for a very bad set of rules when applied to the assessment of witness testimony or the determination of the customary inheritance laws within a particular merchant community. Therefore, classical Indian jurisprudence applied the requirement that *dharma* must be *adṛṣṭārtha* ("without a visible purpose") only adventitiously, never consistently. Some authors admit that rules of *dharma* concerned with the adjudication of lawsuits are neither *adṛṣṭārtha* nor rooted in the Veda (Olivelle 2017: 122–137). Thus, anyone who reads the extant Dharmaśāstras will find many rules that make rational sense, particularly in the sections dealing with statecraft and the settlement of legal disputes. By the period of the medieval commentaries, the notion of *adṛṣṭārtha* had become primarily a hermeneutic device through which commentators could conveniently ignore troublesome scriptural passages. For instance, the ninth-century commentator Medhātithi (at *Manubhāṣya* 5.155), an early opponent of the Indian custom of widow-burning, used the *adṛṣṭārtha* requirement to remove the injunctive force of those Smṛti passages supporting the practice. However, like the legal fiction of inferred Vedic texts, the requirement that *dharma* must be *adṛṣṭārtha* should not be dismissed, for it provides evidence of two important facts about the Hindu legal tradition. First, it affirms the soteriological nature of *dharma* within the tradition. Second, it suggests that the original focus of the Hindu legal tradition was ritual and domestic habit rather than state law, criminal law, or legal procedure. The quality of being *adṛṣṭārtha* makes better sense in the context of religious observances than of secular laws.

If one examines the earliest surviving works of Dharmaśāstra, the four texts known as Dharmasūtras, one finds strong evidence in support of the view the *dharma* applied first to ritual

and daily religious observances, because these texts contain almost no material on law in the narrow sense in which it is used in English today. Instead, they deal overwhelmingly with the daily regimens of Brahmans. In fact, the ritualization or codification of student behaviour, diet, dress, sex, toilet practices, marriage, ancestral rites, purification, and the like was the main aim of these texts. From beginning to end, the Dharmaśāstra tradition centres around the lives of Brahmans, with other social classes woven in either by brief consideration or by implication. The behaviour of the lower classes beyond their relation or obeisance to the upper classes was initially not of much concern to the Hindu legal tradition.

The four-fold hierarchy of social classes (*varṇa*) and life stages (*āśrama*) did, however, serve as the basic structure for the exposition of *dharma* in classical Hindu law. In the ancient literature of Hinduism, Dharmaśāstra provided the strongest theological articulation of the early Indian caste system, the four social classes—Brahmans, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas, and Śūdras. A typical Dharmaśāstra will devote most of its rules of behaviour to the Brahman male, whose life they divide up into discrete stages punctuated by a series of life-cycle rites. The life of the archetypal Brahman male is the model against which the *dharma*s of other classes are both measured and determined as variants. At the same time, an anxiety about contraventions of the social hierarchy pervades Dharmaśāstra and its subtopics. The Brahmanical privilege that informs Dharmaśāstra manifests in a fear of mixed-class marriages, of receiving food from lower classes, and of circumstances in which higher classes might have to do low-class work. Criminal punishments and expiations vary according to class. Even slavery and adultery are treated according to class or caste considerations. Life-stage, or *āśrama*, by contrast, was the Dharmaśāstra tradition's solution to the tension between a householder life and renunciate life. Both internal Hindu renunciation and competing Buddhist and Jain renunciation posed a theological and social threat to the domestic religious life of the Vedas. The mendicant groups at the centre of renouncer traditions create a social structure that places householder in a position of service and support for the renouncer. By placing renunciation as the final stage of a man's life, the *Manu-Smṛti* simultaneously included and subordinated renunciation under the heading of *dharma*. Though originally a term for a special type of "stay-at-home" renouncer (Jamison 2019), the married householder became a religious ideal of classical Hinduism and the household its primary social location. Putting these two axes of *dharma* together, the ideology of *varṇāśramadharma* emerged as the enduring basis of Dharmaśāstra from then on. In the absence of other specification, *dharma* by itself means the law of the classes and life-stages in this tradition. According to Halbfass (1988: 187), *varṇāśramadharma* ideology was a form of ethnocentrism in classical India: "a sophisticated theoretical structure of self-universalization and self-isolation." The point of *varṇāśramadharma* is to prescribe the proper social duties of each class, but it was also an ideology meant to exclude still other groups from being part of *dharma* at all.

The expansion of *dharma* from ritual and social customs in the early Dharmasūtras gave way to an expansive view of *dharma* that included the law of the king and his state. The earliest Dharmaśāstra to discuss statecraft and judicial administration in detail is the famous law-code of Manu, a mythical sage-king. Unlike the Dharmasūtras, the *Manu-Smṛti* (ca. second century CE) devotes roughly one-third of its rules to the king and the state. In particular, the text tells the king the rules of substantive law and how to adjudicate lawsuits about them, a topic known as *vyavahāra*. After Manu, *vyavahāra* becomes such an important subject within the Hindu legal tradition that a number of later Dharmaśāstras, notably those of Nārada, Kātyāyana, and Bṛhaspati, are devoted solely to it. The reasons for this expansion of *dharma* from daily ritual observance to the law of both private and public life are complex, but several points are worth noting. First, the treatment of law and legal procedure in the code of Manu depends on an earlier text, the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya. The *Arthaśāstra* gives us the richest account we have of the ancient

Indian state and is notably free of the transcendence and soteriology that inform *dharma* in Dharmaśāstra (McClish 2019). It is, therefore, an indispensible source of knowledge about secular law and politics. The *Arthaśāstra*, however, did not establish a literary genre. Instead, it is a more or less unique literary monument of Indian antiquity. Why? The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* co-opted its framework for law and statecraft and put a *dharma* spin on public law (Olivelle 2004). Manu reframed the laws of the state and its administration as the king's *dharma*.

Finally, we must note one more shift in the concept of *dharma* in the early Dharmaśāstra. The Dharmasūtra of Āpastamba opens as follows, "I will now explain the *dharma*s that consist of customary norms settled by the agreement [of those who know the law]" (see Wezler 2009: 209). The Veda is also mentioned as a source of *dharma*, but the choice to place first the customary laws agreed upon by those who know the *dharma* (*dharmajñasamaya*) signals that Dharmaśāstra authors saw tradition as an authority on par with scripture. No author would deny the Veda as the ultimate foundation, but many embraced the force of tradition as the substantive core of *dharma*. The legal fiction that all *dharma* is based on the Veda continued. Many authors, however, spoke of laws created by the king, by judges, by administrators, and by social groups. As mentioned previously, a few medieval authors openly acknowledged that some *dharma* topics were not based on the Veda. The tension between scripture and religious experts as authorities on *dharma* persists in Hinduism to this day, though a deference to *guru*s, *svāmi*s, and other Hindu leaders overwhelms any direct consultation of scriptures. Hacker (2009 [1965]: 482) took the acceptance of an expert's word as *dharma* to indicate its "radically empirical" nature. In principle, the idea that *dharma* depends on human conventions or dictates undermines its transcendent nature. The Dharmaśāstra tradition, however, managed to hold transcendental and worldly ideals of *dharma* together in a way that allowed the substance of the tradition to grow and evolve without sacrificing its sacred foundation.

Dharma in the Hindu epics

The only real challengers to Dharmaśāstra's claim to be the major tradition of Hindu *dharma* are the epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Each generated myriad traditions of commentary and retelling that amplified one or another ideal of *dharma*. In the epics themselves, *dharma* functions in a variety of meanings and the texts use their stories to probe its meaning in difficult situations. As narratives that place moral rules in imaginative contexts, the epics use moral ambiguity to drive their stories forward. One does discern moral and legal principles in the epics' uses of *dharma*, but the meaning emerges not through systematic prescription but narrative negotiation. Epic *dharma* is ambiguous on purpose. The *dharma* ideal remains, but its moral foundation is held to be subtle (*sūkṣma*) or hidden (*parokṣa*). By contrast, Dharmaśāstra, with its legal tendencies, cannot tolerate ambiguity. In Dharmaśāstra, legal doubts and conflicts require a resolution in a way that they often do not in the epics.

As discussed previously, the *Mahābhārata* serves as a clearinghouse of various notions of *dharma*. This epic famously claims to be comprehensive, and its many different uses of *dharma* support that claim. The fact that different authors contributed to the composition of the *Mahābhārata* as it exists today must be partly responsible for the less coherent meaning of *dharma* in the epic as a whole. The moral contradictions and grey areas in the episodes of the great epic instruct through narrative empathy, identifying with dilemmas of the characters. Such ambiguity makes a single meaning of *dharma* in the *Mahābhārata* not only impossible but also undesirable.

A major conflict within the main narrative of the epic centres around two influential yet competing notions of *dharma* (Fitzgerald 2004: 100–142). The first of these is the notion of *varṇadharma*, according to which it is the highest sacred duty of the epic's protagonists, as

members of the noble Kṣatriya class, to rule and protect their kingdom. As such, they are bound by *dharma* to engage even in horrific acts of violence for the greater social good. The second notion of *dharma* comprises not class-specific duties but rather universal virtues associated with *yoga*, such as non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), freedom from worldly attachments (*vairāgya*), and equanimity (*śānti*). Both notions of *dharma* were important at the time the *Mahābhārata* was composed. The *Bhagavadgītā*, a famous and beloved sermon of the *Mahābhārata*, resolves the tension through its ideal of detached worldly action—upholding the socially expected actions of one's class but doing so with spiritual detachment from the consequences of those acts. As Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna, "You have a right and a duty only to action, but never to its results" (2.47). The more definitive and philosophical lesson of the *Gītā*, however, does not pervade the whole epic.

In the figure of Yudhiṣṭhira, the eldest of the epic's five heroic Pāṇḍava brothers, one can perceive a conflict between engagement and detachment that remains unresolved. While Yudhiṣṭhira is personally drawn to the ideals of non-violence and worldly detachment, he also acknowledges that it is his *dharma* to wage a bloody war against his cousins, the Kauravas. Thus, Yudhiṣṭhira is effectively torn between two compelling yet conflicting notions of *dharma*. Ultimately, he chooses the violent *dharma* of kings, and the great war results in a cataclysmic loss of life, but Yudhiṣṭhira's regrets and mental anguish at the outcome make his choices both poignant and uncertain. Throughout, morally dubious acts on both sides of the conflict carry the narrative inevitably toward war. Each discrete episode and action, however, is not so simple. Each moral decision feels dharmic in context but accumulates into morally questionable predicaments and ends.

The other great Hindu epic, Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, also presents *dharma* in several senses. John Brockington (2009: 236) highlights "propriety" or "morality" as its most common meaning, with "sacrificial acts," "caste duties" (especially for a king), and "tradition" coming next. These meanings work together in the tale through the idea of fidelity: "Daśaratha is faithful to his vow to Kaikeyī, Rāma faithfully performs his filial duty, Bharata refuses to usurp his older brother's rights, Lakṣmaṇa loyally serves Rāma and Sītā in their exile, Sītā accompanies her husband to a life of hardship" (Brockington 2009: 243). The major and minor characters of the *Rāmāyaṇa* fulfil *dharma* through such acts of loyalty and fidelity. *Dharma* is thus closely linked to truth in this text. Faithful, proper action cleaves one to the truth and helps others be true as well. As B.K. Matilal (2002) argues, however, rigorous fidelity to truth shades into legalism and formalism, such that some controversial *Rāmāyaṇa* episodes (Śūrpanakhā, Vālin, Śambūka, etc.) are justified on technicalities. To this extent, Vālmīki preserves Rāma in particular as an unambiguously dharmic character, but that preservation relies on dubious justifications that feel closer to the legalistic *dharma* of Dharmaśāstra.

Conclusion

The Hindu epics and Purāṇas connected *dharma* to divine beings and thus to theistic, temple-centred Hinduism in medieval India after roughly 500 CE. By connecting to a powerful new religious ideology, these texts functioned as major sources for people to learn *dharma*. However, these traditions did not displace the classical ideals of *varṇāśramadharma*, *dharma*'s Vedic origins, or its soteriological purpose. These Dharmaśāstra principles remained core elements of *dharma* to which later Hindu traditions continued and continue to respond. Others would disagree with our presentation of Dharmaśāstra as the most coherent and influential tradition of *dharma* in classical India. It is our position that other classical Hindu texts that address *dharma* respond to its articulation in Dharmaśāstra more often than the reverse. The epics and Purāṇas make heavy use of Dharmaśāstra views and material, while classic and early medieval Dharmaśāstras

rarely cite the epics and often take a disparaging view of the Purāṇas (Davis and Brick 2018: 35–36). After the classical period, Hindu views of *dharma* continued to change. New Hindu temple practices, devotional movements, and Tantric traditions owed little to *dharma* or to Dharmaśāstra. Nevertheless, these new Hindu institutions drew inspiration from *dharma* and Dharmaśāstra, signalling a firm place for this *dharma* as traditional Hindu morality. But their religious ideas and practices also introduced new elements to Hinduism that were not to be found in classical *dharma* texts—*pūjā* (image worship), *bhakti* (devotion), *yoga*, *tantra*, *tīrtha-yātra* (pilgrimage), and so on. In order to remain relevant, Dharmaśāstra began to incorporate material on these subjects produced in other Hindu religious traditions. The effort was still to view all subjects as parts of *dharma*, but the dominance of *dharma* as the structuring concept of Hindu religious life started to yield to other ideals in many Hindu communities.

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5

REASON, *DHARMA*, AND THE DISCOVERY OF FAITH

Insights from the modes of classical Hinduism

Sthaneshwar Timalsina

Two aspects of dharma

When we glean insights from Amartya Sen's *Argumentative Indian* (Sen 2006) that the civilization under consideration is inherently pluralistic, embracing since its origins dissenting voices and heterodox opinions, and combine them with Ganeri's response that Sen's work lacks historical examples, pointing out "the absence of any corresponding presentation of the range and richness of Indian conceptions of reason" (2009: 251), we come at once to recognize that the West lacks a monopoly on pluralism and secularism. Historical awareness buttresses the argument that Hinduism is inherently pluralistic. My attempt in this chapter is to ground reason in the domain of dharma by tracing classical materials in contrast to unexamined faith. I believe the openness of the systems in accounts of self-reflection, a direct consequence of reasoning, is what made Hindu culture historically pluralistic and open to change. I read this reflexivity as a sole product of rationality that confronts faith. By faith I mean the type of faith that Soren Kierkegaard (1994, [1941]) underscores in his *Fear and Trembling*, the type of faith that demands an unconditional surrender of reasoning. This chapter cannot do justice to the vast array of literature from history. We can zoom in on any specific period in history or any tradition, and we are always reminded of its foundation on rationality. Due to scope, I have selected two traditions: Mīmāṃsā and the literature on dharma that extends from the same cultural milieu and the Advaita of Śaṅkara. This choice from the plethora of literature comes under the assumption that Śaṅkara had when he wrote the preface for his commentary upon the *Bhagavadgītā*:

> There are two types of dharma that the Vedas prescribe: that characterized by engagement (*pravṛtti*) and that characterized by detachment (*nivṛtti*).[1]

Or what Kaṇāda had in his mind when he said:

> Dharma is that through which prosperity and absolute good are attained.[2]

Dharma, therefore, is both the battlefield of active engagement and the forest of seclusion, an active engagement with one's desires and a critical examination and absolute censoring of the realms of desire. Grounding reasoning in the platform of dharma therefore demands that we explore at least these two domains of activism and renunciation, living with the metaphoric fire of

desire or the house of duties and the relinquishment of the fire. In the active expression of dharma, in the mode of *pravṛtti*, reason functions to explore the limits of desire and provides a method for critically examining the moral dimension of desire for both personal and collective good. Reason guides in the next domain by paving a path for individual subjects to encounter one's own inner structures of being, to recognize human fragility and mortality and transcend suffering.

Although the vocabulary of dharma centres around the quest for the self, what it constantly engages with is the other. Dharma therefore becomes the field of self-negation that opens space for the other rather than the type of faith that would determine another's destiny. It thus becomes essential that the happiness an individual seeks for himself opens the territory that constitutes the other, the dharma that determines the other (*para-dharma*). And reason becomes the torchlight for determining the course of action. Freedom in and from the world, amplified in the two modes of dharma, therefore, are the two domains where reasoning is paramount to guide human subjects. Moral judgement, in this light, is not categorically different from philosophical specula-tion when it comes to empirically grounding dharma. This is to say that rationality grounds the scope and limits of morality. The two domains of dharma are also two dimensions of the "truth" (*satya*), the realm of experience in which the subject is in metaphoric conflict and the inner domain of the self about which the subject is perpetually re-evaluating. The task is to explore how Hinduism as dharma grounds reasoning in these two apparently conflicting domains.

The mode of active engagement in life is governed by the rules of Dharmaśāstra, the dis-ciplines relating dharma. Mīmāṃsā provides the philosophical platform for grounding dharma literature considering active engagement. This also strives to save the ethos and the norms gleaned from the Vedas. Collectively, these disciplines determine the scope of rituals and that of moral norms. They found moral codes and familial and social obligations. Vedānta, on the other hand, is the dharma of returning to the self, governed primarily by the thrust of liberation (*mokṣa*). These two therefore provide the minimalistic foundation for addressing dharma from the classical perspective. In both accounts, it is an encounter with freedom (*svātantrya*), freedom explored in active engagement and sought in the inner makings of freedom itself.

I argue on this foundation that the pluralism in both cultural modes of expression and the practice of norms depends on the freedom of reasoning. Stemming from universal and innate traits that constitute dharma, reason becomes the yardstick for both engagement and renuncia-tion, in both accounts, examining what belief and faith can provide. The discovery of Hinduism as dharma in this account is therefore different from its discovery as religion or faith. Tension in the modes of dharma, in this account, reflects the fluidity inherent within reasoning itself. In contrast, tension in the domain of religion reflects the inherent contradiction between reason and faith. Encountering Hinduism as dharma therefore is different from encountering it as faith. I argue further that the domain of dharma does not conflict with the pluralism of voices or the rational inquiry of norms. In contrast, faith demands rejection of difference, as the only other within the scope of faith is the transcendental other, God. I argue at the end that the transfor-mation of Hinduism from dharma to faith demands the sacrifice of reasoning, as this negation makes it possible not only to homogenize Hinduism from within but also to erase voices from the boundary and outside.

Reason in the domain of active engagement (*pravṛtti*)

While *nivṛtti* or disengagement seeks to actualize the absolute and pave the path to transform oneself into that absolute or recognize one's harmony with the absolute, *pravṛtti*, or active engagement, values the conventional world, conditioned by conventional norms and laws. Guided by engagement and detachment, they rely on a rational exploration of dharma in

living the life "for" dharma, adopting the laws that are guided by it, and living "in" dharma by relinquishing the individuality that separates one from the cosmic unfolding of dharma. In both accounts, the world of everyday experience is the battleground of desire as every individual is seeking to fulfil their own desire. Reason functions in the path of engagement to guide personal interest in alignment with the interest of the collective and to examine the scope of desire, seeking freedom from desire while actively seeking to fulfil those that do not counter the broader dharma parameters. This is where the conflict emerges. The beliefs and norms that guide individuals are ultimately founded upon Vedic authority, and if this authority of the Vedas were to suppress rationality, dharma would not be ultimately founded on reasoning. My argument is the authority of speech in the classical Hindu paradigm is not outside the scope of reasoning. Textual authority is not meant to trump rationality. Consequently, the ultimate parameters to outline the course of action and provide moral codes lie in reasoning and evolved on empirical grounds. In the second account or in the mode of *nivṛtti*, Upaniṣads, the ultimate sections of the Vedas, reveal the absolute reality, and the pursuit of life reverses its course, directing now towards oneself. This is where living "in" dharma comes to play, as this is the path that guides subjects to the absolute nature of dharma that seeks to expunge individual subjectivity. What makes this authority of the Vedic speech distinct from the absolute "scriptural authority" is that the domain of this speech, like any other speech, is to be guided by *pramāṇa*, veridical means of knowledge.

If founded on rationality, speech must abide within parameters that do not conflict with what is given by immediate perception. One way this has been traditionally circumvented is that if there is something to be known that does not fall within the scope of perception, the testimony of the speech stands. In other words, as far as the issue relates to something perceptible, the primacy of perception remains unchallenged. It is only regarding issues outside the scope of perception and inference that the testimony of Vedic speech stands. This mirrors the way testimony functions in the common world, making Vedic speech a subset of speech whose testimony is grounded on the system of justification, as outlined by the *pramāṇas*. As a consequence, a rational inquiry provides the foundation for the authority of Vedic speech, and its authority is not invoked based on divine authority.

To begin with, there are Vedas and not *The Veda*, and every single Veda comes with multiple recensions, not just different in tone but also in texture. These were not meant to be texts frozen in the past either, as the Vedas are supposed to be constantly unfolding and infinite (*anantā vai vedāḥ*).[3] Moreover, Vedas weren't meant to give dogmatic, historically static rules; rather, their role was to express the inherent dynamism embedded within being. Most importantly, the very concept of dharma does not describe the universal truth outside of the chain of transformation: "There are both the dynamic order and foundational truth" (*ṛtam ca satyam ca*, *Ṛgveda* X.190.1), says Aghamarṣaṇa. This is just one side of the story of the testimony of the Vedas. What constitutes Vedas as separate from speech is not by invoking higher authority but in their lack of fixed reference, with mantric speech always being open to interpretation and the unfolding of new meaning. This is why Vedic speech often manifests as a riddle—not a riddle filled with ambiguity suffused by ignorance but an ambiguity that questions the power of speech and that expands beyond its determined horizon, always saying more than what it can refer to. This is why we first encounter the paradox, whether in the songs, "it transforms into the manifold without actually being born" (*ajāyamāno bahudhā vijāyate | Śukla Yajurveda* XXXI.19) or in its content, as in identifying the fire as the grandson of waters (*apāṃ napāt*, *Ṛgveda* II.35.13). It is in the context outlined previously that Vedic speech is not descriptive like common speech.

Speaking from the Mīmāṃsā perspective, Vedic speech does not invoke any external agency for its authority. It was meant to capture reality in constant dynamism, and for this reason, it could not be identical to common speech with determined meaning. In

Upaniṣadic expression, speech simply surrenders, alongside the mind, its attempts to capture the absolute (*Taittirīyopaniṣad* II.9.1). This is why the same speech can be a question and also its answer. For instance: "Whom shall we offer libation?" "We shall offer libation to ka" (*kasmai devāya haviṣā vidhema | Ṛgveda* X.121.1–9). The ambiguity regarding what we ought to do in our everyday life mirrors a quagmire of the ritual paradigm, as ritual prescriptions can be inconsistent. Riddles in the Vedas are therefore not just a pastime for the Vedic seers but an embodiment of the ever-unfolding truth that is in itself filled with riddles. It is in this inherent fluidity that dharma becomes manifold, personalized, temporalized, spatialized, ethnicized, gendered, and always changing depending on social conditions like the cultural norms forbidden for our times or physical conditions such as aging. This makes it possible in changing circumstances to eat forbidden foods or to engage in the act of violence or to kill oneself without violating dharma. For a text to be open to multiple interpretations is paramount to founding rationality, as it is only when a text surrenders itself to new circumstances, is open to interpretation, and allows reason within its fold that dharma can be grounded on rationality.

Jaimini's statement that "Dharma is the act (*artha*) characterized by the sentences that enjoin [an agent] (*codanā*)"[4] leaves it open as to what amounts to dharma. Vedic texts prescribe those acts that are naturally virtuous. They also prescribe non-virtuous acts such as "someone practicing black magic should sacrifice with a falcon."[5] The text is now open to commentary, and it is intentionally so, because the *sūtra* texts anticipate diverse and sometimes conflicting commentaries.

Hindu orthodoxy considers that the authority of the Vedic speech is absolute, in the sense that it motivates humans in the acts that cannot be subject to other epistemic means. The sentences that enjoin subjects to act are called *codanā*. Śabara explains the scope of *codanā* in the following lines:

> *Codanā* brings to awareness entities belonging to the past, that are in the process of coming into being, or are about to happen in the future. [Their scope relates to] an entity that is very subtle, that is blocked from the sight (*vyavahita*), or that which is remote. No other [epistemic system] can [objectify this]. Nor the sensory faculties.[6]

Noteworthy here is that the force embedded within *codanā* that underlies Vedic sentences is not grounded on their extra-ordinary origins. Śabara is simply invoking the semantic power and not invoking the authority of Vedic sentences because they were revealed to a select people or because they were of divine origins or anything that would place them outside of the scope of *pramāṇa*. Śabara eventually negates the centrality of agency in semantic comprehension as his commentary moves forward. To reiterate it, the authority of the Vedas lies not in its origin but in its function of being the act of the unfolding of truth itself. To invoke the power of *codanā* on semantic grounds does have a rational exposition that what we can learn from language goes beyond what our sensory faculties can reveal.[7]

Now the issue of motivation. On the one hand, Vedic speech maintains its highest status within the Hindu orthodoxy, while on the other hand, its task is not to guide humans in living everyday life, as this task falls under Dharmaśāstra, a separate discipline. In the next paragraphs, I will address how the codes of Dharmaśāstras are subject to rational inquiry. Returning to Vedic speech itself, comprehending the injunctions rests on exegetical methods. On both accounts, with speech succumbing to reasoning, a mere comprehension of the Vedic command is insufficient to inspire human subjects, as subjects have their own will to inspire them into action.

The texts that codify action address the issue that their role is just to prescribe. This, in my opinion, recognizes the centrality of human reasoning in action. As a consequence, the conversation that started with Vedic injunction evolves into exploring the scope of *niyoga*, or motivation, and *bhāvanā*, or the operation that brings into reality what one is motivated toward. This is also where the task of reading the Vedas becomes a playground for philosophical inquiry on human motivation. The analysis of ritual goes beyond exploring rituals and engages the ritual of human life. First the spontaneous oral ritual performances become codified and textually finite. But then they themselves become subject to hermeneutics. Eventually rituals mirror human life, and the Vedic speech mediates, on the one hand, rituals and, on the other, everyday life. In other words, Mīmāṃsā domesticates the rituals and confines them within the scope of Vedic texts. Consequentially, it subtracts the primacy of rituals and interjects reasoning. Eventually it subverts archaic modes of sacrifice to commonly acceptable forms and further subverts those rituals again, transforming them into internalized rituals and visualization practices. Texts thus encode rituals and eventually circumscribe their scope, while they themselves are rendered to perplexity. The product of encoding rituals thus becomes subversion of texts, with an eventual victory of reasoning over ensnaring speech. Simple attempts to comprehend the ritual dynamics thus transform into a theatric of human motivation and a philosophical inquiry into human desire. There is no agent behind the screen monitoring human agency and human compliance to Vedic injunction. What is good and what one ought to do are completely left with human subjects to determine.

Happiness (*sukha*) as the goal of life is not shifted in the discourse of dharma. Following dharma makes it possible for subjects to experience the highest form of happiness, free of conflicts and remorse. If we expand this argument, the sense of morality is formulated within the process of making good and bad choices and facing their consequences. Our instantaneous satisfaction and consequent suffering in various physical and mental orders teach us to act morally. Since this chain of interactions could not be circumscribed within the life of a single subject, this is subject to cultural memory, hence *Smṛti*. The argument, then, is: Just as our personal activities are guided by our memory, our moral judgment and action are guided by cultural memory. Smṛti, translated as memory, functions in this regard as epigenetic memory, as traits carried over from experience are not personal but guide us in the course of correct action. These Smṛti texts are therefore supposed to be a second-hand experience, passed down over generations. Whatever the dubious status memory holds in Hindu epistemology, the Smṛti texts hold the same status in governing the course of action. Basically, while Smṛtis guide our moral life, their validity needs to be tested in conjunction with other supporting evidence, including the subject's own judgment.

The application of personal judgment culminates in human intentionality (*saṅkalpa*). Whether the commandment is to prohibit: "you shall not injure any sentient being" (*mā hiṃsyāt sarvā bhūtāni*) or to enjoin: "speak truthfully" (*satyaṃ vada*)—it comes down to human agency constituted by intentionality. It is only upon a subject's desire to act that virtuous and vicious acts are carried out, and therefore scriptural injunctions and prohibitions cannot transcend human agency. While our beliefs guide our desire, the very act of forming belief is not isolated from rational inquiry. *Manusmṛti* acknowledges the centrality of intentionality in this regard:

> Desire is founded on intentionality. Ritual acts are made possible by intentionality. All the ritual observations and the laws that govern restraining observations (*yama*) are born out of intentionality. No action has ever been observed in the world by a subject devoid of desire. Whatever someone does, that all is motivated by desire.[8]

Medhātithi defines intentionality (*saṅkalpa*) as "a mental act of reflection that engenders desire and resolution in sequence."[9] It is this intentionality that motivates the mind to reflect, to desire, and be determined regarding the course of action. This intentionality is not a simple orientation towards an object. Neither is this wandering amid material objects. This intentionality is not a fantasy but a determination. Even the application of desire (*kāma*) needs to be read in this light, as the emergence of this desire is subsequent to intentionality (*saṅkalpa*). Someone fantasizing about a drink in a bar while in his bedroom would not therefore count as this intentionality. It is more like a thirsty person walking in the desert desiring water who rushes toward the water-hole as soon as he spots it, abandoning other acts. When it comes to the domain of dharma or is related to activities that have no visible result in this world, such as the offerings made for gods with an intent to go to heaven, Vedic speech is primary, as no perception or inference can determine the causal relationship between this worldly actions and other-worldly consequences. Here, belief is central. The domain of dharma is not, however, merely seeking heaven. The this-worldly nature of dharma always demands questioning, and the injunctions regarding this worldly dharma are always subject to change.

This brings us back to the authority of Vedic speech. As I said earlier, this is the speech that is heard (*śruti*) that requires a speaker and not a word with the Rosetta stone and absent author. What makes Vedic speech unique is something more. Following the Mīmāṃsā exegesis, Vedic speech lacks agency. It is speech that unfolds itself. In this self-presentation, the Vedic speech does not just confirm internal verification of the epistemic system of justification. It also confirms the primacy of speech and its power in constituting agency. Basically, it is the speech that constitutes the agent and not the other way around. This primacy of speech in constituting agency coincides with the autonomy given to speech, not just to represent the world but rather to constitute reality. It is not thus upon human agency to determine meaning, but it is the speech that determines its reference, of which the subject is just one of its horizons.

Rather than invoking the authority of Vedic speech on faith alone, it thus becomes a platform of hermeneutic exercise. And instead of the speech dictating the norms or prescribing what we ought to do, it opens the field for a broader consideration of correct action. The openness regarding the source of dharma as outlined in Manusmṛti explains this phenomenon. While the Smṛtis consider the Vedas the foundation of dharma, they place in the same category recollection (also referring to the Smṛti texts), the conduct of those who know the Vedas, the conduct of virtuous people (even if they are not authoritative in the Vedas), and, above all, the self-satisfaction of the agent conducting dharma.[10] There are three types of agents that determine dharma: scholars, virtuous people, and the active agent. This does not just give human agency an active role in determining dharma; it makes self-evaluation crucial. What else can a subject have to guide his course of action other than reasoning, if the final prescription is his own judgment? This is not an isolated example. Yājñavalkya has a similar list when it comes to counting the source of dharma: Vedas, Smṛti, good conduct (of virtuous people), something that appeals to the active agent, and desire that is formed with due deliberation.[11] Rather than confining the scope of dharma, this list makes it open and keeps it fluid, so the scope of dharma remains relevant in changing times. Moreover, it consistently includes the subject's personal inclination, confirming that dharma is the natural course of action if subjects were not to be overpowered by misconceptions and deluded by passion and aversion. Virtue, along these lines, is internal and self revealing, and the mechanisms, including Vedic speech, are only to allow the subject to see the truth for himself, to feel the guiding principle of dharma functioning from within. Rational inquiry is foremost in this light, as this is the only means left to guide one through perplexity.

Even when the subject matter of action is other-worldly, such as making sacrifices in anticipation of going to heaven, Smṛtis leave room for open inquiry. Upon the question, "What is it a man ought to do?" *Manusmṛti* (II.1) outlines that one ought to do what is:

1   Honoured by the learned people.
2   Followed by virtuous people who have overcome attachment and aversion.
3   Approved by the heart of the acting subject.[12]

The previous criteria for the source of dharma subordinate texts to human agency, as the course of correct action is not historically frozen, and dharma has to function by speaking in the flux. Recognizing the course of dharma, as the list suggests, requires that one rise above attachment and aversion, that one be guided not by passion but reason. When a subject rests back within his own heart, dharma reveals itself, as the text suggests. And it is in this biological and cultural conditioning that we lose sight of dharma. This underscores the ever-unfolding aspect of dharma, liberating the scope of dharma from the confinement of history. If dharma were to be equated with the truth, this needs to be recognized as not reserved to some individuals in the past. And if the basis of dharma is the truth, this should not shun reasoning nor rely on transcendental agency. On the other hand, if dharma is reserved to human judgment, there is always a threat of fallibility. This can be reconciled only by grounding dharma in reasoning. This is why Mohanty (1995) says, "the Hindu mind was constantly engaged in theorizing about practice." The issue therefore is not about whether the codes in the Smṛtis are applicable or valid. The issue is: Can they be contested while remaining within Hindu orthodoxy? The answer is positive. This is what grounds reasoning within the domain of Dharma.

Evident from the previous conversation, there is very little to substantiate when it comes to giving an absolute mandate for moral conducts even when dharma is violated: When dharma is violated, the subject has violated upon himself and not against some higher agency. In order to conduct dharma, it is therefore mandatory that the subject be capable of moral judgment and free to make a choice. If the actions are not carried out by a free agent guided by his will, these would not be karmically liberating or binding.

The openness of the Smṛti texts is not only regarding what constitutes the outside of the norms prescribed within the Smṛtis. These very texts are diverse, and the laws that they outline are not unanimous. Just like modern laws, these texts have historically undergone change. This fluidity regarding textual authority provides open space for reason to insert itself. The argument is that the textual prescriptions are there to be followed, but only if they do not conflict with reasoning. Dharma manifests itself through this hermeneutic ambiguity and textual fluidity. No matter how rational and how reasonable, so long as a text does not open space for its other, be it other texts or reasoning, the text cannot ground rationality. And this is not to say that Smṛtis have come up with the best moral judgment. On the contrary. You may point out some of the most grotesque judgments in the texts. What makes rationality is not grounded on what they mandate but what they leave behind, the judgment for action that is upon the subject's own evaluation and the prescription from other human agents who have chosen to live a moral life. Not that the laws that Smṛtis outline are all justifiable, but what makes them open to rationality is their willingness to open for the other, whether that other is the agent seeking moral guidance or other texts that contrast with one other. Every voice has its other, and the role of rationality is to split them apart and analyze their foundation. Matilal notes this fluidity, that "these scriptures proved to be flexible, sometimes to the point that they seemed to have meant whatever their interpreters chose to make them mean" (as cited in Ganeri 2002: 51).

Mahābhārata epitomizes the inherent tension between conflicting traits of dharma. Underscored in the line, "even the wise ones are confused as to what is good action and what is bad action" (*Bhagavadgītā* IV.16), the text explores morality from its abyss to zenith by using history and narratives. Rather than saying what one ought to do, the text endeavours to address the conflict between different dharmic codes: the conflict between the codes of truthfulness and violence being one among them. Through the narratives, *Mahābhārata* explores the cases where stealing may not violate dharma and when a celibate ought to transgress his celibacy. The text neither prescribes new codes of conduct nor challenges existing ones: it is contesting through and through any dogmatic adherence to the codes without examining them in light of reasoning. With regard to this conflict between reason and faith, Arindam Chakrabarti (1997) says that:

> Traditions and texts cannot solve them because they themselves are often in conflict with one another. That is why one needs intelligence (*buddhi*) and learning (*vidyā*), a special training in the *pramāṇas* (means of knowledge), to purify the moral knowledge derived from handed-down tradition. *Dharma* cannot afford to be intellectually blind or uncritical.

Reason in the domain of detachment (*nivṛtti*)

The polarity between this world and the other, heaven and earth, life and afterlife, does not apply when it comes to the dharma traditions. Not that they do not share similar beliefs, but the real issue is both this and that world are the realms of desire. Life and afterlife are chained with karma, and both heaven and earth are transitory stations. The real polarities here are the realm of active engagement and that of detachment, the path of desire and the path of relinquishing desires. One explores the world, the other the self. The first engages the cultural self and controls the biological self; the other explores emancipation from the cultural self while using cultural construction for its self-actualization. There are many theories regarding the self or the lack thereof, but what is widely common is that self-exploration is an empirical and rational process and that self-realization is not a product of blind faith. If our active engagement in the world with moral judgement needs to be guided by reasoning, how about our desire to be free from desire per se? The desire of freedom from desire itself is metaphorically compared with the fire that consumes itself upon consuming the fuel. This is the thrust of negation that self-negates upon negating the rest. Vedānta or the Upaniṣads stress self-actualization or liberation from the grip of passion and aversion, epitomized in the Advaita of Śaṅkara as the realization that the individual self is identical with *brahman*.

Here, again, our first focus is the status of the Upaniṣadic sentences. Is self-realization an imperative? And how should the force of the Upaniṣadic description such as "you are the *brahman*" be recognized? Is this force constituted on empirical grounds, or is this on scriptural authority that cannot be questioned? In the end, this leads to the question of whether this self-realization is achievable by means of human endeavour or if divine grace is central to such a realization. If the second is the case, absolute faith becomes inextricably essential in the course of self-realization.

Śaṅkara's Advaita begins with the empirical basis that self-experience is always given, making it possible that human endeavours should suffice in self-recognition. However, Śaṅkara himself stresses the centrality of a text in self-realization. So, the question regarding scriptural authority is relevant when it comes to addressing self-realization. What we should not ignore, however, is that the Advaita exegesis rests on the epistemology of the pre-givenness of self-awareness, the

self-revealing nature of consciousness and of *brahman*, and the identity between empirical self and the absolute. The knowledge one acquires by comprehending the texts cannot therefore be considered an acquisition of new information, as there is no situation in which the self is not given. The status of the texts in this light is to remove ignorance, or to negate false impositions. Examples abound. "You are the tenth," a common example to discuss the status of the texts in self-realization, exemplifies the case where a subject forgets to count oneself and grieves for the lost person. An instructor merely reminds the subject to count himself.

The act of counting oneself does not produce a new entity, as it is just the removal of ignorance. While the realization may not be unique, this removal of ignorance varies based on the types and degrees of ignorance. That is, our actualization of the truth is contingent upon our own cultural conditions, as the binding factors are not always constant. Whatever semantic force the sentence "You are the tenth" has in illuminating the person, the same is the force the "scriptures" have in the act of self-realization. What does it mean to say, "You are not what you think you are, you are not a huntsman but a prince?" There is no injunction there. There is no new information derived from the sentence. It only describes the fact. Sentences such as "You are that" are similar in the sense that they also describe the facts and don't produce something new.

Śaṅkara distinguishes between laws that relate to the facts (*vastutantra*) and the conditions that are contingent upon agency (*puruṣatantra*) (see BSBh I.1.4). Recognizing the self is knowing the fact, and subjects have no constitutive agency in it. The primacy of semantic comprehension in Advaita needs to be read in this light, that although this is not a production but a reproduction of what is already given, this type of knowledge is not possible by other epistemic means. Since nothing new has been constituted in this type of knowledge, and therefore there is no real agency, and since there is no real agency, there is no real grace, there is no faith external to reasoning necessary for this type of realization. When there is real agency, there is freedom embedded with the agency, and the subject produces something new. There is something altered when there is real action. Knowing the self, according to Śaṅkara, therefore does not amount to action, and there lies no actual agency in self-realization. Śaṅkara says against this backdrop that:

> It should not be argued that even though *brahman* is a completely ascertained fact that this nonetheless is an object of perception etc. This is because the identity of the brahman with the self cannot be comprehended without the scriptures such as "you are that."[13]

He continues further,

> However, cognition is a mental act. [This] is not because it is distinct. Action is where the act does not presuppose as it is and is dependent upon the operation of the cognizing subject.
>
> (BSBh I.1.4)[14]

And more,

> Even though meditation or contemplation is mental, it nonetheless is contingent upon the subject to act, not act, or act otherwise, because it is subjective. Knowledge is the product of the means of cognition and the means of cognition have as their object that which exists. Therefore, knowledge is not something that the subject can constitute or make not happen (*akartum*) or make otherwise. It is merely as it is. This is not contingent upon what the sentences inspire (*codanā*), and is not subjective.[15]

While explaining the centrality of the texts, Śaṅkara reiterates one more aspect of self-realization: that it is not an act, and there is no agency, as this is realizing a pre-given fact. It never is the case that the self is not immediately given and never the case that consciousness is not self revealing. If we were to argue that the epistemic system is to reveal new information, to give rise to a new instance of consciousness, it does not apply to recognizing the self, leading to the conclusion that even the Upaniṣads would not be the valid means of cognition. This matter, however, has already been addressed in that the means of cognition here is not in giving new information but in removing false suppositions. That the self is *brahman* is not a product of faith; neither is it something acquired by grace. As has been said, this knowledge is dependent upon the fact (*vastutantra*) and not dependent upon subject (*puruṣatantra*). It is knowing the fact by means of speech, not a type of misconception that could have been erased by other epistemic means. Rather than "revealing" the truth, providing new information, or generating new consciousness, the Vedic speech thus aims only to bestow a full return, allowing subjects to reverse their gaze that naturally flows out guided by the natural instincts:

> *svābhāvikapravṛttiviṣayavimukhīkaraṇārthānīti brūmaḥ* | BSBh I.1.4.
> We say that [the Vedic sentences are] for turning [subjects] away from the objects of natural motivation.

It is in this primacy of the self or consciousness that reason inserts itself to the centre, as the realization of the self subverts the primacy of speech, because even in abnegation of speech, the self cannot be negated:

> *ātmanaś ca pratyākhyātum aśakyatvāt, ya eva nirākartā tasyaivātmatvāt* | BSBh I.1.4
> It is not possible to reject the self, as whoever is rejecting is the very self.

To reiterate the previous statement, the primacy of the self subverts the primacy of speech. Vedic speech is "for" self-realization and not due to the subjugation of the self by the text. The argument that Śaṅkara gives primacy to the text is also contextual and therefore misunderstood. Śaṅkara gives primacy to the text only at the phenomenal level and not in the absolute sense. This is to say that texts can speak only in the relational realm, so the primacy of the text collapses upon the emergent consciousness of the identity of the self and *brahman*. The objective of the sentences is merely to create a mode of consciousness which mirrors the experience of non–dual *brahman*, and even this mirroring collapses upon the emergence of real experience. Semantic comprehension, accordingly, is not expunged of concepts, and concepts cannot reveal, as it is of what is given in the first mode of consciousness. When everything else is negated, even Vedic speech needs to be silenced in order for one to merge to the state of pure being and pure consciousness.

We need to read the primacy of Vedic speech in Śaṅkara's philosophy in light of the system of justification which comes as "the means of valid cognition" (*pramāṇa*). Since speech has the same capacity in generating knowledge as perception or inference, most philosophical systems in India accept the word as a valid means of cognition. Noteworthy here is that the validity of a system of justification is not pre-given to its production of veridical knowledge. What Advaita maintains is only that this validity is not subsequent to the production of knowledge either, as it is simultaneous. The validity of the system therefore rests on its ability to produce veridical knowledge. Since the Vedic speech is a subset of the speech or *śabda* in general, the validity of Vedic speech cannot rest on faith but on reasoning. In other words, Vedic speech is not valid for the sake of being what it is but because it produces veridical knowledge. That is to say that the

veridicality of a system cannot be circular, and veridicality is affirmed simultaneously to generating veridical knowledge. The very concept of intrinsic veridicality confirms furthermore that the validity of the Vedic speech cannot be derived on the grounds of the authority or this being the divine word. Therefore, the validity of sentences such as "You are that" rests on their ability to generate veridical knowledge. To sum up, the validity of the Vedic speech is grounded on reasoning and not on simple faith.

Speaking from within the epistemic system of Advaita, reflective thinking (*manana*) and meditation (*nididhyāsana*) are not independent means of justification to confirm what amounts to knowledge. *Śabda*, or the speech, on the other hand, is one among them. When Śaṅkara credits Vedic speech for generating self-knowledge and when Prakāśātman places its primacy over reflective thinking and meditation, this needs to be read in view of the system of justification. Prakāśātman argues along these lines:

> *viśiṣṭaśabdāvadhāraṇaṃ prameyāvagamaṃ praty avyavadhānena kāraṇaṃ bhavati, pramāṇasya prameyāvagamaṃ praty avyavadhānāt | manana-nididhyāsane tu cittasya pratyagātmapravaṇa tāsaṃskārapariniṣpannatadekāgravṛttikāryadvāreṇaiva brahmānubhavahetutāṃ pratipadyete, iti phalaṃ praty avyavahitasya karaṇasya viśiṣṭaśabdā-vadhāraṇasya vyavahite mananandididhyāsane tadaṅgaṃ aṅgīkriyete |.*

<div align="right">

(*Pañcapādikāvivaraṇa*, p. 288)

</div>

> Ascertaining specific words is the direct means in cognizing object. It is because valid means of cognition is direct in comprehending object. Both reflection and meditation are instrumental in experiencing *brahman* by means of generating attentive state of mind that is refined with the *saṃskāra* of the propensity of orienting to the self. Accordingly, mediated [means of] reflection and meditation are subordinate to comprehending certain words that is the direct means in generating result.

The primacy of the Vedic speech, therefore, is not at the cost of other means of cognition. It rather is about the primacy of speech over reflection and meditation. And yes, if the subject matter is such that other means of cognition cannot produce the required knowledge, there is the primacy of the Vedic speech. When it comes to contemplative reflection and meditation, no philosophical system considers them independent means of cognition; ergo, they are subordinate to speech in producing knowledge. Their scope lies in creating appropriate conditions for the emergence of consciousness. Furthermore, reflection and meditation rest on beliefs and are subject to suspicion, as they cannot self-affirm, unlike the veridical means of cognition. Semantic comprehension, on the other hand, is not externally verified. The role belief and memory play in semantic comprehension is not considered above and beyond the role they play in perception or inference. That is, their ability in producing first-hand knowledge remains uncontested. Accordingly, it is also in censoring agency from the domain of speech that speech gains its freedom. Once reason grounds itself in this platform of freedom, it cannot ever be subject to external control. This is how the Hindu philosophers and theologians liberated reasoning from the shackles of faith, and it is in the discovery of this speech that Hinduism can survive as Hinduism.

The rise of faith and the decline of reasoning

Pennington (2005) argues that the British Raj played role in shaping Hinduism the way we know it in his sensational title, *Was Hinduism Invented?* My only argument is, this shaping or "inventing" of Hinduism cannot be credited to the British Raj alone, as equal credit goes to the

Mughal Raj. This is not to argue that Hinduism as dharma was a colonial product but only to confirm that the flavour and the mould of monotheism, besides many other elements to constitute "religion," were a direct contribution of imperialism. No culture is bereft of blind faith, but it is by means of constituting homogenous identity based on faith that it can preside over reason. If superstitions in early Hinduism are to be considered unexamined beliefs that could be confronted with reason, the formation of "religion" makes it difficult to critically examine those beliefs as they become the "articles of faith." In every eon, rationality has to struggle to break down the shackles of blind faith. During the colonial modes, Hinduism did not just discover itself, it discovered itself in the image of the faith of the colonizers. While shaping dharma in the mould of faith was a project that started long before East India Company landed on Indian soil, it still deserves the main credit, for it is in this era that the Hindus started organizing themselves to transform their "faith" and mobilize masses by means of faith, a factor that is uniquely prophetic. Reformist Samaj movements such as Brahmo Samaj or Arya Samaj and the political movements of Sanghs are designed in such ways that they intrinsically discredit dharma ethos and experiences and circumscribe dharma in the mould of monotheistic religions. To combine this insight with a piercing observation of Kierkegaard (p. 44):

> in order to see what a tremendous paradox faith is, a paradox which is capable of transforming a murder into a holy act well-pleasing to God, a paradox which gives Isaac back to Abraham, which no thought can master, because faith begins precisely there where thinking leaves off

then to analyze the history of debates and arguments in classical India, while contrasting the construction of the articles of faith and censoring of speech in modern India, we do come to two conclusions. Faith and reason cannot share the same bed and form the bedrock of dharma, and the colonial project did indeed shape Hinduism in the way that we know it today. Stepping outside of the foundational quest of self-liberation and immediate experience to ground faith, modern Hinduism has evolved into a means of mass mobilization, and this has helped shape the brands for both political and commercial reasons.

The demarcation of Hinduism as faith and Hinduism as dharma has nothing to do with a vibrant dialogue culture. This rather is about the lack of dialogue and about unconscious simulation. I do not consider something dialogue if two dialoguing agents do not accept the existence of each other. Hinduism as dharma has historically sustained dialogue. Hinduism as dharma evolved by means of dialogue, a constructive and organic dialogue, whereas Hinduism as "faith" evolved in reaction and blind mimicry. This also blurred the dialogical modes for cultural differentiation. Any construction of cultural insider and outsider is complex, and when it comes to the Hindu world, with innumerable pantheons, with each having its own cosmology and metaphysics, rituals and codes of conduct, Hinduism is always its own cultural other. The elastic thread that ties these pantheons functions both to bundle a few and to exclude some others. But what trivializes this inclusion/exclusion is there is always randomness that plays a role in which group or pantheon or deity is outside on which occasion. If we borrow the metaphor of a *maṇḍala*, this is a vibrant *maṇḍala* with deities in flux, and nobody knows when the new ones entered and the old ones got out. The open space in the boundaries has always allowed the outside to penetrate within, sometimes for order and other times for chaos. Hinduism as faith opens itself mostly to the elements that contradict rationality. In this cultural space with semi-permeable boundaries, it is very difficult to distinguish the voices from the margins, the voices from outside, and the voices from within. Oftentimes, the categories of insider and outsider become so blurred that the outsider is the real insider and the insider is merely the body with the soul and the voice of the outsider.

The meaning of modernity becomes blurred when we read it in the context of Hinduism. It is actually after the birth of a sociopolitical force driven by the zeal to create homogenous identity that Hinduism shifts from dharma to religion. What it means by modernity in this sense is culturally converse. Religion in this stage becomes a means of actualizing the collective self to mobilize society for political gain. This self-discovery by means of faith comes both from the plight and sense of weakness and consequently a hyperactivated sense of self-assurance. This shift provides the voice, creates a homogenous cultural group, and makes it possible to categorize the Hindus in the global sphere. It is in this new modification where the Hindus start equating *brahman* with God, transform ritual and contemplation-centred practices into devotional movements, and use cultural experience as a means for constructing identity. Rational inquiry succumbs to the articles of faith at this stage. This is where Hinduism as dharma surrenders and Hinduism as faith emerges.

In some accounts, this is also the project of orientalism. If we examine the articles of Arya Samaj, it rediscovers the Vedas in the mould of the Prophetic Holy Book, confronts image worship or worshipping many gods, and uses homogenous cultural identity to confront cultural imperialism. That is, it embodies what it confronts. We find similar tendencies whether we examine Brahmo Samaj or Vedanta mission. That is, Hindu self-identity fails to express itself by means of dharma and Hinduism as religion forms in this transition. Dharmic ethos become completely blurred. This is what provides the platform for the renunciates and hermits to rule the land. In this modern paradigm, norms are changed, and social aspiration is not about self-discovery or self-realization but about discovering the other within oneself. Hinduism as religion becomes a habitus to describe nationalism. The very formation of the nation state in the leadership of Gandhi or Ambedkar or in the struggles of Aurobindo speaks by means of this very newfound identity. Enchantment with history, primarily a contribution of the orientalists, takes like a fever. Simulated self-identity becomes the mechanism of rediscovering the faith that once was dharma. It is actually in this mode of self-discovery that the colonial project comes to completion.

Returning to the discovery of the absolute truth and moulding oneself in the shape of truth, this new collective self-recognition founded on the basis of faith comes in the format of bending truths and savouring perspectives, engineering and distributing perspectives for mass consumption, and benefitting from this trade of truths. This is where speech submits its primacy over the agents. This new awakening thus translates the mantras into propaganda that collectively functions to shape new faiths. The fluidity that once defined dharma now becomes a means for creating brands and distributing charisma. This entire new discovery has nothing to do with reasoning.

Before closing, I would like to invoke the narrative of Pṛthu from the *Mahābhārata*. He is the first king of mankind on earth, with the very earth being named *pṛthvī* or *pṛthivī*, the lands belonging to Pṛthu. In this myth, the project of Pṛthu is to flatten the earth by levelling all the mountains. Whether by Hindu modernity we imagine faith in alliance with Mohandas Gandhi or with B. R. Ambedkar, the project of modern Hinduism is creating a homogenous society that can mobilize itself for its defence or in offence against the cultural other. If Hinduism is this metaphoric earth, political force is the legendary Pṛthu that demands flattening all the mountains and slopes of Hinduism to create an organized force. The centrality of the Vedic speech in this new age needs a different reading, as this is not the primacy of the spontaneous voice of the constantly unfolding reality but the heavenly mandate, the scripture in the Biblical image.

In this new emanation, individuals become the institute, and faith becomes a commodity. In this age when charisma rules over *tapas* of the *ṛṣis* and reason is subdued, truth has its architects and owners. The message today is the messenger is the message. In this self-affirming frenzy of faith, it is reason that must be the modern-day Isaac. Rather than understanding "reason" as a path to truth, what constitutes something reasonable today is what can mobilize the masses.

In this new incarnation, religion becomes an instrument for mass hysteria and social mobilization. At this juncture, dharma becomes the sacrificial beast on the altar of politics.

Notes

1 *dvividho hi vedokto dharmaḥ pravṛttilakṣaṇo nivṛttilakṣaṇaś ca* | The commentary of Śaṅkara upon the *Bhagavadgītā*, Upakramaṇikā, p. 3 on Pansikar (1936 ed.).
2 *yato ’bhyudayaniḥśreyasasiddhiḥ sa dharmaḥ* | Vaiśeṣikasūtra I.1.2.
3 *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* III.10.11.14.
4 *codanālakṣaṇo ’rtho dharma* | Jaiminīyasūtra I.1.2.
5 *śyenenābhicaran yajeta* | Āpastambaśrautasūtra XXII.4.13.
6 *codanā hi bhūtaṃ bhavantaṃ bhaviṣyantaṃ sūkṣmaṃ vyavahitaṃ viprakṛṣṭam ity evaṃjātīyakam arthaṃ śaknoty avagamayituṃ nānyat kiñ ca, nendriyam* | Śabara on Mīmāṃsāsūtra I.1.2.
7 This also leads to the thesis of intrinsic validity of the speech. For discussion on this issue, see Taber 1992.
8 *saṅkalpamūlaḥ kāmo vai yajñāḥ saṅkalpasaṃbhavāḥ |*
   vratāni yamadharmāś ca sarve saṅkalpajāḥ smṛtāḥ ||
   akāmasya kriyā kācid dṛśyate neha karhicit |
   yad yaddhi kurute kiñcit tattat kāmasya ceṣṭitam || Manusmṛti II.3–4.
9 *yac cetaḥ sandarśanaṃ nāma yadanantaraṃ prārthanādhyavasāyau krameṇa bhavataḥ* | Medātithi on *Manusmṛti* II.3.
10 *Vedo ’khilo dharmamūlaṃ smṛtiśīle ca tadvidām | ācāraś caiva sādhūnām ātmanas tuṣṭir eva ca || Manusmṛti* II.6.
11 *Śrutiḥ smṛtiḥ sadācāraḥ svasya ca priyam ātmanaḥ | samyaksaṅkalpajaḥ kāmo dharmamūlam idaṃ smṛtam || Yājñavalkyasmṛti* I.7. See also Vijñāneśvara’s commentary upon *Yājñavaklyasmṛti* I.7. For discussion, see Davis 2017: 507–521.
12 *vidvadbhiḥ sevitaḥ sadbhir nityamadveṣarāgibhiḥ |*
   hṛdayenābhyanujñāto yo dharmas taṃ nibodhata || Manusmṛti II.1.
13 *na ca pariniṣṭhitavastusvarūpatve ’pi pratyakṣādiviṣayatvaṃ brahmaṇaḥ, tattvamasīti brahmātmabhāvasya śāstram antareṇānavagamyamānatvāt* | *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* I.1.4.
14 *nanu jñānaṃ nāma mānasī kriya | na, vailakṣaṇyāt | kriyā hi nāma sā yatra vastusvarūpanira-pekṣaiva codyate puruṣacittavyāpārādhīnā ca* | *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* I.1.4.
15 *dhyānaṃ cintanaṃ yadyapi mānasaṃ tathāpi puruṣeṇa kartum akartum anyathā vā kartuṃ śakyaṃ, puruṣatantratvāt, jñānaṃ tu pramāṇajanyam | pramāṇaṃ ca yathābhūtavastuviṣayam | ato jñānaṃ kartum akartum anyathā vā kartum aśakyam | kevalaṃ vastutantram eva tat | na codanātantram | nāpi puruṣatantram | Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* I.1.4.

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6

FROM YAJÑA TO PŪJĀ?

Marko Geslani

As a singular transformation in the history of Hinduism, the question of the origins of image worship may be the wrong one. For if from our vantage point in the globalized present we can hardly speak from a position beyond the "West," then it may remain impossible to conjure the Hindu image absent the spectre of the pagan idol, that perennial fixation of Christian polemics. Even after centuries of secular criticism, the question of Hindu image worship still tends to reflect as much about the enquirer as the informant.

We might begin, then, by recalling one of the striking findings of Partha Mitter's study, *Much-Maligned Monsters: A History of Western Reactions to Indian Art* (1977). Until the middle of the seventeenth century, European depictions of Indian gods were dominated by stereotypes from Christian demonology and classical Greco-Roman monster lore. In other words, for centuries, the Hindu image could only be rendered as a particularly Western kind of monstrosity. The phenomenon held true even in the eyewitness travel accounts of those who encountered Hindu images *in situ*. In an influential report, the Italian aristocrat Ludovico di Varthema, who travelled to India between 1503 and 1508, described as follows a metallic "devil" (Deumo) kept in the palace chapel of the king of Calicut:

> The said devil has a crown made like that of the papal kingdom, with three crowns; it has also four horns and four teeth with a very large mouth, nose, and most terrible eyes. The hands are made like those of a flesh hook, and the feet like those of a cock; so that he is a fearful object to behold. All the pictures around the said chapel are those of devils, and on each side of it there is a Sathanas.

<div align="right">(Varthema 1843: 137)</div>

This puzzling Satanic iconography clearly does not correspond to any real Hindu counterpart. Nonetheless, illustrations of Varthema's *Itinerario* drew on contemporary European stereotypes of horned theriomorphic devils. The modern European encounter with the Hindu image, then, begins with a prolonged cultural blindness.

At issue here is not simply the relative objectivity or enthusiasm of such accounts. According to Mitter, while increasingly reliable information on Indian art and architecture became available in the eighteenth century, allowing for more affirming views, these were stimulated by a perceived genealogical link between Indian erotic sculpture and ancient Greek fertility

cults. Subsequent appreciations of Indian art in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—including those of the influential art historian A.K. Coomaraswamy—failed in Mitter's view to reconstruct native standards of aesthetic criticism because they were governed by various secular and Christian preoccupations, including classicism, primitivism, symbolism, and spiritualism. As with the history of Orientalism writ large, such a reception history illustrates the ease with which cultural enthusiasm and objective academic knowledge survive, and indeed thrive, along with histories of political contestation. Nowhere is this truer than in the present case. Academics in the twenty-first century know more about Hindu images than ever. But this knowledge does not cancel their political charge; more likely, it multiplies the potential politics of their representation.

In what follows, I outline the endurance of what I have called an "iconocentric" pattern of thought in the study of Hinduism (Geslani 2018: 3), before turning to some recent approaches to image worship. If I adopt a somewhat iconoclastic approach to the problem of images in Hinduism, however, this is not to deconstruct that problem as a historical reality, but rather to resituate it. There is no doubt that image worship emerges as a ritual form distinct from Vedic sacrifice (among other religious forms) in the post-Vedic period, as evidenced in textual and material sources. Yet accounts of the "origins" of image worship are legion; what I wish to contribute in this chapter is a sense of some alternative trajectories in the history of Hindu practice that may become legible by means of a critique of the supposed problem of the image's origins.

Polytheism to pluralism: the classical iconocentric account

Most accounts of the history of Hinduism emphasize a historical break between the "aniconic" and originally itinerant fire sacrifice (*yajña*) and temple-based image worship (*pūjā*). Whereas the former belongs to the corpus of Vedic texts (ca. 1200–500 BCE), the latter seems to have emerged sometime around the turn of the common era, culminating in the "Hindu" *purāṇa*s that begin to appear in the Gupta period (ca. fourth–sixth centuries CE) and proliferate throughout the medieval period. Meanwhile, in terms of the archaeological record, temple culture reaches maturity by the end of the first millennium CE. The following passage from Gavin Flood's popular textbook, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, is representative of this conventional account and useful here for its didactic clarity:

> From about 500 BCE through the first millennium CE, there was a growth of sectarian worship of particular deities, and vedic sacrifice, though never dying out, gave way to devotional worship (*pūjā*). Performing *pūjā* is a way of expressing love or devotion (*bhakti*) to a deity in some form, and became the central religious practice of Hinduism.
>
> (Flood 1996: 103)

As a summary of textual and material evidence, this is an entirely accurate statement that faithfully represents the scholarly consensus. As a structure of thought, however, certain features stand out. In historical terms, the narrative sequentially opposes Vedic sacrifice (*yajña*) to image worship (*pūjā*). Vedism in this model gives way to Hinduism—the sacrificial fires, as it were, waning if not extinguishing over the course of the first millennium CE. This historical account harbours an equation of Hindu practice, in general, with *pūjā*, defined as an expression of devotion (*bhakti*). Hence the passage not merely summarizes a historical change in ritual practice; it gives way to an essential description of Hinduism—one marked by a shift to the

present tense in the second sentence. Even as the final clause of the sentence returns to the historical tense, stating that image worship "became the central religious practice of Hinduism," the implication is that it remains so in the present, that is, the late twentieth-century British-American university classroom.

It will be instructive to review the colonial roots of this historical narrative, while keeping in mind that these roots extend much deeper in Hindu-Brahmanical tradition. As Brian Pennington has shown, idolatry was a particularly powerful charge against Hinduism in the writings of British missionaries in nineteenth-century India. Informed by a moralistic, Pauline interpretation of idolatry—as a theological error that leads inevitably to violence and sexual depravity—missionary writers like the Baptist reverend William Ward and the Anglican chaplain Claudius Buchanan depicted contemporary Hinduism in India as a vast polytheistic system, derived from the belief in a divine energy subsisting in various forms and objects. According to this view, by mistaking matter for divinity, Hindu idolatry imprisons the worshipper in the material world of the senses, leading to such varied social ills as erotic temple dancing, infanticide, and widow burning (Pennington 2005: 77–100). Although they directly addressed the practices of Hindus in India, Pennington shows how missionary discourse emanating from the colonial periphery fed pedagogic projects in the metropole. Depictions of paganism in India not only generated support for Indian missions, they also worked implicitly for the moral uplift of the emergent British working class, which was also targeted by the colonial civilizing project (Pennington 2005: 51–55). Attacks on idolatry were thus perhaps more effective for domestic policy than for actual foreign conversion.

Missionaries like Ward and Buchanan built on earlier Orientalist accounts of Hindu history. As Thomas Trautmann has shown, enthusiasm for India among early Orientalists like William Jones, John Zephaniah Holwell, and others centred on the ancient Sanskrit texts, whose discovery in the late eighteenth century raised potentially unsettling questions about Biblical revelation: Would these sources confirm or invalidate of the scriptural foundations of Christianity? For some, Hindu scriptures testified to the original (Christian or deist) monotheism of the Mosaic record; for others, the texts presented a later fabrication (Trautmann 1997: 67–80). These debates established a decided preference in Colonial writing for ancient (Vedic) Hinduism, both as a key to the history of humanity and a repository of ancient wisdom. Indeed, the overarching theme of Trautmann's work is the Orientalists' fascination with a perceived kinship between British heritage and Vedic-Aryan culture. For our purposes, the result of this preference for textual antiquity is that contemporary Hinduism could be marked in contrast as a degraded religion—with India's Islamic heritage seen as a foreign imposition. Missionaries like Ward and Buchanan did not contest but rather elaborated this narrative of religious decline. In contrast to the literary quality and philosophical depth of ancient Sanskrit literature, for them, contemporary Hindu "idolatry" illustrated the very nadir of barbarism. The overall structure of this historical narrative confirmed Protestant theories of an original, rational monotheism that was revealed at the beginning of time and disastrously obscured over the ages through priestly machinations (Smith 2004: 183–184).

Such a highly politicized discourse would cast a long shadow over subsequent accounts of image worship in the history of Hinduism. Almost every notable Orientalist of the nineteenth and early twentieth century commented on the problem of the relative antiquity of image worship. Most confirmed both the aniconism of the Vedic sacrifice and the impersonal monotheism (or pantheism) of the Upaniṣads. But they were also quick to distinguish the elite religion of the Vedic texts from the popular or even "primitive" practices of the masses, leaving open the likelihood that image worship might have always been the norm for the "native" inhabitants of

India. Thus in 1883, Monier-Williams summarized the transition from Vedic–Brahmanism to Hinduism as follows:

> We now pass on to the third and by far most complex stage of Hindū religious thought. And at the very outset we are called upon to take note of the fact illustrated by the whole history of religious thought from the earliest times, namely, that a merely spiritual and impersonal religion is quite incapable of taking hold of the masses of mankind or satisfying their religious requirements. Something more was needed for vast populations naturally craving for personal objects of faith and devotion, than the merely spiritual pantheistic creed of Brāhmanism.
>
> The chief point, then, which characterizes Hindūism and distinguishes it from Brāhmanism is that it subordinates the purely spiritual Brahman (nom. Brahmā) with its first manifestation Brahmā, to the personal deities of Śiva and Vishṇu or some form of these deities; while it admits of numerous sects, each exalting its own god to the place of the Supreme.
>
> (Monier–Williams 1883: 54)

Dedicated to "those educated Englishmen who may be desirous of gaining insight into the mental, moral, and religious condition of the inhabitants of our Eastern empire," Monier-Williams' account is relatively sympathetic to British Hindu subjects in India—even if it remains squarely within an imperial politics. Surely seeking to correct the more polemical views of some of his countrymen, he cautions against reducing the whole religious system in India to "heathenism" and "idolatry," "as if every idea it contains was to be eradicated root and branch" (Monier-Williams 1883: vii). If this caution seems to recognize the potential for iconoclasm to feed culture clash, the fine theological distinction between an impersonal and "purely spiritual" Brahman and a personal sectarian deity serves to ease the sense of a precipitous decline between Vedism and Hinduism. Nonetheless, the Orientalist thesis of religious decline is not disposed of entirely; rather, it is transposed into a cultural and sociological distinction between the Āryan elite and the native majority. Hinduism in this iteration is thus defined as "Brāhmanism modified by the creeds and superstitions of Buddhists and non-Āryan races of all kinds, including Drāviḍians, Kolarians, and perhaps pre-Kolarian aborigines" (Monier-Williams 1883: 3). Image worship thus arises out of the natural longing for personal objects of faith on the part of these non-Āryan masses and, as a popular (albeit sectarian) monotheism, is easily integrated into an embracing Brahmanical pantheism.

Various lines of thought illustrated by Monier-Williams' account survived into the twentieth century. In 1926, the Swedish Orientalist Jarl Charpentier proposed to derive the Sanskrit word *pūjā* "from the Dravidian *pūcu-*, *pūsu-*, 'to paint, to daub, to smear [red pigment]'" (Charpentier 1927 [1926]: 133). This was based on the conjecture that Dravidian religion, typified for Charpentier by the worship of village goddesses, centred on the appeasement of malign spirits through blood sacrifice. Invoking a uniform, global primitivism, Charpentier explicitly drew similarities between this "awe-inspiring and terrifying" Dravidian religion and "those known from certain parts of Africa" (Charpentier 1927 [1926]: 96). The hypothesis was countered in 1939 by Paul Thieme, who proposed a Sanskritic derivation for the term (see below). Nonetheless, Charpentier's thesis, mobilized by a classed and racialized Aryan/non-Aryan distinction, illustrates how the question of image worship triggered lingering anxieties about primitivism in the late colonial era.

By contrast, nationalist historians opted for a less vulgar version of events. The Indologist and art historian J.N. Banerjea, for instance, traced an increasing non-Aryan influence within the

later Vedic corpus itself. Following the Scottish Sanskritist A.B. Keith, he viewed the Upaniṣads as hybrid Aryo-Dravidian texts, highly commensurate with *bhakti*:

> In the Upaniṣads . . . the mental attitude of the thinkers to the supreme entity, viz., Brahman–Ātman gets a character which is, in no uncertain manner, reminiscent of *Bhakti*. The growth and development of monotheism, a direct result of the pantheistic conception of the earlier Upaniṣads, was the certain ground on which Bhakti was to develop among the intellectual section of the composite population of India.
>
> (Banerjea 1941: 81)

Banerjea extends Monier-Williams' theological reading of the Vedic-Hindu divide, rendering the devotional monotheism of later Hinduism continuous with, if not identical to, the pantheism of the Upaniṣads. His approach offers a theological motivation for image worship that is firmly grounded in Vedism:

> Some sensible objects were found to be indispensable by the various sectarians who required them as so many visible symbols for the various personal gods to whom they rendered their exclusive homage. The symbols and images in their case analogically did the same sort of service as was done by Fire (Agni) in the Vedic ritualism. Fire was specially sacred to the Vedic priests, because it was the carrier of the sacrificers' oblations to the respective gods; in the case of the sectary, the image or icon or any such visible symbol of his deity was the handy medium through which he could transfer his one-souled devotion (*ekātmikā bhakti*) to his god.
>
> (Banerjea 1941: 86)

Rather than an atavistic survival of demonic blood sacrifice, here the image serves as symbolic medium for the contemplative transfer of devotion. In this function, it is analogous to the ancient Vedic fire, which served as medium for the oblation. Through this analogy, devotional Hinduism functionally supersedes Vedic ritualism.

This historiographic review shows the endurance of both Orientalist-textual antiquarianism and missionary-ethnographic iconoclasm through the era of Indian independence. By the 1940s, a scholarly defence of Hinduism not only required a theological reinterpretation of image worship in light of the charge of idolatry; it also had to bridge a considerable temporal and conceptual gap with Vedic tradition, in part to insulate Hinduism from the charge of primitivism. Thus Banerjea's account simultaneously dematerializes and Vedicizes image worship, projecting devotionalism backward in time via the Upaniṣads and bringing the sacred fire forward by analogy with the image.

The need for a theological defence of Hindu image worship did not dissipate by the late twentieth century, even if the terms of this defence shifted amidst Asian decolonization, U.S. political hegemony, and global capitalism. Diana Eck's *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (1998 [1981]), largely departs from the narrative framework of historical origins, establishing an essentialist and phenomenological approach to image worship as a visual encounter of mutual recognition (*darśan* as "seeing") between deity and devotee. Eck strategically repackages Max Müller's description of Ṛgvedic theology as "kathenotheism," or the worship of one god at a time—a sort of middle ground between monotheism and polytheism that well serves her redescription of image worship. While she appeals to Hinduism's latent monotheism, she also retains its manifest polytheism as key to its theological diversity: "India's affirmation of Oneness is made in a context that affirms with equal vehemence the multitude of ways that human beings have

seen that oneness and expressed their vision" (Eck 1998 [1981]: 24). Whereas early travellers to India saw in the image a "wild mob of nightmares," in the late twentieth century, "the very images of the gods portray in visible form the multiplicity and oneness of the divine, and they display the tensions and seeming contradictions that are resolved in a single mythic image" (Eck 1998 [1981]: 28). The image remains a bewildering array of heads, limbs, and implements, but this bewilderment is merely the outward sign of an inner resolution.

Eck's account of the divine image in Hinduism takes us a long way indeed from missionary iconophobes like William Ward who lived under British colonial rule in India. But that distance traverses a road marked by the signage of Anglo-American political history. Thus, while her account is informed by a more sensitive ethnography—and thus a more accurate picture of religious practice in India—it also reflects political imperatives in aspiring secular democracies like the United States. This political context prioritizes a Protestant definition of "religion" as private monotheistic belief, and it manages different beliefs as equivalent commitments within a framework of religious pluralism. Given Christianity's abiding majority status and cultural dominance in the United States and Europe, the modern setting also retains a discomfort with religious materiality, though it increasingly attenuates this discomfort through cultural-aesthetic consumption. In this complex situation, Hinduism presents both a minority diaspora tradition in need of political advocacy and intercultural translation, and a global religion bearing significant potential within secular modernity for its venerable scriptures, aesthetic achievements, and apparent theological diversity. It is within such terms that contemporary sources valorize and essentialize many assumptions about Hinduism inherited from earlier accounts of the origins of image worship, including its theological continuity with Vedic tradition; demotic social location; and monotheistic, devotional character.

Hesitations and contradictions

Despite significant global political transformations that have fostered an academic revaluation of Hinduism, much of the earlier historical narrative from *yajña* to *pūjā* persists. This is a rather long and imprecise history, as we have seen—"from 500 BCE through the first millennium," in Flood's terms. In this section, I will review some new questions that have been raised about this early history. But first, it should be stressed that, however broad, this roughly 1500-year period is not an arbitrary timeframe; rather, it covers an array of definite textual and material evidence of a cult of images of Hindu deities permanently installed in temples. The material evidence is especially commanding. Beginning on the near end of this time scale, around the turn of the second millennium CE, we find numerous monumental temple complexes dedicated to various deities and tied to regional powers, such as Thanjavur and Khajuraho, commissioned by the Colas and Chandellas, respectively. These massive monuments—products of immense political and economic energies—did not arise *ex nihilo* but present the culmination of centuries-old architectural tradition, continuous with monumental temples built by the Cālukyas and Pallavas in the seventh and eighth centuries and those of the Guptas in the fifth and sixth centuries. The Gupta period is thus generally accepted as the starting point for a continuous Hindu temple architecture, with much of the earlier architectural record centring on Buddhist monuments. Before this period, we find sporadic evidence of brick shrines (Ray 2004: 348–349) as early as the first century BCE. Contemporaneous with Buddhist and Jain images (DeCaroli 2015; Cort 2010), the earliest seemingly Hindu sculptures in the round date also from this period, while Hindu iconography appears on the coinage of the Kushanas in the first–second century CE (Michel 2000: 40–44). Given the overall lack of architectural context, however, it remains difficult to reconstruct the operation of a temple cult in the pre-Gupta period.

The textual evidence is also significant, if somewhat more equivocal. Near the end of the first millennium CE, a number of Purāṇic texts recommend the installation and worship of images, and detailed liturgical manuals appear in Vaiṣṇava *Saṃhitā*s and Śaiva *Āgama*s. Many *purāṇas* colourfully illustrate the benefits of image veneration. The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, for instance, tells the story of a mouse that lived in a temple to Viṣṇu at *Nṛsiṃha tīrtha* on the banks of the Devikā river in Madras. While attempting to steal a candle wick, the mouse is startled by a cat, and in flight, brushes a lamp, causing it to burn brighter for an instant. Due to this unintended offering, the mouse is born as Latikā, the daughter of Citraratha, and wife of Cārudharmin, king of Kāśī, famed for her incessant provision of lamps in Viṣṇu's temple (Granoff 1993: 73–76). Stories like this establish the tremendous merit and soteriological efficacy of even unconscious acts of image worship. Nonetheless, as we will see, the *purāṇa*s are not uniform sources of theology or ritual. They were written over a vast period, and even where they are forthcoming about images, we cannot always be sure whether they are directed to an approving or hostile audience. A relatively conservative view, then, cannot take the full image cult as we know it back before the sixth century—before the astrologer Varāhamihira, who gives our earliest firmly datable instruction for image installation (*pratiṣṭhā*) and temple architecture, and the earliest Āḷvārs, poet saints who depict vivid scenes of image worship in their devotional poetry. As with the material evidence, earlier textual sources are less forthcoming than is sometimes suggested. For instance, select portions of the *Mahābhārata*, including the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Nārāyaṇīya Parvan*, are often cited in accounts of the rise of image worship because they recommend devotion (*bhakti*) to Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, even if they do not explicitly prescribe the worship of images. Such citations make sense only if we assume that devotionalism naturally gives rise to image worship.

We would be mistaken to conclude, therefore, that the conventional account of the image's origins—or the very question of image worship in Hindu history—is a political fiction born in the colonial encounter. Adding further momentum to the account is the way in which it dovetails with precolonial discourses about the image from within the Hindu tradition. Whilst harbouring a Protestant theory of religious decline, Orientalists also drew on a homologous Brahmanical discourse of moral degeneration known as the Yuga theory. Already in the medieval period, Purāṇic sources idealized the ancient Vedic sacrifice and viewed later ritualism (including image worship) as a necessary evil in this fourth and final Kali age (Trautmann 1997: 67). Moreover, the tendency to regard image worship as a concession to a "weak-minded" lower class was common in South Asian soteriology. The Advaita theologian, Śaṅkara, developed a "two-tiered" model of religious practice, much like the one theorized by Monier-Williams and others, that accepted the worship of sensible forms as potentially useful at a lower level of practice, despite the ultimate truth of a formless, abstract Brahman (Davis 2001: 122–124).

Nonetheless, as Gilles Tarabout cautions us, these theological and soteriological doctrines cannot be taken as a satisfactory historical standard. Turning the "popular concession" thesis on its head, Tarabout observes that in contemporary India, by far the vast majority of gods worshiped among lower classes are invisible, or, if visible, aniconic. By contrast, anthropomorphic images are much rarer and appear almost exclusively in high-caste temples. This raises the question of whose religion is represented by the emphasis on devotional image worship in scholarship on Hinduism. At the very least, Tarabout suggests that the ethnographic situation he describes—the reverse of what we would expect if images emerged as natural counterparts to popular devotion—should set a different constraint on possible historical explanations. As in the case of Christianity and Buddhism, we must seek a history of the Hindu cult of images among the elite (Tarabout 2004).

Tarabout's ethnographic correction of the conventional sociology of image worship sets a useful frame for recent scholarship, which has taken up the textual evidence of the first millennium CE with social and historical precision and a deconstructive sensibility. Gérard Colas (2012) begins by reframing the chronology of this early history, based on the wide divergence between material and textual evidence. As he puts it, "Archaeology knows the existence of religious sculptures on the subcontinent from before the common era, and since then, the region witnessed the massive spread of icons and their worship, but the texts of the period in question only rarely invoke Indian opinions about icons" (Colas 2012: 9). Rather than gloss this empirical impasse as marking the long period of the image's inevitable emergence, he takes it as a prompt for a less teleological reconsideration of iconic thought in India prior to the twelfth century CE. Colas' polycentric approach recasts the image as an intersection of multiple interests—religious, economic, political, and technical—among various stakeholders, including monks, priests, astrologers, scribes, and artisans—in addition to philosophers and theologians. In forefronting these "intermediary" professional classes, who were "lettered without being erudite," he decomposes the earlier, largely Protestant notion of a singular, elite "priesthood" that begrudgingly concedes to popular devotional demand. Instead his analysis highlights the discontinuity and contestation among various views of the image in this early period. For example, the *Arthaśāstra*, a treatise of political strategy, expresses an instrumental and potentially cynical view, advising kings to exploit their subjects' or enemies' credulity in a divine image. Elsewhere we find a debate about whether an image could be considered an owner of property, a claim supported by Buddhist monastic literature and epigraphical sources but contested by the Vedic school of exegesis (*mīmāṃsā*). Meanwhile, even by the end of the first millennium CE, philosophical elites still expressed considerable ambivalence about the view of the image as a living divine presence.

Whereas the conventional account tended to depict the emergence of image worship as a Brahmanical adoption reflecting the decline of Vedic ritualism, recent scholarship has therefore explored the way in which orthodox Brahmans continued to reject or dismiss image worship well after the end of the Vedic period. Classical sources from the Brahmanical legal tradition (Dharmaśāstra) composed in the early centuries CE are largely silent on temples and do not include image worship among the regular duties twice-born classes, even if they occasionally acknowledge the existence of divinities and shrines (Olivelle 2010). The major early work of this tradition, the *Mānavadharmaśāstra*, is openly disdainful of the *devālaka*s or temple officiants, excluding them from the proper brahmanical community that should be invited to ancestral offerings (Davis 2018: 351). By the seventh century, a theistic (Vaiṣṇava) Dharmaśāstra does prescribe the worship of images, though this may not indicate widespread Brahmanical sanction of images. The tenth-century commentator Medhātithi, for instance, maintained the *mīmāṃsā* view that gods do not have bodies or legal personhood. This record supports the view that image worship remained controversial within the Brahmanical community for some time (Von Stietencron 1977; Davis 2001).

Tracing the ritual effects of this prolonged reticence and conflict, Phyllis Granoff reads the first millennium CE as a period of ongoing hesitation, contradiction, and inconsistency around the image, wrought by the possible collision between still-unidentified image-worshipping priests and Brahman inheritors of the Vedic ritual tradition. Various fissures resulting from this collision are evident even in texts usually thought to reflect a mature temple cult. In one instance, the *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, a well-known source of architecture and iconography, issues an apology for image worship that nonetheless admits the redundancy of worshipping a god who is formless and omnipresent in a discrete iconographic form. In another case, the *Jayākhyāsaṃhitā*, a text also belonging to the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇavas, major historical agents for

the image cult, admits the inconsistency of invoking a god into a statue where he has already been permanently installed. This suggests a tension between rituals of worship (*pūjā*) and rituals of permanent installation (*pratiṣṭhā*). The habit of invocation (*āvāhana*) and dismissal (*visarjana*), common in many daily *pūjā* ceremonies, assumes a deity that is only present temporarily, as in Vedic rituals, whereas the purpose of the installation ceremony is to bring the deity into the image permanently (Granoff 2006). One outcome of this prolonged tension is a lingering ambiguity around images even in mainstream *purāṇa*s, which tend to deny the specificity of the image as a unique category of ritual object. Thus, images are often treated as but one receptacle among others for divine presence, or they can serve purposes other than worship, such as gifting (Granoff 2004). As Granoff puts it, "The history of image worship in India, I suspect, is a history of the tension and oscillation between these two poles, one in which the image is the god himself, and another in which the image is simply one of many possible supports for the god" (2004: 42).

These considerations do much to unsettle the received history that posits both the perennial worship of images among the lower classes as well as their widespread and inevitable acceptance among Brahmanical groups by the end of the first millennium CE. They open several broad directions for inquiry. Aside from the devotional groups themselves, who were the other stakeholders in the image cult, and how did these varied interests shape temple Hinduism? What was the process whereby the cult of the image was accommodated within—or itself adopted—so-called "Brahmanical" ritual? Is it possible to understand this process in relation to a specific institutional or political history? How might we understand image worship within broader historical frameworks of ritual practice and theories of materiality among varied groups in the medieval South Asian religious landscape?

Pūjā reconsidered

This new terrain for the history of early Hindu ritual has hardly been explored, but we can chart some of its contours through a review of recent studies of *pūjā*, the ritual format denoted by the term "image worship." Whereas the conventional account tends to understand image worship as an instinctive devotional impulse, *pūjā* has more recently been analyzed as a discrete ritual structure, independent of theological commitments. While this approach has not done away entirely with the question of non-Brahmanical origins, it has brought *pūjā* into view as a ritual form commensurate and historically continuous with earlier Vedic paradigms and hence in clearer relation to Brahmanism.

Such an approach was already evident in Paul Thieme's hypothesis about the etymology of *pūjā*. Based on occurrences in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Thieme defined *pūjā* as a mode of "honor," based on the Brahmanical custom of entertaining eminent guests. In the domestic ritual codes (Gṛhyasūtras), the custom of guest reception was known as *madhu-parka*, since it required offering the visitor a refreshing beverage or "honey-mixture." Based on this connection, Thieme proposed to derive *pūjā* from a periphrastic form of the Sanskrit root *pṛc* ("to mix"), under the influence of vernacular sound changes (pṛñcāṃ > puñcāṃ > puñjāṃ > pujjāṃ > pūjāṃ) (Thieme 1939). Rather than as reflecting primitive blood sacrifice, Thieme thus established image worship as intelligible within a tradition of Brahmanical hospitality that was at least conceptually continuous with the Vedic practice of inviting gods to the sacrifice.

Whether or not this etymology can be confirmed, subsequent scholarship has followed Thieme's lead in situating *pūjā* in the context of Vedic-Brahmanical domestic ritual. As Gudrun Bühnemann (1988) has shown, as a mature ritual format, *pūjā* emerges in the late *Gṛhyasūtras* and their appendices (*pariśiṣṭa*s), texts composed within the Vedic rituals after the Vedic period

and likely sometime before the Guptas. In its fullest form, the ritual comprises no less than sixteen services (*ṣoḍaśopacāra*), including (with some variation) invocation (*āvāhana*), seat (*āsana*), foot-water (*pādya*), drinking water (*arghya*), bath (*snāna*), clothing (*vastra*), sacrificial thread (*yajñopavīta*), perfume (*gandha*), flowers (*puṣpa*), incense (*dhūpa*), lamp (*dīpa*), food (*naivedya*), rinsing water (*ācamanīya*), fruit (*phala*), betel nut (*tāmbūla*), and circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇa*). In his analysis of these transitional Gṛhya-appendices, Shingo Einoo understands the *pūjā* ritual structure as the result of a historical process. As he sees it, non-Brahmanical offerings (perfume, flowers, incense, lamps) have been amalgamated with offerings from two domestic Brahmanical frameworks, first, the simple domestic sacrifice (invocation and cooked food) and second, the guest reception ritual (seat, foot-washing, drink, bathing, dress, sipping) (Einoo 1996). Timothy Lubin elaborates and extends this insight through an analysis of one of the earliest sources of the daily *pūjā* of Viṣṇu and Rudra/Śiva, in the *Baudhāyanagṛhyaśeṣasūtra*. He emphasizes how these instructions demonstrate a concerted effort by *smārta* Brahmans to Vedicize image worship by embedding it within the frame of domestic sacrifice and providing each ritual element with Vedic mantras that, where possible, carry prior associations with the god in question (Lubin 2016).

The Vedicization of *pūjā* finds significant historical confirmation in Michael Willis' reading of Gupta temple charters. On the whole, these epigraphical sources define *pūjā* as comprising various terms, including *bali*, *caru*, *sattra*, perfume, flowers, incense, and lights. Willis argues the first three terms were adopted from the ritual classification of the "Five Great Sacrifices" (*pañcamahāyajña*) theorized in the Vedic domestic *sūtra*s and Dharmaśāstra. In his reconstruction, the epigraphic *bali* refers to the simple food offering to various spirits, or *bhūtayajña*; *caru* to the fire sacrifice (*homa*), or *devayajña*; and *sattra* to the feeding and clothing of the Brahmanical community, or *manuṣyayajña*. To verify this interpretation with a scriptural example, Willis cites the *pūjā* instruction from the *Vaikhānasasmārtasūtra*, which combines cooked and simple food offerings (*caru* and *bali*); perfume, flowers, incense, and lamps; and the feeding of Brahmans (*sattra*). The occurrence of *bali*, *caru*, and *sattra* in the early historical record shows again the intention, on the part of temple priests, to relocate Vedic domestic ritual within the public temple and, conversely, to establish image worship as a variant of Vedic sacrifice. This institutional activity flourished under the aegis of the overall state-building project of the Guptas (Willis 2009).

Following these trajectories, my research has attempted to enlarge the ideological and political dimensions of image worship by placing the cult of permanent images in relation to the royal ritual program devised at the nexus of Atharvavedic and astral (Jyotiḥśāstra) specializations. Rereading early instructions for image installation and worship in the Gṛhya-appendices, I see a parallel between the cult of the divine image and the cult of the royal body. Rather than the Vedic fire or the simple offerings of perfume and flowers that characterize *pūjā*, the crucial ritual motif in this reconstruction is bathing or aspersion (*snāna/abhiṣeka*). In a pattern that holds true across Vedic, astrological, and later Purāṇic texts, the aspersion or "appeasement" (*śānti*) waters—as they are called in many sources—empowered by priestly recitations, are used to protect the king's body from malign forces of inauspiciousness. Thus, the king is bathed at his inaugural consecration into kingship, at regular intervals thereafter, and upon the manifestation of omens in his kingdom. A similar pattern can be seen in rituals for the installation (*pratiṣṭhā*) and regular worship (*pūjā*) of the image; although it was not a regular element in the domestic fire sacrifice or guest reception ceremony, bathing appears in both rituals as a way of harmonizing the worship of the image with the cult of the royal body. Thus, in the *Baudhāyanagṛhyaśeṣasūtra*, the daily baths of Viṣṇu and Rudra, which double as *pūjā* ceremonies, are also said to bring appeasement to the image. A close analogy between king and image helps to explain the communal function of the medieval temple cult, which

replicates at the local level the work of the state to dispense auspiciousness and prosperity (Geslani 2018).

Altogether, these findings significantly revise the historical narrative *from* sacrifice *to* image worship. *Pūjā* in fact becomes historically visible insofar as it is embedded or encompassed *within yajña*. Hence, the thesis of the decline of sacrifice in the medieval period appears somewhat less tenable. Even if the monumental solemn rituals of old were not practiced with great frequency, nonetheless, the Hindu temple became a site for the maintenance of Vedic ritualism, however adapted or transformed. At a more fundamental level, this survival represents the endurance of Vedic models of priesthood. As Colas observes, ancient Vedic ritualism is not best described as "aniconic"—as it is usually depicted in iconocentric accounts of Hinduism—but rather as poetic or sonic, since divinity was summoned and imagined through Vedic recitation (Colas 2012: 24). Likewise, the histories of ritual change summarized here all presume ritual specialists—Vedic or otherwise—whose professional authority is based on mantric repertoires.

The image lives

None of the foregoing work settles the ultimate "origins" of image worship beyond the sphere of the Brahmanical-Sanskritic record. As we have seen, many scholars still presume the influence of non-Brahmanical iconophiles to explain tensions evident within the Brahmanical community. Meanwhile, attempts to reconstruct this Brahmanical other continue (Lidova 2010). We should also be careful not to prescribe a top-down model of history that overemphasizes the historical role of royal patronage to the detriment of other social groups and local and regional factors (Ray 2009: 88–90). Nonetheless, given the way in which the devotional perspective of the image has been privileged and at times essentialized in scholarship on Hinduism, it seems important to note how, in aspiring to a more reliable and critical history, recent work reveals some of the image's other social and ideological functions. To put it another way, if temple Hinduism thrived *in spite of* significant hesitation on the part of orthodox Brahmanical authorities, then its success owes at least as much to the image cult's ability to organize society at large as its devotional gravity. Once we embrace the image's multiplicity as a social and political signifier, rather than its theological singularity, a different history opens up, one continuous with the postsecular and postcolonial present.

In *Lives of Indian Images* (1997), Richard Davis pioneers a "biographical" approach to Hindu images, adapting Igor Kopytoff's cultural-biographical object history. Davis begins by examining cases of image theft in medieval South Asia, where Hindu rulers creatively appropriated images for the purposes of state-building. For example, he examines the case of the Cola ruler Rājādhirāja (1018–54), who, after defeating the Cālukyas and sacking the capital Kalyāṇapuram, returned home with a Cālukya door guardian as a war trophy. In another case, the Vijayanagara emperor Kṛṣṇadevarāya (1509–1529), after defeating the Gajapati ruler Pratāparudra, appropriated an image of Bālakṛṣṇa from Udayagiri and installed it in its own temple in his territory. In order to comprehend the full significance of these appropriations, Davis situates image theft within a broader history of the looting of royal paraphernalia. Insofar as umbrellas, crowns, and thrones participated in ceremonial kingship, their appropriation and redistribution carried major significance in the shifting political landscape of medieval South Asia. Hence, gifting an emerald pedestal to a general cemented an alliance, while stealing a rival king's deity was tantamount to political subordination and incorporation. If the power of the image drew in part on its ability to represent the king, it was highly susceptible to kidnapping.

While governed by different cultural standards of looting, both Islamic and British forces were drawn into this highly politicized South Asian culture of appropriation. In each case, a

discourse of "idolatry" added political significance to the treatment of temple images. Thus, for Islamic chroniclers of the conquests of Maḥmūd, who raided the Somanātha temple in Gujarat in 1026 and is said to have destroyed and relocated the temple idol, depictions of iconoclasm helped establish the righteousness of his rule, perhaps justifying massive economic gain (Davis 1997: 99). By contrast, British officials initially showed little interest in, if not disdain for, Indian "idols." If the colonial principle of non-interference in religion left some temples untouched, it also reflected a misrecognition of cultural patterns of kingship and perhaps the wilful ignorance of Indian sovereignty. Meanwhile, British forces enriched themselves greatly through other spoils of colonial conflict.

While at first the discourse of idolatry precluded aesthetic interest, in the early twentieth century, Indian images transitioned into art objects, first through the articulation of distinctively Indian aesthetic values (Davis 1997: 178). This process, which is continuous with British decolonization and the entry of India into the ranks of global nationhood, culminates in the late twentieth-century legal notion of "cultural property" and the possibility—seldom exercised successfully—of the repatriation of images. We thus arrive at a compelling context for an interpretation of the Hindu image in the present. What does it mean that Hindu images, appropriated during and after British colonization, now inhabit museums everywhere in the modern world? Are they untended gods or kings demanding tribute? Desecrated spoils of war or ambassadors of cultural-aesthetic tradition? The modern museum, which originated as a nationalizing and civilizing project in colonial Europe, frames the image as a singular aesthetic object, expressive of national genius (Duncan 1995). Thus, in the museum, the image stands naked and abstract. This certainly differs from the temple setting, where it is treated as a venerable living body, bathed, clothed, adorned, and fed in regular *pūjā* ceremonies. One interpretation would see the museum as a space of desecration (Grimes 1992). Yet on another level, one could assert that both the modes of looking presume a similar kind of encounter or recognition, with the aesthetic and the devotional gaze becoming increasingly difficult to parse in the post-secular age. Meanwhile, as medieval royal bodies on display, images continue to index a history of colonial conquest that all but obliterated South Asian kingship, even as the museum itself belongs to a postcolonial diaspora at times eager to see its varied cultural traditions represented on the global stage. In this context, both the repatriation of images to Indian temples or museums and their continued display in the West may be seen to serve national interests.

The image returns

The earliest image treated by Mitter in his study of Western receptions of Indian art is not a monstrous one, exactly. It is a painting from the fourteenth-century manuscript *Le livre des merveilles*, an illustrated compendium of various travel accounts, including those of Marco Polo, who reported the South Indian practice of dedicating young girls to gods and goddesses: "when the nuns of a convent desire to make a feast to their god, they send for all those consecrated damsels and make them sing and dance before the idol with great festivity" (quoted in Mitter 1977: 3). The illustration of this passage, titled *Danse des servantes ou esclaves des dieux*, depicts seven girls worshipping an "idol" on a pedestal. All of the figures are dressed in the garb of Christian nuns, with flowing white robes and a dark veil. This includes the deity, who is only distinguished by her dark skin, in contradistinction to the white-skinned nuns, six of whom dance in a circle, while another makes an offering. As Mitter reminds us, the image reflects nothing accurate or specific about Indian iconography. Having no context, the artist has simply taken the text literally, drawing on entirely Western conventions. The idol herself can only be marked vertically and racially. A complete ignorance of architectural context lends a somewhat abstract effect to the painting; the figures

stand on a tiled, geometric floor that stretches to a twilight horizon. If this image says nothing about its subject, it seems to present—nakedly and recursively—the eye of the beholder.

Much later in the history of Western art is a comparable work by Nicolas Poussin, *The Adoration of the Golden Calf* (1633–35), a depiction of the paradigmatic scene of idolatry from Exodus, wherein, as Moses is receiving the law on Mount Sinai, the Israelites urge Aaron to make them a god. Poussin's rendering foregrounds the Israelites dancing joyously around the golden calf, while in the background Moses descends from Sinai with the tablets of the law, as dark clouds crowd the horizon. According to art historian Richard Neer, Poussin designed the image as an allegorical illustration of the second commandment, testing the discerning viewer to perceive the invisible truth of divine judgment looming in the background of the vibrant jubilee. But W.J.T. Mitchell takes the opposite view: perhaps despite himself, Poussin has illustrated a Durkheimian totem—perhaps, even, a democratic emblem—one that the Israelites themselves had requested (Mitchell 2011).

Danse des servantes seems open to a similar interpretation. Imagining the Hindu idol for perhaps the first time, the artist figures a scene unencumbered by Mosaic injunction: women dancing at the feet of a figure utterly human, if racially other. Following Mitchell, we might see this as a scene less of fear of the other than of longing for community—or, at least, of a longing lodged in the heart of fear. I have suggested that, as much as in the textual and archaeological record, we must also find the "origin" of the Hindu image here, in the particularly Western and Christian tradition of iconocentrism that grounds Indology and religious studies. In that tradition, as seen in missionary accounts during the colonial period, the Hindu image represented a pagan recurrence, the return of an originary sin. Orientalist and Nationalist observers translated this sinful idol into a perennial demotic impulse, to whose inevitability the Brahmin priesthood must reluctantly concede. And this impulse reaches its full flower in recent accounts of the image as signifier of secular pluralism.

If this historiographic trajectory, like *Danse des servantes*, foregrounds the devotees and their gods, recent scholarship on the Vedicization of image worship can be seen, like *Adoration of the Golden Calf*, to return the priesthood—and the monarchic state—to the background of the scene. We have found the Brahmanical class to be both in the position of Aaron and Moses: On the whole, Vedic Brahmans were perhaps the critical historical agents of image worship, even as they would forever remain anxious about the image's devotional immediacy. The paradox is that through their somewhat equivocal ritual labours, they created the very conditions for Hindu communities, through the temple cult, to maintain continuity amid various interruptions during the medieval and modern periods. There is a lesson here, in the history of the Hindu image, for Mitchell, Durkheim, and perhaps the Abrahamic iconoclasts. Sanskrit texts often warn that a damaged image, or one whose worship has been interrupted, should be discarded—either buried in the ground or cast into the ocean. This is because, as one source puts it, it may "become home to goblins or demons." Such passages seem to reflect anxiety about the image's return beyond its intended use. If so, this is a legitimate fear, for the image inevitably returns—but less in the hands of goblins and demons than other priests.

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7

EARLY PILGRIMAGE TRADITIONS IN SOUTH ASIA

Knut A. Jacobsen

Introduction[1]

In this chapter, I look at some early South Asian pilgrimage traditions and the integration of pilgrimage rituals in the Hindu traditions. Sacred sites that were believed to offer rewards to those who visited them have been a significant feature of South Asian religious traditions since at least the first centuries CE, and the practice of religious travel to visit such sacred sites is still flourishing. South Asia is one of the major pilgrimage regions in the world. Some of the most popular sites in contemporary South Asia, such as the Veṅkaṭeśvara temple in Tirumala, the Jagannāth temple in Puri, the Harmandir Sāhib in Amritsar, the Sharīf Dargāh in Ajmer, and the Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health in Velankanni, attract millions annually, and some pilgrimage festivals, such as the *kumbhamelā*s, attract even more people during the weeks they take place. All four religions of Indian origin have numerous pilgrimage sites, which are centres of ritual activities, and their sacred geographies continue to develop, not only in South Asia but increasingly also globally. In Jainism, the sacred sites are primarily associated with the events and teachings of *tīrthaṅkara*s and temples, and in Buddhism with *buddha*s and *bodhisattva*s and sacred structures such as temples and *stūpa*s. In Hinduism, the power of the sites to give rewards is connected to the events and presence of their gods, goddesses, ascetics, ṛṣis, and so on, which are seen as inherent in the sites themselves. The Hindu sites are often situated next to water bodies. In Sikhism, the sites mark historical places mainly associated with their ten human gurus. Christians in South Asia have likewise created sacred sites, such as the Marian shrine of Velankanni in South India, and Muslims have numerous Dargāhs and Masjīds. The sites often represent a particular powerful presence of the divine, and salvific rewards such as healing, wealth, moral purification, and *mokṣa* are thought to be available at the sites. Sacred sites such as a Buddhist *stūpa*, a historical *gurdvārā*, a temple at a Hindu pilgrimage place, or a temple marking the place associated with Jain *tīrthaṅkara*s also signify the religious ownership of localities and define landscapes. In addition, the sites make the sacred narratives of sages, divinities, and powers, which the sites celebrate, appear true, authentic, and genuine, since the places where the narratives were supposed to have happened actually do exist and can be visited, seen, touched, smelled, heard, and experienced.

Sites claimed to have been places of religious narratives and powers become "owned" by ritual traditions, and the religious rituals and narratives connected to space can represent a

form of "land grabbing". The All-India pilgrimage described in the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* can be understood as an attempt to claim this whole geographical space for Brahman ritual experts. That this pilgrimage is imagined as an All-India *parikramā* (see Bhardwaj 1973) strengthens this interpretation. In his study of the *Vāyupurāṇa*, D. Patil observed, regarding the descriptions of *tīrtha*s and pilgrimage in the *Mahābhārata*, that the heroes of the epic visit *tīrtha*s "almost as if on a holy campaign" (Patil 1946: 333). One of the purposes of the descriptions, and why it can be characterized as a "holy campaign", was probably to claim "ownership" of the sacred sites within this *parikramā*. This possibly included the ritual clients who visited places and also functioned to increase the number of clients by making the sites better known and part of larger networks and narratives. Ritual clients are a central resource for ritual traditions, and one important reason for taking over old or creating new sacred sites seems to have been to gain access to and increase this important religious resource.

Pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic religious ritual sites

The early history of pilgrimage and sites of pilgrimage in South Asia is associated with much uncertainty, and its earliest history will probably never be known. However, in all probability, the sacredness of some pilgrimage sites dates back to pre-historic times. Pilgrimage rituals might have been part of the Indus Valley civilization, although there is no conclusive evidence.[2] Some pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic religious rituals in parts of north and central India were associated with sacred trees, pools of water, and shrines in the form of stones, and some of these might have been objects of pilgrimage travel also in pre-historic times. Festivals possibly took place at their sites. Such sacred sites were later called *caitya*s (Sanskrit) or *cetiya*s (Pali), or sometimes *caityavṛkṣa* (tree shrine) (Falk 1973: 4).[3] A *caitya* was in particular associated with a tree or group of trees, which was most often the abode of beings that in the textual traditions came to be called *yakṣa*s or *yakṣiṇī*s. These beings seem to have been connected to sites around which their worship centred and which sometimes also had shrines. The worship of *yakṣa*s, as well as *nāga*s and other deities, was perhaps widespread in north and central India. They were guardians of places and gatekeepers and were probably associated with prosperity and fertility. Significantly for understanding early pilgrimage, since *yakṣa*s or *yakṣiṇī*s were connected to sites, the worshipper would have to travel to their sites in order to worship them. The *yakṣa* would have a distinctive type of shrine, which was thought to be "representative of the wilderness that constituted the yaksha's original home" (Falk 1973: 3). Ascetics may have gathered at or near such *caitya*s in order to collect alms from visitors, who could then perhaps be considered pilgrims. The shrines consisting of a tree or a grove of trees that sometimes had a stone of some considerable size under them are frequently depicted in the texts and art (Falk 1973: 3).

*Yakṣa*s, in particular, have been considered "a relic of non-Aryan worship" (Misra 1981: 6), and some beings named *nāga*s, *apsaras*es, *rākṣasa*s, and so on might have belonged to that same category of non-Aryan worship. *Caitya*s were important in the Buddhist and Jain traditions, but "there is sufficient evidence to prove that many such *caitya*s belonged to the Yakshas" (Misra 1981: 20). The Buddha apparently often stayed and preached at such *cetiya*s (Misra 1981: 42), and some *vihāra*s were built on such sites (ibid.). Buddhists seemingly made use of "local deities in order to emplace themselves within a local society" (Cohen 1998: 377), and this was possible precisely because these deities were connected to localities. By associating with these deities, the Buddhists could connect their own presence to the same spot. "The Buddha and saṅgha become localized," writes Cohen, "insofar as they share their dwellings with the deities who are indigenous and unique to sites of the monasteries" (Cohen 1998: 380). Misra, in his study of the *yakṣa*, notes, "One by one the different religious systems made a concerted effort

to dislodge and supersede the Yakshas" (Misra 1981: 1). The popularity of the *yakṣa*s is visible on the reliefs of *stūpa*s, which are some of the earliest statues in India; in stories preserved in the Buddhist texts; and by their presence in the *Mahābhārata* and other Hindu texts such as Purāṇas. These divinities had superior powers and could apparently be both benevolent and malevolent (Sutherland 1991), although the texts, Buddhist or Hindu, might very well have misrepresented them. However, they were often venerated as protectors and guardians and known to have been worshipped as such at some pilgrimage places such as Kurukṣetra, even after the sites had become identified with the narratives of Hindu gods. The *yakṣa* Macakruka owned a lake at the border of Kurukṣetra and was recognized as a powerful gatekeeper. According to the *Mahābhārata* (3.81.7, 3.81.178), when a person went to or simply thought about the lake, all his evil deeds disappeared and he obtained a reward equal to the gift of a thousand cows, especially when he saluted the *yakṣa* Macakruka. Some *yakṣa*s were also transformed into Hindu divinities and sages. One such case is the *yakṣa* Kapila. Several of the Hindu pilgrimage places associated with the well-known Sāṃkhya sage Kapila were previously associated with the *yakṣa* named Kapila. The *yakṣa* identity was at some point of time changed into the Sāṃkhya sage Kapila (Jacobsen 2008, 2013). One of these Kapila *yakṣa*s was the *yakṣa* Kapila in Kurukṣetra district, who was one of Kurukṣetra's four guardian *yakṣa*s and is now worshipped in the form of the Sāṃkhya teacher Kapila (see Jacobsen 2013). That the Buddha sought enlightenment under a bodhi tree in Bodhgaya was probably because this sacred tree was already worshipped, and the place beneath it was by that time a sacred site with a *cetiya*, a shrine. The worship of the tree, perhaps with its *yakṣa*, was then redefined, or reinvented, emphasizing the tree and the site's significance for the Buddha and Buddhist tradition. In several of his previous lives, as told in the Jātakas, the Buddha was a tree-god (*yakṣa*). According to the enlightenment narrative, the female servant of Sujāta, the woman who gave boiled rice to the Buddha, believed he was the tree's *yakṣa*.

As already suggested, pilgrimage was probably part of the worship of *yakṣa*s at *caitya*s, since they belonged to sites to which humans had to travel, and in Jain texts, there are references to pilgrimages to *yakṣa*s which date back to the period of the *Mahābhārata* (Misra 1981: 52). Misra writes:

> Giving oblations to the Yakshas was an essential part of the worship. Sometimes pilgrimages were made to such spots hallowed by Yakshas. The Bhaṇḍīravana of Mathura, which probably contained the *caitya* of Sudarśana Yaksha as mentioned in the *Vipāka Sūtra* was one of such places where persons used to go for worship. The prayers in this case were offered to the Bhaṇḍīravaṭa. In the *Āvaśyaka Sūtra* (I.275) Bhaṇḍīravaṭa is connected with Yakshas: and it is said there that people made pilgrimage to this place of worship in honour of the Yaksha. The antiquity of this *vaṭa* goes back to the *Mahābhārata* which refers to the *nyagrodha* tree Vrinālavana which was known as Bhaṇḍīra.
>
> (Misra 1981: 52)

It seems therefore reasonable to assume that the later Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain pilgrimage traditions were influenced by traditions associated with pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic religious rituals connected to *yakṣa*s (and perhaps other divine beings), who were identified with specific sites or territories which they owned and guarded. About this spirit religion of *yakṣa* worship, and its relationship to Vedic religion, Robert DeCaroli has noted:

> These spirit-deities are chthonic creatures and are intimately associated with specific features in the physical landscape, such as a particular tree or certain pool of water.

It is therefore unlikely that such beings could have been imported. It is even less likely that Vedism, which had its origins in a nomadic culture, would have originated a belief system in which divinity is contained within a localized natural feature and delimited by boundaries. It would seem then, that yakṣa was a Vedic term that may originally have been applied to an ephemeral and transcendent spirit inhabiting the physical world, but later was used to identify a type of spirit–deity worshiped by the non–Vedic-speaking populations.

(DeCaroli 2004: 9)

DeCaroli states that the artistic and archaeological evidence leave little doubt that the Buddhist community intentionally sought out and absorbed spirit–deities into its fold (DeCaroli 2004: 186) and that numerous accounts describe the conversion of spirit–deity *caitya*s into Buddhist monasteries (DeCaroli 2004: 61). Burial grounds were also taken over. Megalithic grave monuments are found in several areas of South Asia, and Buddhist *stūpa*s were often built in the vicinity of them. The Buddhist monasteries and the *stūpa*s often belonged together to make a sacred complex (Schopen 1997: 34). Burial grounds perhaps also contributed to developing the idea of well-defined spaces for ritual worship as distinct from the settlement area, as suggested by Mishra and Ray (2017: 4). Buddhism was established as similar to but also superior to the religion it tried to replace (Schopen 2004: 360–381), and building *stūpa*s on places already established as sacred was a strategy of expansion. The association of specific *cetiya*s with individual *yakṣa*s (Pali: yakkhas) is attested in Buddhist texts, and Buddhaghosa glosses *cetiyāni* as "*yakkha-ṭṭānāni*", the "dwelling places of yakkhas" (Trainor 1997: 34). References to many such sites are found in the literature. This is clear evidence that the Buddhists built *cetiya*s on places that were already sacred and associated with *yakṣa*s. A similar process can be seen in the *Mahābhārata* with *yakṣa*s and other divinities associated with pilgrimage places.

Since the pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic ritual traditions did not produce texts, the earliest textual statements of religious pilgrimage and sites of pilgrimage in South Asia were found in texts of the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. Two early important texts that promote pilgrimage are the Buddhist *Mahāparinibbānasutta/Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and the Hindu *Mahābhārata*. Both texts indicate that the presence of the pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic religious traditions was important for the development of pilgrimage traditions.

Sacred sites and religious travel in early Buddhism

The famous text *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (*sutta* 16 in the *Dīghanikāya*) about the last days of the Buddha contains the first statements of Buddhist pilgrimage. Ānanda, worrying about what will happen when the Buddha passes away, says to the Buddha that after the Buddha's death, it will no longer be possible for the monks to come to pay homage to him after the end of the rainy season. The Buddha then explains that honouring him after his death would still be possible and that the monks should go to pay homage to four sites (*ṭhāna*) with the same enthusiasm (*saṃvejanīyāni*, "arousing *saṃvega*", eagerness or sense of urgency that leads to better rebirth) that they used to show to the Buddha.[4] These four sites are: Lumbinī, the Buddha's birthplace; Bodhgayā, the place of the awakening of the Buddha; Sārnāth, where the Buddha held the first sermon; and Kusinārā, where he attained *parinibbāna*. The monks, nuns, and lay people are encouraged to go to these places, and the Buddha promises that they will gain religious merit from visiting these sites (*Dīghanikāya* 16.5.8).[5]

Concluding the topic, the Buddha promises a rebirth in heaven as the reward of the pilgrimage:

> And they, Ānanda, who shall die while they, with believing heart, are journeying on such pilgrimage (*cetiya-cārikaṃ*), shall be reborn after death, when the body shall dissolve, in the happy realms of heaven (*sugatiṃ saggaṃ lokaṃ*).
> (*Dīghanikāya* 16.5.8; tr. T.W. Rhys Davids)[6]

It is notable that the four sacred places to which one should go on pilgrimage are called *cetiya*s, the same name as used for the pre-Buddhist *yakṣa* shrines.[7] Gregory Schopen considers this statement of the *Dīghanikāya* "the single most important canonical passage" (Schopen 1994: 291).[8] That the Buddha is stated to have said that those who undertook the pilgrimage and died while travelling to a sacred site will be reborn in heaven indicates perhaps that the sites were associated with salvific power. Similarly, this is the understanding of the other type of pilgrimage place, the *stūpa*. Ānanda asks what they should do with the body of the Buddha after he passes away. The Buddha answers that "there are wise men, Ānanda, among the nobles, the brahmins, among the heads of houses, who are firm believers in the Tathāgata; and they will do due honour to the remains of the Tathāgata" (*Dīghanikāya* 16.5.10; tr. T.W. Rhys Davids). The Buddha explains that his body should be put in a vessel filled with oil and burned, and a *stūpa* built at a crossroads.

> At the four cross roads a cairn (*thūpo*) should be erected to the Tathāgata. And whosoever shall there place garlands or perfumes or paint, or make salutation there, or become in its presence calm in heart—that shall long be to them profit and a joy.
> (*Dīghanikāya* 16.5.10; tr. T.W. Rhys Davids)[9]

The relics, the vessel, and embers were eventually divided between eight different rulers, who built *stūpa*s and organized festivals there. According to Gregory Schopen, "the Buddha was thought to be actually present and alive" at these sites (Schopen 1997: 126). The idea that the Buddha was believed to be alive at the sites has similarity to the beliefs about *yakṣa*s and their sites. However, in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, the origin of the salvific power at these sites is explained as relating to the life and the body of the Buddha, and there is no mention here of any pre-Buddhist pilgrimage to these sites. Researchers often claim, nevertheless, that the Buddha consciously sought out certain places such as Gayā and Vārāṇasī (which the Buddha had decided should be two of the four pilgrimage places connected to events of his life, as Bodhgayā and Sārnāth), because they were already sites of important Hindu pilgrimages. This view is probably mistaken. There might have been pilgrimages in connection with the *yakṣa* worship at these places,[10] but the Hindu pilgrimage associated with these sites originated probably several centuries after the Buddha. Hans Bakker (1996) shows that Vārāṇasī as a pilgrimage place associated with death, *mokṣa*, and the Hindu god Śiva was a late development, and he argues that Vārāṇasī had developed as a commercial centre in the fifth century BCE and that "this may have been one of the factors that attracted the Buddhist order to its neighbourhood" (Bakker 1996: 33). Bakker writes: "judging by archaeological as well as literary testimony the town itself had no special religious significance within the Brahmanical tradition (beyond a local one) before the beginning of the Christian era" (Bakker 1996: 33). A "shift came in the third century CE", but "the transformation of commercial, i.e. profane, space into sacred space . . . took place in the fourth to sixth centuries of the Christian era" (Bakker 1996: 33). Sayers (2010) argues that the

association of Gayā with the *śrāddha* ritual also did not predate the Buddha and that references to it appear long after the Buddhist narratives of the Buddha's enlightenment had become popular (Sayers 2010: 10).

Studies of inscriptions have shown that already at the time of Aśoka (third century BCE) Buddhists had established their own sacred sites (Schopen 1997) and that the most characteristic element of Buddhist sacred sites in India was the presence of a *stūpa* (Schopen 1994: 273). The relics of the Buddha and the *stūpa* symbolized his presence and were objects of worship. In early Buddhism, the *darśan* of the place implied a "direct, intimate contact with a living presence" (Schopen 1997: 117). Schopen has argued for a close similarity between the Hindu idea of *tīrtha*s and Buddhist *stūpa* sites as living deities. But the idea of living deities associated with sites may very well go back to the non-Vedic, pre-Buddhist substrate culture. The use of *stūpa*s for political control may explain the Aśoka's eagerness for the expansion of the cult of relics (Strong 2004).[11]

Sacred sites and religious travel in early Brahmanical Hindu traditions

The *stūpa* was, in contrast to the placeless-ness of the Vedic gods, a site of the permanent presence of sacred power. The *stūpa*, writes Romila Thapar,

> was in many ways the antithesis of a Vedic sacred enclosure. Unlike the temporary sanctification of the location of an area for the sacrifice, the stupa was a permanently demarcated sacred place.
>
> (Thapar 2003: 264)

But as we have seen, the idea of a permanently demarcated sacred place most likely represented a continuation of the pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic substrate culture. The evidence from inscriptions from Aśokan times are probably earlier than the *tīrtha* texts of the *Mahābhārata*, which, if this dating is correct, would indicate that Buddhist pilgrimage originated before the pilgrimage texts of the *Mahābhārata*. While the source of this ritual in South Asia may very well have been the pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic substrate culture, the expansion of Hindu places promoted in the *Tīrthayātrāparvan*, which encompasses large parts of India, may perhaps be read as a textual response to the Aśokan and post-Aśokan expansion of Buddhist sacred sites with the construction of a large number of *stūpa*s and monastic institutions. A continuation of this process is found in the geographical expansion described in the Purāṇas (Nath 1993, 2001, 2007), which became the most important genre of texts to promote Hindu pilgrimage sites.

The early Vedic religion was nomadic, and its gods were notably space-less and not connected permanently to sacred sites such as *caitya*s. These gods preferred open space and did not like locations, it has been suggested (Angot 2009: 63), and they could thus have no clear links with any specific sites. The Vedic gods instead travelled to where humans performed sacrifices; humans did not travel to them. In the religion of the Vedas, there was no pilgrimage, since "To go on pilgrimage you must have somewhere to go!" (Angot 2009: 48). One major difference between the Vedic religion and most of the later Hindu traditions is indeed the localization of divinities (Jacobsen 2013). In the pilgrimage tradition, the relationship between gods and humans became reversed compared to the pre-pilgrimage, Vedic tradition. Divinities now belonged to particular sites, and people travelled to these places to be in their actual presence. The idea of pilgrimage developed across Buddhism, Jainism, and the Hindu traditions, but it is notable that the divinities of the pre-Buddhist, non-Vedic substrate culture were localized,

as were sites of worship of the Buddhists. It might very well be that the absorption of these ideas happened earlier in some traditions than others. It is significant that in the orthodox Dharmaśāstra tradition, there was a critical attitude towards pilgrimage, but in the Buddhist tradition, its founder supposedly embraced the ritual. Falk notes that stories of Buddha–*yakṣa* encounters have a fairly consistent form: the Buddha encounters a *yakṣa* and converts him; a monument is then erected on the site, and the *yakṣa* becomes its guardian spirit (Falk 1973: 13). The success of this strategy of the Buddhist tradition, as well as the *stūpa* cult and worship of the Buddha, was perhaps one reason the Brahmanical tradition followed "as if on a holy campaign" to connect their ritual traditions to sacred sites in the Indian landscape.

The longest of the pilgrimage texts of the *Mahābhārata* is the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* of the *Āraṇyakaparvan* (*Vanaparvan*) (Chapters 78–148). Other major pilgrimage chapters are in the *Śalyaparvan* (Chapters 35–54) the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (Chapters 25–26), the *Ādiparvan* (Chapters 206–210), the *Udyogaparvan* (Chapter 187), the *Mahāprasthānikaparvan*, and the *Svargarohaṇikaparvan* (*pṛthivīpradakṣiṇā* and *mahāprasthāna*). Here I will look only at some chapters in the *Ādiparvan*, the *Śalyaparvan*, and the *Āraṇyakaparvan*. Bigger (2001) has argued that pilgrimage texts in these three books were inserted at different stages of the textual development of the *Mahābhārata* and that the *tīrthayātrā* of Baladeva in *Śalyaparvan* is the oldest; thereafter, the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* was added, and last, Arjuna's journey in the *Ādiparvan*, which had hitherto only been concerned with Arjuna's amorous adventures, was transformed into a pilgrimage narrative (Bigger 2001). Vassilkov has suggested that bards at pilgrimage sites were central to this development (Vassilkov 2002).

Looking at these three texts, it becomes obvious that two different rituals of religious travel are described in these pilgrimage sections of the *Mahābhārata*. One is a procession ritual, performed by wealthy royalty with daily sacrifices, carried out partly for the purpose of economic redistribution, with emphasis on an extremely generous distribution of gifts to Brahmans.[12] The other ritual of religious travel is a ritual of pilgrimage recommended for poor people who cannot afford to perform sacrifices, with emphasis on the easy access to salvific rewards. The *tīrthayātrā* of Baladeva in the *Śalyaparvan* describes a royal procession ritual modelled on the *sarasvatīsattra* ritual (Bigger 2001), while pilgrimage in the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* is a quite different ritual and seems related to the Buddhist pilgrimage as presented in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, to which it was perhaps introduced as a competitor. It is probably this second type that functioned to expand the number of Brahmanical pilgrimage sites and aimed at increasing the number of ritual clients for the Brahman priests and which became omnipresent in the Purāṇas. These two traditions, the royal procession and the ritual of popular pilgrimage, certainly seem to have different purposes and functions.

Baladeva's journey in the *Śalyaparvan* is presented in the text as a ritual journey to visit *tīrtha*s. It is accompanied by a performance of fire sacrifices along the river and the distribution of wealth. In Baladeva's procession ritual, there are hundreds of Brahmans and thousands of cows. About the place Ārṣṭhisena, it says: "Giving away diverse kinds of wealth in that foremost of *tīrtha*s, Balarāma also cheerfully gave away milch cows and vehicles and beds, ornaments, and food and also drink of the best kinds, O king, unto many foremost of Brahmanas after having worshipped them duly".[13] Redistribution of wealth to Brahmans seems to be a main function of this procession ritual.

In the *Śalyaparvan*, visiting *tīrtha*s is presented as a Vedic sacrificial ritual and associated with Vedic recitation. According to the *Śalyaparvan*, after the completion of the 12-year sacrifice in Naimiṣa, the *ṛṣi*s set out to visit *tīrtha*s. At these places, "it resounded with the chanting of the Vedas", and the whole region reverberated with the loud recitation of ṛṣis who poured libations into the sacred fire.[14] In a total reversal of the *tīrtha* ideology, the river Sarasvatī becomes

sevenfold because it appears where the *muni*s performed sacrifice and thought of the river.[15] This is similar to the Vedic religion, where gods were not fixed to places but appeared where humans carried out sacrifices and called on them (Pradhan 2002: 93–94). The text tries to connect the salvific power of sites to Vedic mythology and represents perhaps an attempt to Vedicize the new pilgrimage ritual. The *tīrtha* Ārṣṭisena attained its power because a king obtained knowledge of the Veda at the place by means of penance, the text informs. In an interesting narrative about how Kurukṣetra gained salvific powers, it is explained as being caused by the interaction of Kuru with Vedic gods. These gods gave their consent to the place becoming a *tīrtha*, as Kuru had wished for, as a way to protect themselves from the threat of the site attaining absolute power. By consenting, they limited the power of the place. Kurukṣetra was a centre for worship of the *yakṣa*s (Misra 1981) and thus had sacred sites connected to their worship, and the narrative perhaps attempts to transfer their sacredness to the Vedic tradition. The *Śalyaparvan* uses the etymology of Kurukṣetra ("the field of Kuru") to explain how salvific powers came to be present at the place. Baladeva asks for what reason Kuru cultivated the field, and the *ṛṣi*s tell him the story. Kuru was tilling the field intensely, and Indra came down from heaven and asked for what purpose he tilled the field. Kuru answered that his purpose was to ensure that those who die there should be purified of moral impurity (*pāpavivarjita*) and attain heaven (*sukṛta loka*, 9.52.6). Indra responded by ridiculing him. Kuru, however, continued to till the soil for the creation of a *tīrtha*. Indra called the other gods, who, on being informed of the situation, asked Indra to stop Kuru by offering him a boon, because, "If men, by only dying there were to come to heaven, without having performed sacrifice to us, our very existence will be endangered" (*yadi hy atra pramītā vai svargaṃ gacchanti mānavāḥ, asān aniṣṭvā kratubhir bhāgo no na bhaviṣyati*, 9.52.11). Indra returned to Kuru and told him to stop tilling. Indra also told Kuru that those who have abstained from food and, with all their senses awake, die in Kurukṣetra will come to heaven, as will those who die there in battle. Kuru answered, so be it (*tathāstu*). The text states that the gods had approved that there was no place more sacred on earth than Kurukṣetra, that ascetics who die there go to the world of Brahman, but also that those who give away their wealth there would soon see their wealth doubled. It seems the text attempts to Vedicize, that is, give Vedic legitimization to Kurukṣetra being a *tīrtha*, by connecting the salvific powers of the *tīrtha* to the Vedic gods. The tension in the text between sacrifice and *tīrtha* is perhaps mirroring a conflict between the orthodox priests who were against the rituals of pilgrimage and the concept of a permanent presence of the divine at particular sites and the new pilgrimage priests who chose to function as priests at the sites and received payments from the pilgrims (for this conflict, see Jacobsen 2013; Olivelle 2010; Stietencron 1977).

The *Tīrthayātrāparvan* starts with Pulastya answering questions about the rewards (*phala*) of pilgrimage, which is the prime focus of this text. Yudhiṣṭhira asks Nārada: "If a person makes a circumambulation of the earth to visit pilgrimage places, what award does he get? Tell me in full, Brahman!" (*pradakṣiṇaṃ yaḥ kurute pṛthivīṃ tīrthatatparaḥ, kiṃ phalaṃ tasya kārtsnyena tad brahman vaktum arhasi*) (3.80.10). Nārada then relates what Pulastya answered Bhīṣma when he lived as an ascetic on the bank of the Gaṅgā and asked Pulastya a similar question (3.80.28). Pulastya begins his answer to Bhīṣma by stating that he will indeed talk of the rewards (*phala*) of pilgrimage. The text then informs about some of the presuppositions for attaining the rewards, again emphasizing that the rewards of pilgrimage are in focus. Pulastya describes ascetical values such as the control of the senses and being content, restrained, without selfishness, free from vices, without anger, truthful, and seeing oneself in all beings. Pulastya explains that the merit (*puṇya*) of visiting *tīrtha*s is the same as the rewards of sacrifices (*tulyo yajñaphalaiḥ puṇyais*) (3.80.38), but that going (*abhigamana*) to *tīrtha*s also surpasses them (*ṛṣīṇāṃ paramaṃ guhyam idam bharatasattama, tīrthābhigamanaṃ puṇyaṃ yajñair api viśiṣyate* [This is the highest secret of the seers, the merit of

going to *tīrtha*s even surpasses the sacrifices], 3.80.39). Claiming something as a secret is often a way to attempt to gain legitimacy for a new teaching. In contrast, the information about the sacrifices and their rewards is found in the Vedas (*ṛṣibhiḥ kratavaḥ proktā vedeṣv iha yathākramam*, *phalaṃ caiva yathātattvaṃ pretya ceha ca sarvaśaḥ*, 3.80.34).

The difference between the *tīrtha* texts of the *Āraṇyakaparvan* and the *Śalyaparvan* is striking. The *Āraṇyakaparvan* states that pilgrimage is the poor man's ritual and that poor persons attain rewards that rich persons do not attain, not even by their sacrifices, while the *Śalyaparvan* describes a kingly procession whose main function seems to be the redistribution of wealth. Two quite different forms of ritual travel seem in fact to be described. The *Āraṇyakaparvan* states:

> A poor man cannot obtain the fruits of sacrifices, O king, for they require many implements and a great variety of ingredients. Kings can perform them and sometimes rich people, not individuals lacking in means and implements and not helped by others.
>
> (*Mahābhārata* 3.80.35–36)[16]

This description can be compared to a description of Baladeva, the brother of Kṛṣṇa, who travelled with his encourage in the procession described in the *Śalyaparvan*. Preparing for his pilgrimage ritual, Baladeva ordered his servants to:

> Bring all things that are necessary for a pilgrimage. . . . Bring gold, silver, kine, robes, steeds, elephants, cars, mules, camels, and other draft cattle. Bring all these necessaries for a trip to the sacred waters, and proceed with great speed towards the Sarasvatī. Bring also some priests to be especially employed, and hundreds of foremost *brāhmaṇa*s . . . he visited all the sacred places along her course, accompanied by priests, friends, and many foremost *brāhmaṇa*s, as also with cars and elephants and steeds and servants, O bull of Bharata's race, and with many vehicles drawn by kine and mules and camels. Diverse kinds of necessaries of life were given away, in large measures and in diverse countries unto the weary and worn, children and old, in response, O king, to solicitations. . . . At the command of Rohini's son, men, at different stages of the journey, stored food and drink in great quantities. Costly garments and bedsteads and coverlets were given for the gratification of *brāhmaṇa*s, desirous of ease and comfort. Whatever *brāhmaṇa* or *kṣatriya* solicited whatever thing, that O Bharata, was seen as ungrudgingly given to him. . . . That chief of Yadu's race also gave away thousands of milk cows covered with excellent cloths and having their horns cased in gold, many steeds belonging to different countries, many vehicles and many beautiful slaves.
>
> (tr. Ganguli [modified])[17]

These two statements obviously reflect different traditions of religious travel in South Asia, the ritual royal procession and the individual pilgrimage of the common people. Both types of ritual travel are found in the Hindu traditions. It is also notable that in the *Śalyaparvan* chapters, we are told about the performance of sacrifices at the *tīrtha*s, while in the *Āraṇyakaparvan*, pilgrimage is presented as an alternative to the sacrifice for poor people. Both may perhaps be considered forms of pilgrimage travel. It was, however, especially the individual pilgrimage travel to *tīrtha*s that became promoted in the Purāṇas and was used to expand the number of ritual clients for the Brahmanical tradition.

A curious inflation in sacredness is found in the *Tīrthayātrāparvan*. The first site described is Puṣkara, and the text starts by informing that all "ten thousand crore of *tīrtha*s are present

in Puṣkara". This became a common way to propagate certain *tīrtha*s. This statement both reduces the value of *tīrtha*s, by stating that there are billions of them, and increases the value of certain *tīrtha*s, by declaring that these billions of sites are all present at a single place. The Vedic tradition was restrictive, as the Vedas and *yajñya*s were only available to some, while the *tīrtha* tradition welcomed all. The inflated sacredness was perhaps a way of ridiculing other traditions or practices. Even the dust from a *tīrtha* blown in the wind will give *mokṣa*, according to a statement about Kurukṣetra that is repeated twice in the *Mahābhārata*. There was a need to involve more people in rituals performed by Brahmans, because these rituals provided the priests with income. The large number of new rituals available at *tīrtha*s such as *piṇḍadāna*, *śrāddha*, *dāna*, and *pūjā*, which required payment of some sort to Brahmans, also indicates that the idea of increasing the number of ritual clients was an important motivation in this development. V. Nath has argued that by the period of the beginning of the Guptas (320 CE), it was a matter of survival for the Brahman priests to accept anyone as their ritual clients (Nath 1993: 47) and women and low castes, who had not been welcome at the Vedic sacrifices, were welcomed at the *tīrtha*s. The purpose of the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* of the *Āraṇyakaparvan* is not to explain the presence of salvific power at pilgrimage sites but to propagate the salvific rewards of these places, especially for encouraging poor people to become ritual clients of the Brahmans.

In the short narrative in *Ādiparvan* (1.206–210), Arjuna visits water place *tīrtha*s guarded by *apsaras*es and *nāga*s, and the narrative illustrates how these spiritual beings, as guardians of sites, were utilized in the *Mahābhārata* to construct *tīrtha* traditions.[18] When Arjuna bathes at the first place, Ulūpī, the daughter of the king of the *nāga*s (*nāgarāja*), pulls him under the water. Arjuna is then taken to the *nāga* Kauravya's palace where there is a giant sacrificial fire. Here he makes love to the *nāga* woman. He then goes to other *tīrtha*s, and the text states that he makes donations of thousands of cows at the *tīrtha*s, which perhaps means that this ritual travel was perceived as a procession ritual. He goes to the *tīrtha*s of the southern ocean, we are told, which are all ornamented with ascetics (1.208). But five fords, which in the past were cultivated by ascetics, are now empty because the crocodiles living in them "drag away the ascetics". Arjuna goes to visit one of these *tīrtha*s, Bharadvājatīrtha, although the ascetics try to restrain him, and there he wrestles a crocodile. Once the crocodile is brought on shore, it turns into a beautiful woman, an *apsaras*, who informs him that she was the favourite of Kubera, a *yakṣa*. This *apsaras*, along with four other *apsaras*es, had tried to disrupt the mortifications of a Brahman at the water place and he subsequently put a curse on them, turning them into crocodiles. The Brahman promised that after 100 years, Arjuna would pull them out of the water and the *tīrtha*s would become known as the *tīrtha*s of the women (*nārītīrtha*).[19] This story is also, similarly to the Kurukṣetra story, an etymological story. The text does not clarify why these are *tīrtha*s but just states that they are and that the crocodiles disrupted their function. When the crocodiles were transformed back into *apsaras*es, the ascetics could once again visit the places. The text emphasizes gifts to Brahmans and that Arjuna was accompanied on his journey by bards, reciters, and storytellers (*sūtāḥ paurāṇikāś ca ye kathakās*) (1.206.3). Bards, reciters, and storytellers played an important role in promoting the *tīrtha*s (Vassilkov 2002), and it may have been the case that some of them invented the etymological stories of Kurukṣetra and Nārītīrtha for the purpose of entertaining pilgrims at the sites.

It is generally assumed that the existence of pilgrimage traditions preceded their appearance in the *Mahābhārata* textual traditions, because what is described in the *Mahābhārata* is almost a pan-Indian geography. In the Vedic texts, which are older than the *Mahābhārata*, although rivers were considered sacred and taking a purifying bath in sacred rivers is known, there is no evidence of particular spots being treated as *tīrtha*s with ritual specialists serving as pilgrimage priests (Nath 1993). Yaska's *Nirukta* (c. 250 BCE), the oldest treatise on etymology, does not

mention *tīrtha* in the meaning of a specific pilgrimage spot but only in the context of rivers and their waters (Nath 1993: 29), and in the *Dharmaśāstra* literature, there are no elaborate descriptions of *tīrtha*s before the *Dharmanibandha*s, starting in the twelfth century,[20] although there are some mentions, and a list of sites for *śrāddha* is found in the *Viṣṇusmṛti*, one of the late texts of the *Dharmaśāstra* tradition (eighth to eleventh centuries).[21] The prominence at that time of *Purāṇa*s, temples, and theistic movements was probably one reason for the acceptance of the ritual of *tīrthayātrā* by the upholders of the *Dharmaśāstra*. Notable is the strong reluctance of the *Dharmaśāstra* authors to consider pilgrimage part of *dharma* before the twelfth century. The statements in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇa*s about the rewards of visiting *tīrtha*s being compared to the sacrifices, and the need to devaluate the Vedic sacrifice, may be interpreted as an indication of a conflict between groups of Purāṇic and Vedic Brahmans. The ritual of *tīrthayātrā* was probably only reluctantly accepted in the Brahmanical tradition out of economic necessity (Nandi 1979–80: 100, 1986). The Epics and *Purāṇa*s, which were the most important texts for the pilgrimage traditions, were incorporated into the *Dharmaśāstra* tradition only when the digests (*nibandha*s) were produced, for the first time in a volume in the twelfth-century *Kṛtyakalpataru* of Lakṣmīdhara, the *Tīrthavivecanakāṇḍa*, which imported material from the Epics and *Purāṇa*s into a thematically organized collection (Davis and Brick 2018: 35). When the Vedic Brahmans of the orthodox *Dharmaśāstra* tradition finally accepted the traditions of *tīrtha*s, temples had become "powerful and widespread throughout India" (Davis and Brick 2018: 36). Previously, temple traditions had not been considered important enough to discuss in detail or at all in the orthodox *dharmaśāstra* tradition, "because the practices were unknown or did not exist at the time" (Davis and Brick 2018: 36). Davis and Brick suggest that it was the emergence, during the second half of the first millennium, especially of the temple rituals of the Pāñcarātras and Pāśupatas, and the political and economic success of temple-centred sectarian traditions, called Āgamic and Tāntric, that led to reconciliation between Purāṇic and Vedic Brahmans. The reconciliation was "intended to undermine the growing power and position of Tantric Brahmins in temples patronized by rulers and lords of medieval Indian states" (Davis and Brick 2018: 36). Thus, Vedic Brahmans finally also accepted *tīrthayātrā* as a mainstream ritual, and the full incorporation of pilgrimage rituals in the Hindu traditions had been accomplished.

Notes

1 The author wishes to thank Marko Geslani for his comments on an earlier draft of the chapter.
2 For discussion about possible pilgrimage in the Indus Valley civilization, see Parpola 2003.
3 The earliest use of Pali *cetiya* is in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*. See subsequently, and Pradhan 2002.
4 *Cattārimāni Ānanda saddhassa kulaputtassa dassanīyāni saṃvejanīyāni ṭhānāni.*
5 https://obo.genaud.net/dhamma-vinaya/pts/dn/dn.16.rhyt.pts.htm, accessed May 10, 2020.
6 https://obo.genaud.net/dhamma-vinaya/pts/dn/dn.16.rhyt.pts.htm, accessed May 10, 2020.
7 The term *cetiya* is also used in Chapter 1 of the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, in which the Buddha explains what the Vajjians need to do to avoid the decline of their society. One of the things the Vajjians must do is honour the Vajjian shrines (Vajjicetiyāni) both within and outside (the city) and respect, revere, and worship them.
8 Schopen quotes the Sanskrit version of the *Mahāparirvāṇasūtra*: "Which of them on that occasion will with devout minds die in my presence (*mamāntike kālam kariṣyānti*), they—those with karma yet to be worked out (*ye kecit sopadhiśeṣāḥ*)—all will go to heaven (*te sarve svargopagā*)". (Schopen 1994: 291, from E. Waldschmidt (1951) *Das Mahāparirvāṇasūtra*. Berlin: University of Gottingen, III, 390, 41.9). The Pali version reads: *Ye hi keci, Ānanda, cetiya-cārikaṃ āhiṇḍantā pasannacittā kālaṃ karissanti, sabbe te kāyassa bhedā paraṃ maraṇā sugatiṃ saggaṃ lokaṃ uppajjissantīti.*
9 https://obo.genaud.net/dhamma-vinaya/pts/dn/dn.16.rhyt.pts.htm, accessed May 10, 2020. The Pali reads: *Cātumahāpathe tathāgatassa thūpo kātabbo. Tattha ye mālaṃ vā gandhaṃ vā cuṇṇakam vā āropessanti vā abhivādessanti vā cittaṃ vā pasādessanti tesaṃ taṃ bhavissati dīgharattaṃ hitāya sukhāya.*

10 Misra (1981: 34) notes that *yakṣa* worship was particularly strong in Vārāṇasī, Kurukṣetra, and Madhyadeśa. Misra also notes that many religious traditions assimilated the *yakṣa* cult but that Śaivas did not tolerate them and fought against *yakṣa* worship (1981: 35).

11 This expansion of *stūpa*s for political control can be observed in contemporary South Asia in Sri Lanka.

12 This procession ritual probably needs to be distinguished from the *digvijaya* procession, which seems to be modelled on the military procession, with emphasis on battles and conquest (see Sax 2000). In the *digvijayaparvan* of the Mahābhārata (2.23.23–29), the Pāṇḍavas conquer riches, defeat enemies, and return with gifts, which is quite the opposite of the procession pilgrimage described in the *tīrthayātrā* of Baladeva in the *Śalyaparvan*.

13 *Śalyaparvan* in *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwayapayana Vyasa*, Ganguli, trans. Vol VII, 1990: 114.

14 *Śalyaparvan* in *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwayapayana Vyasa*, Ganguli, tr. Vol. VII, 1990: 107.

15 *Śalyaparvan* in *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwayapayana Vyasa*, Ganguli, tr. Vol. VII, 1990: 107–109.

16 *na te śakyā daridreṇa yajñāḥ prāptuṃ mahīpate, bahūpakaraṇā yajñā nānāsaṃbhāravistarāḥ.prāpyante pārthivair ete samṛddhair vā naraiḥ kva cit, nārthanyūnopakaraṇair ekātmabhir asaṃhataiḥ.*

17 *Śalyaparvan* in *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwayapayana Vyasa*, Ganguli, tr. Vol. VII, 1990: 97–98.

18 Water places were usually guarded by Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Nāgas, and other spirits (Kumar 1983: 136).

19 The five *tīrtha*s, Agastyatīrtha, Saubhadratīrtha, Paulomatīrtha, Kārandhamatīrtha, and Bharadvājatīrtha are called *nārītīrtha*s.

20 The first significant description is the *Tīrthavivekanakāṇḍa* of Lakṣmīdhara.

21 Its dealing with *tīrtha*s is one of the proofs of its lateness. The *tīrtha* part of *Viṣṇusmṛti* probably dates to a period close to the *Tīrthavivekanakāṇḍa*, when Hindu pilgrimage had become accepted as a Dharmaśāstric tradition.

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8

SRI LANKA'S PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF SOUTH ASIAN BUDDHISM

Justin Henry

Introduction

Sri Lanka, as the oldest continuous home to a Buddhist Sangha and with the longest-standing continuous transmission of a Buddhist textual corpus, distinguishes itself as a unique preserve of Buddhism globally. The island's perceived status as sanctuary of authoritative Pali scripture, an ordination succession extending from antiquity, authentic relics, and model Buddhist kingship has left an indelible "Lankan" imprint on other historical Buddhist polities throughout Southern Asia. While Southeast Asian Buddhist chronicles, visual art, and ritual life are noted for their highly localized character, Lankan templates are often discoverable in their midst: the image of Mahāsammata as the primordial law-giver and ancestor of the solar dynasty; the insistence on Aśoka as the paradigmatic Buddhist monarch and *cakravartin*; and the rites and requisites of Buddhist kingship, including possession of the "Relic of the Tooth." Sri Lankans stood at the vanguard of Pali Buddhist intellectual life historically, with the names of Lankan works and persons resounding in their influence to this day.

Space does not allow us here to rehearse recent scholarly problematization of the term "Theravāda" itself. It is true that the designation "Theravāda" was in the twentieth century imposed by (predominantly western) scholars as a descriptor of the Pali-oriented Buddhism of Southern Asia and that historically the term was not used to describe the type of Buddhism practiced in Sri Lanka.[1] Despite its anachronistic and etic genesis, the utility of the term is attested in the fact that Buddhists of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia are today comfortable self-identifying as "Theravādins." "Theravāda" continues to be used as an adjectival modifier by prominent scholars in the field, though an alternative signifier with the same referential scope—Pali Buddhism—has also begun its ascendancy in the literature.

Sri Lankans themselves have historically referred to the "Buddhist religion" of the island as the *buddha-sāsana*, sometimes translated into English rather capaciously as "the dispensation of the Buddha." Pali *sāsana* (Sanskrit: *śāsana*) has the sense of "teaching" and "instruction," which are translations often given for the term. "Sāsana" also has the meaning of an "order" or "command," with the specific sense of a land grant made by a king (Sircar 1965: 103–106). The conceptualization of Laṅkā as a domain of custodianship is implicit in Chapter 7 of the *Mahāvaṃsa*, when, on his deathbed, the Buddha Gotama entrusts guardianship of the island to the god Sakka (Śakra), who in turn deputizes Uppalavaṇṇa (Upulvan, Viṣṇu) with this charge. Thereafter

in the chronicle, the preservation of the *sāsana* depends upon Sri Lanka's kings, assisted and watched over by the various guardian deities of the island (in Sinhala, the "guardians entrusted with warrants" [*varan deviyō*]), whose imperative to do so derives initially from the Buddha. The overlap in the senses of *sāsana* as the Buddha's teaching and the domain in which it is preserved, along with its implications of vassalage and overlordship, is made more apparent by the parallel terms *buddha-sāsana* and *deva-sāsana*, which emerge in medieval Sinhala literature, the *deva-sāsana* referring to the pantheon of (Hindu) gods entrusted with guardianship of the island and its royal families, depicted with the Buddha at the "summit" of the *deva-sāsana* in terms of rank and importance (Obeyesekere 1984: 51–64).

Early Buddhism in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's early Pali chronicles—the late third- or early fourth-century *Dīpavaṃsa* and c. sixth-century *Mahāvaṃsa*—relate that the Buddha *sāsana* was established on the island by the great Mauryan ruler Aśoka's son and daughter, Mahinda and Saṅghamitta, dispatched on one of the king's several missionary envoys. Aśoka's Edicts themselves (all-important epigraphical reference points for the dynastic chronology of ancient India) speak of his "conquest of Dharma" all the way down below the Cōḷas and Pāṇḍyas, "as far as Taṃbapaṇṇī," in reference to what is generally today understood to mean Sri Lanka (Sen 1956: 66f., 102f.).[2] Beyond the probability of Aśoka having sent a detachment of representatives to the island, no other details from chronicles can be corroborated on the basis of continental evidence (with the further, residual question as to the actual content of "Aśoka's Dharma" still a subject of scholarly contention).[3] The Pali chronicles present the conversion of a Sri Lankan king, Devānampiya Tissa, upon his encounter with Mahinda as corresponding to the installation of Buddhism as a state religion on the island (as well as the wholesale importation of the Aśokan model of Buddhist kingship). Evidence for Buddhist activity on the island from this period comes in the form of inscriptions recording the names of donors of cave dwellings for monks and nuns. The earliest of these do trace most likely to the third century BCE, though the nature and geographical distribution of the caves and their donor records suggest a much more diffuse and informal network of patronage than is indicated by the chronicles.[4]

The *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvaṃsa* trace the doctrinal heritage of their school (the Mahāvihāra of Anuradhapura) to the "Third Council" of elders, convened by Aśoka at his capital city of Pāṭaliputta (Pāṭaliputra) and presided over by a senior monk named Moggaliputta Tissa (Oldenberg 1879: 7.37–59; Geiger 1950 [1912]: 5.231–282).[5] The *Mahāvaṃsa* sets the Council amid a highly factious and disputational Buddhist Sangha, listing over 18 doctrinal schools that had arisen by the time of Aśoka's reign (Geiger 1950 [1912]: 5.1–13). Moggaliputta Tissa, the story relates, represented the orthodox interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures, his school known as that of the "Vibhajjavāda" (Vibhajyavāda, "those who advocate analysis"). A digest of the positions of the Vibhajjavāda is given in the *Kathāvatthu*, a canonical work belonging to the Abhidhamma Piṭaka (the date of the text is uncertain, likely belonging to the early centuries of the first millennium).[6] Major points of disputation on which the Vibhajjavāda pronounced were those as to whether thought is inherently pure, if there is an intermediate state (*antarabhāva*) between death and rebirth, and whether enlightened people (*arahants*) can retrogress in their level of attainment (Berkwitz 2010: 58). While it is only in the second century CE that formally designated Buddhist "schools" emerge in the continental epigraphic record (Schopen 1997: 26), there is every indication that Sri Lankan monks of the Mahāvihāra fraternity were by this time secure in their identity as "Vibhajjavādins," with Lance Cousins identifying this sect as the common ancestor of three other Buddhist schools to emerge in first-millennium

India—the Dhammaguttikas, Kassapiyas, Mahiṃsāsakas—as well as an alternative designation of the "Tambapaṇṇakas" (a name for Sri Lankan monks in South India) (Cousins 2001: 132). The chronicles explain that the Vibhajjavāda school was introduced to Sri Lanka through Aśoka's mission, where later monks and nuns of Mahinda's ordination lineage would be referred to as "masters of the Vinaya of the Vibhajjavāda."[7]

Chapter 4 of the *Dīpavaṃsa* relates the "council of Mahākassapa," at which 500 elder monks were elected to finalize the Dhamma and Vinaya of the Buddha, including "the collection of *āgama*s also called the *sutta*s." Upon the finalization of this authoritative "doctrine of the elders" (*theravāda*), which is the "summit of the teachings" (*aggavāda*) of the Buddha, "'the great earth shook' in recognition of this collection which was worthy of the *sāsana* (*sāsanārahaṃ*)" (Oldenberg 1879: 4.1–26). The traditional account of the transmission of the Pali Tipiṭaka—the canon of the "three baskets" of texts with the imprimatur of the Third Council—was by way of Mahinda during Aśoka's mission. The chronicles relate that the texts were transmitted orally until the reign of King Vaṭṭagāmiṇi in the first quarter of the first century BCE, at which time the *piṭaka*s and their commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*) were written down in manuscript form, with the elder monks recognizing that "the people were falling away from the teaching" and "in order that the true doctrine might endure" (Geiger 1950 [1912]: 33.100f.; cf. Oldenberg 1879: 20.20f.). The earliest reliable date for the Tipiṭaka as inherited in its present form is the lifetime of Buddhaghosa (fifth–sixth century), to whom are attributed a substantial number of commentarial texts, translated and reworked from Sinhala to Pali. Buddhaghosa explains that his desire to render the *aṭṭakathā* in Pali was so that monks outside the island of Laṅkā—the only place where Sinhala is spoken—could comprehend them (Malalasekera 1994 [1928]: 79–101).

The first appearances of the word "piṭaka" in Buddhist inscriptions and texts date to the first century CE, with no indication at that point that the "three baskets" of the Vinaya, Suttas, and Abhidhamma refers to a closed list of texts. "Vinaya," "Sutta" and "Abhidhamma" were at this stage more likely three distinct textual genres within the tradition (Collins 1990: 75). Steven Collins (1990) notes that the commitment of the Tipiṭaka to writing, the declaration of its authoritative status as *buddha-vacana* (bearing the imprimatur of Mahākassapa and the Buddha's other most competent disciples), and the standardization of authoritative commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*) corresponded closely to the emergence of the Pali chronicle tradition. Collins contends that the motivation for the consolidation of an official canon relates to competition between the duelling monastic fraternities of early first-millennium Sri Lanka, as they sought to enshrine their respective patrons within the lineages (*vaṃsa*s) of pedigreed rulers disclosed by their respective chronicles.

Beyond uncertainties regarding the chronology of the genesis and finalization of the Tipiṭaka, Anne Blackburn (1999) reminds us that the very notion of a complete or "formal" canon remained within the realm of the ideal for many monks historically. Not all monasteries had a complete collection of the texts certified as *buddha-vacana*, and not all such texts were equally relevant in informing premodern Buddhist literary and theological imagination. Blackburn challenges us, therefore, to consider a distinction between the "formal canon" of texts considered *buddha-vacana* (the list of which varied slightly between Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia) and a "practical canon" of texts (the Vinaya and key Suttas), which functioned as commonly shared references for preparing sermons and regulating monastic orthopraxis.

Sri Lankan Buddhists classify the Pali canon as *buddha-vacana*, or "the word of the Buddha," by which is meant the authentic spirit of the Buddha's teaching for some portions of the canon, where *buddha-vacana* could not possibly literally mean "words spoken by the Buddha." As such, later commentarial and Sinhala literature often refers to Pali as "Māgadhī," that is, the language of Magadha, the region of northeastern India in which the Buddha carried out his ministry.

In truth, the Pali language is obscure in its provenance, likely representing an attempt on the part of Buddhist religieux in northwestern India to fashion their own *lingua franca* or "ecclesiastical koiné" reminiscent of Sanskrit in the late first millennium BCE (von Hinüber 1982, 1996: 7).

Beyond the question as to the ultimate origin of the Pali language is that regarding its reception and preservation in Sri Lanka. Did the fact that the canon (or at least its initial core) was transmitted from India to Sri Lanka in Pali, and then preserved there in that language, have to do primarily with the fact that Pali was the language in which the scriptures were initially received, and so regarded as authoritative? Was there no temptation to render Buddhist texts into a local dialect (e.g. Sinhala Prakrit, in the case of Sri Lanka), as we know occurred in the case of northwestern Buddhists who preserved texts in Gāndhārī? Lance Cousins, who postulates Vanavāsa in modern Karnataka as an early epicentre for the Vibhajjavāda/Pali literary milieu, makes a compelling argument for the possibility that an early core of the Pali canon was received during the third century BCE in areas throughout Dravidian-speaking South India, where the difficulty of the task of translation (from a north Indian Prakrit) would have mitigated against the temptation to render Pali texts into any of the various Dravidian vernaculars (Cousins 2001: 166–168). With respect to the choice of Pali over Sinhala in Sri Lanka, Tilman Frasch (following Steven Collins) argues for a self-conscious choice on the part of the Mahāvihāra between the third and fifth centuries CE to "[go] for a canonized version of the canon written in a language mostly incomprehensible to outsiders, to underpin their claim of being the true keepers of the *dhamma*" (Frasch 2017: 75).

Indian connections

By the third century CE, the growth of the kingdom of Anuradhapura and the consolidation of its major *nikāya*s as centres of Buddhist institutional learning both attracted intellectual talent from abroad and enabled Sri Lankan monks to make connections on the Indian mainland through diplomatic-missionary excursions.[8] The extant literary and archaeological records give us only glimpses of what was in the early first millennium a thriving network of Buddhist communities throughout South India, the activities of which were intimately connected to the major centres of monastic learning in Sri Lanka. Buddhaghosa, Buddhadatta, and Dhammapala, three preeminent Pali commentators of the fourth–sixth centuries, seem to have spent their active years in transit between Tamil South India and Anuradhapura. Buddhadatta records that he wrote his commentarial works while residing at Kāvīrapaṭṭana (Kāvirippūmpaṭṭinam). Dhammapāla similarly states that he composed his instalments of the *Paramatthadīpanī* at a South Indian monastery named Badaratittha Vihāra. While tradition records that Buddhaghosa did the bulk of his work at the secluded Ganthakāra Vihāra in Anuradhapura, according to the *Mahāvaṃsa* and commentarial literature, he was born and ordained in India, with Buddhaghosa stating himself that a number of his works were written at the request of Buddhist monks living in Kāñcipuram (Monius 2001: 5f.). In addition to this famous trio, there is the prolific commentator Anuruddha, whose era and place of residence remain vexatious.[9]

The commentarial works of Buddhaghosa and Buddhadatta—further mythologized in later Pali texts—relate the legend of a mid-ocean encounter between the two great scholars: Buddhaghosa, having set sail for Sri Lanka from India, comes upon Buddhadatta on his voyage home from Anuradhapura. Buddhadatta explains that his work of translating and updating the *aṭṭhakathā* remains unfinished and hopes that his ambitious junior will be able to complete the task. Buddhadatta passes to Buddhaghosa the implements he will need to do so: a stylus, myrobalan, and application stone—balm for the eyes and back, aching after long hours of writing (Malalasekera 1994 [1928]: 105f.). While the details of the encounter are almost certainly

apocryphal, the episode allegorically acknowledges the generational continuity of exchange of monastic scholars between Sri Lanka and South India.

Today there remain only glimpses of what must have been during the first millennium a flourishing Buddhist culture in Tamil-speaking South India. Evidence for large-scale Buddhist monasteries in Tamil-speaking South India is attested in the fourth century CE through archaeological remains at Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam (Buddhadatta's apparent home, modern Puhar), though discoveries at Kāñcipuram may push the date for institutional Buddhism in the region a century earlier (Schalk 1998: 309–310). Aside from fragments preserved in other works, our only extant, complete texts written by Buddhist authors in Tamil from this era are the c. sixth-century *Manimekalai* and the eleventh-century *Vīracōḻiyam* (Monius 2001: 8). Buddhism continued to receive patronage under Cōḷa kings between the tenth and thirteenth centuries in Tamil Nadu (Schalk 2002: 145).[10]

Northern Sri Lanka—including the kingdom of Anuradhapura, the Rāja Raṭṭha or "king's country"—succumbed to Cōḷa military incursions and remained for the better part of the eleventh century under Tamil rule. The interregnum marked a transformative period in the political and religious institutional life on the island, involving the abandonment of the major monasteries of Anuradhapura and, following the restoration of the north to Sri Lankan hands, a gradual shift in the location of Buddhist-majority political capitals to the southwest (see the final section of this chapter). Sri Lanka's tradition of Buddhist nuns (the "Bhikkhunī Saṅgha") was also lost around this time. The thirteenth-century section of the *Cūlavaṃsa* remembers the Cōḷa occupation of Rāja Raṭṭha as wholly disastrous for the *buddha-sāsana*, and it is true that the major *vihāras* of Anuradhapura were looted at the hands of the invaders and also that, as Śaivites, the Cōḷa rulers of *īḻam* had no unique sympathies for Buddhism. A complete view of the religious attitudes of the conquering Cōḷas must include, however, epigraphs from northeastern Sri Lanka indicating Tamil support for Buddhist shrines within temple complexes that also housed images of Śiva and Viṣṇu.[11]

The Sri Lankan literary record indicates the endurance of a viable Buddhist Sangha in the Tamil country through the thirteenth century. The twelfth-century author of the *Upāsakajanālaṅkara* explains that he wrote his compendium of ideal practices for lay Buddhists from South India in the city of Sirivallabha, where he resided in one of the three splendid monasteries built by a recently converted king. These, the author Ānanda records, stood as refuges for the elders of Sri Lanka, who fled there "when the whole island of Laṅkā was destabilized by the fire of the Tamils" (Augostini 2015: xii, 337). The *Cūlavaṃsa* relates that Parākramabāhu II (r. 1236–70) invited a detachment of *bhikkhus* from the Cōḷa country, who resided in an area known as Tambaraṭṭha, in order to purify the Lankan Sangha which had fallen into decline (Geiger 2003 [1929]: 84: 9–16).

Atavisms of what was evidently for a millennium a geographically and linguistically porous Buddhist continuum between Sri Lanka and the southern subcontinent are also found in later Sinhala inscriptions and literature. The eminent Dhammakitti Thero is recorded to have undertaken the construction of an image house at Śrī Dhānyakaṭaka (Amarāvatī in Andhra Pradesh), according to the Gaḍalādeṇiya inscription of 1344 and the *Saddharmaratnākara* (Paranavitana 1934: 97). The *Nikāya Saṅgrahā* applauds Sēnālaṅkādhikāra, a Meheṇavara and ranking official at the Gampola court, for his sponsorship of a costly, three-storied image-house (presumably to the Buddha) at Kāñcipuram (it is unclear as to whether construction on this project was ever in fact undertaken) (de Zilva Wickremasinghe 1890: 25). As late as the mid-fifteenth century, the famed poet-scholar Śrī Rāhula names and quotes from (in Sinhala) a text he calls the *Demaḷa Jātaka Gätapadaya*, a commentary on the stories of the Buddha's former births in Tamil, we must infer.[12]

Regarding sustained Lankan connections further north in India, inscriptions at Bodhgaya attest to the presence of Sri Lankan monks in the fifth and sixth centuries, with Hsüan-tsang confirming in his diary the presence of Sinhala monks at the holy site (Rongxi 1996: 227). Inscriptions noting the presence of *sthāvira*s at Buddhist temples across India's coasts illustrate the role of Lankan *nikāya*s in maritime religious networks. Regarding the possible survival of pilgrimage traditions to Bodhgaya, a Kandyan-period Sinhala prose work (the "Dambadiva Alaṃkāraya") gives an impressively detailed visitor's guide to the attractions of Bodhgaya, as well as instructions on travel to nearby Vaṃkagiri Mountain, Rajagaha, and Banaräs.[13]

Southeast Asian connections

While Indian connections represented one spectrum of the Lankan Buddhist cultural continuum, it was Sri Lanka's sustained relationships with the emerging polities of Southeast Asia which forged the Pali Buddhist world recognizable to us today. It is likely that Buddhism was introduced to mainland Southeast Asia at an early date—certainly by the first century CE and perhaps even earlier.[14] Indian influences are traceable at Beikthano in the Pyu Kingdom of Burma from the second century CE, with possible influence from Sri Lankan Buddhist architecture in the centuries following (Stargardt 1990: 39, 315–322). Trade connections between Burma and Sri Lanka are attested from the second century as well (Assavavirulhakarn 2010: 47f.). The evidence base for early Buddhism in the region is limited—Sanskrit and Pali inscriptions and scattered statuaries in what are now Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia constituting the bulk of this archive (Skilling 1997: 94, 105). The temptation to assume that the original source of Buddhism in peninsular Southeast Asia must have been Sri Lanka is mitigated by a number of factors, including evidence for abundant connections with the Buddhist metropolises of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and Amarāvatī (Startgart 2018: 103; Assavavirulhakarn 2010: 67; Skilling 1997: 101). In any case, the introduction of Buddhism in the region did not take place through any single, catalyzing event but rather gradually over the course of hundreds of years, at the hands of myriad groups and individuals from throughout Asia.

Sri Lankan contact with insular Southeast Asia dates to the late eighth century, acknowledged in an inscription commemorating the establishment of a chapter of the Abhayagiri Vihāra at the Ratubaka plateaux in Java, where similarities between the architecture of Ratubaka and the Ritigala Padhānaghara Pirivena near Anuradhapura have been noted (Coningham et al. 2017: 28). Reception of Lankan Buddhist textual materials on the Southeast Asian mainland is also indicated by an inscription dating to 761 CE at Wat Si Maha Phot—written in Pali and Khmer—containing quotations from the *Telakaṭāhagāthā*, a Sri Lankan Pali exegetical poem. Moonstones resembling those of Anuradhapura are also present at nearby Dong Si Maha Phot (Brown 1996: 59–61).

An image of a connected Lankan and mainland Southeast Asian Buddhist world emerges in the eleventh century, when, following a disruptive 70-year period of Cōḷa rule over the northern portion of the island, Vijayabāhu I (r. 1058–1114) sought to reestablish the Sangha in his capital of Polonnaruva. To do so, he invited a party of *bhikkhus* from Rāmañña through the Burmese king Anuruddha (r. 1044–77), such that these foreign *thera*s "characterized by moral discipline and other virtues, with a complete knowledge of the Three Piṭakas" might ordain a quorum of Lankan monks and thus restore the Sangha to a state of purity.[15] The city of Bagan in southern Burma would remain the predominant centre of Buddhist learning in the region until the end of the thirteenth century (Frasch 2017: 71–73).

Vijayabāhu's invitation marked the first of a number of such "purifications" of the Sangha in Sri Lanka, involving more missions from Burma and Thailand, as well as, eventually and

reciprocally, envoys of Lankan monks to kingdoms in those respective regions for the same purpose. The rulers of Sukhodaya between the 1330s and 1360s, followed by the rulers of the kingdoms of Bago, Chiang Mai, and Ayutthaya between the 1420s and 1470s, all sought out monks from Sri Lanka to re-ordain the Sanghas of their capital cities. Culling the Sangha allowed kings to retain only high-ranking monks sympathetic to them, with such consolidation corresponding to textual projects casting local regents in the model of King Aśoka, together with large-scale public merit-making rituals affirming the status of their royal sponsors as virtuous Buddhists and authorized protectors of the realm (Blackburn 2015: 255f.).[16] Sri Lankan monks, along with textual and ritual templates, were attractive for the ideological projects of Thai, Mon, and Burmese kings consolidating their image as Buddhist-oriented rulers owing to the island's venerated status as ordained by the Buddha Gotama himself as the land where his *sāsana* would be preserved (according to the Pali chronicles), as the home of the "authentic" relics of the Buddha, and owing to the putative descent of the monks and nuns of the island from Aśoka's own family and Mauryan lineage. Sri Lanka increasingly functioned as a resort for mainland Southeast Asian Buddhist rulers as Islamic kingdoms displaced centres of Buddhist ritual and learning in northeastern India, Java, and Sumatra.

In addition to the preservation of the Tipiṭaka, Sri Lanka must be noted for the influence of its chronicle tradition on the Buddhist world of Southeast Asia. Thai chronicles share in common with Lankan templates their "universal histories" of Buddhism as it began in India and was propagated by Aśoka, as well as, of course, their lists of lineages of kings and queens who fostered the Buddha *sāsana*. The theme of the Buddha as a civilizing presence is also a common element across traditions. In the Sri Lankan chronicles, the Buddha expels the resident Rakkhasas and Yakkhas, preaching to the Nāgas who are the sole non-human denizens receptive to the Dhamma, in order to render the island suitable for human habitation.[17] In the *Cāmadevīvaṃsa*, a Pali translation of a Thai chronicle produced in Chiang Mai in the early fifteenth century, the Buddha miraculously appears to a group of Mon forest people (*vanaputtam*), converts them to Buddhism, and prophecies that a relic (*dhātu*) of his would later manifest there (in what would be the city of Haripuñjaya) (Swearer and Premchit 1998: 37–40). While the *Cāmadevīvaṃsa* presents an autochthonous origin to the central relic of the Buddha in Thailand, the chronicles of Nakhòn Si Thammarat usurp the Sri Lankan narrative of the arrival of the Buddha's tooth (transported by a royal envoy from Kāliṅga to Sri Lanka in the fourth century, according to tradition), explaining that the ship bound for Sri Lanka containing the relic was in fact redirected during a storm at sea to the eastern coast of Thailand, where the tooth was subsequently enshrined.[18]

The *Jinakālamālī*, a chronicle of Chiangmai written in 1516, more directly acknowledges Sri Lanka's role in the spread of Buddhism in Siam (Wyatt 1976: 115). The text relates that in the late thirteenth century, a king of Sukhodaya named Roca was given an image of the Buddha made of tin, gold, and silver (the "Sīhḷa image") by a group of monks, which became an honoured royal treasure of his successors. The text recounts that 1,967 years after the Buddha's *parinibbāna* (1423/24 CE), 33 great elders "were living in Kamboja country further down" and decided amongst themselves to go to the island of Laṅkā, in order to return with "the higher ordination of the *sāsana* of the Teacher and plant it in our land." Thus they established the "Sīhḷa fraternity" in their home city of Jayasena. The chronicle goes on to say that in the year 1455, the Emperor Tilaka heard a Dhamma sermon on the planting of Bodhi trees from the "Sīhḷa" monks, after which he set up a monastic residence at Máe Nām Khān in Chiang Mai Province, where he planted a Bodhi tree from a seed taken from the southern branch of the Mahā Bodhi of the Island of the Sīhḷas, having dispatched an envoy of monks to request it (Jayawickrama 1968: 120–139). A relic, brought by a monk of the original party of those

who had gone from Kamboja to Sri Lanka to obtain higher ordination, was also installed in a *cetiya* there.[19]

Mahāyāna and Tantra

The brand of Buddhism exported to Southeast Asia descended in large part from the single surviving school of first millennium Sri Lanka—the self-consciously orthodox Mahāvihāra Nikāya. While the extent of the influence of Mahāyāna doctrine on rival Buddhist schools at Anuradhapura is largely confined to the realm of speculation owing to the paucity of the textual record, it is clear that the Abhayagiri Vihāra entertained a broader selection of literature and invited guests than the Mahāvihāra. According to his tenth-century Chinese biography, Amoghavajra (d. 774), an Indian monk in the service of the T'ang emperor, went directly to Sri Lanka (bypassing Nālanda in India) to retrieve needed Tantric manuscripts (the most important of which was the *Sarva Tathāgata Sattva Saṅgraha*). There is epigraphic and archaeological evidence for Abhayagiri missions and transmission of Yoga Tantras in Central Java in the eighth century (Sundberg 2004: 103f., 110–119). Despite the chronicles' insistence on the purity of the Mahāvihāra in its rejection of "false doctrine," it is probable that some Vajrayāna elements surreptitiously found their way into the school, as suggested by a reference to the "diamond body (*vajrakāya*) of the Buddha" in the tenth-century *Dampiyā Aṭuvā Gätapadaya* and the conspicuous octagonal *vajra* modelled into the design of the Thūpārāma at Anuradhapura (Gunawardana 1979: 324–326).

Heinz Bechert discerns three periods of Mahāyāna influence in Sri Lanka: the first ending in the reign of King Vohārikatissa (c. 215–37 CE), who suppressed monks inclined towards "Vetullavāda" (unorthodox) teaching. So near as can be reconstructed, this early period was characterized by a general laxity within the major Buddhist schools of Anuradhapura towards Mahāyāna doctrine and has imparted to us a single text, the *Buddhāpadāna* (the first part of the *Apadāna* of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*), which contains cosmological notions analogous with contemporary Indian Mahāyāna works exemplified by the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sutra* (for example, the idea of "Buddha fields" or *buddha-khetta* in Pali) (Bechert 1977: 364–367). Little information apart from a few scattered inscriptions survives from the second period, spanning the early third to the early ninth century (the reign of King Sena I, 833–853 CE), which was characterized by a thoroughgoing rejection of Mahāyāna doctrine within the Mahāvihāra. Though the literature of the Abhayagiri and Jetavana Vihāras does not survive, we retain nonetheless many references to Mahāyāna thought in the literary record in the centuries following the reign of King Sena I, corresponding to Bechert's "third period."

The inscriptional, art-historical, and literary record of the ninth and tenth centuries shows an injection of Mahāyāna imagery and vocabulary into Sri Lankan Buddhism that would have enduring effects. From this period onward, Sinhala Buddhist works employ (albeit haphazardly) terms such as *trikāya, vajrakāya,* and *śūnyatā*. Sinhala panegyrics identify medieval kings as "Bodhisattvas," the closest Sri Lanka would come to the *deva-rāja* cults of north India.[20] John Holt (1991) has demonstrated that the god Nātha—famous as one of the "warrant guardians" assigned to protect the Buddhist royal families of the courts of the southwest—evolved from Avalokiteśvara. While it is clear that Sri Lankans were exposed to Mahāyāna texts and imagery, it is difficult to say straightforwardly the extent to which aspects of Sri Lankan Buddhism may have been shaped by specific doctrines and practices. We must on the one hand keep in mind the overall conservative stance with respect to orthodoxy and orthopraxy on the part of the Mahāvihāra. While this fraternity ceased to be relevant as an institution after the twelfth century, insularity and doctrinal conservatism prevail in much of the surviving Sinhala Buddhist literature of the late medieval period.[21]

At the level of Mahāyāna aesthetics, Mahinda Deegalle (1999: 354f.) reminds us that we cannot in the case of Sri Lankan Buddhist art assume that stylistic or iconographic influence implies ideological influence. Gananath Obeyesekere (1993: 373) points out that while the iconographic origins of the god Nātha may lie with Avalokiteśvara, the two gods have some irreconcilable attributes, with Nātha possibly representing not the sublimation of Avalokiteśvara but his complete *replacement* in the Buddhist religious imagination. In her recent work on pre-modern esoteric meditation in Burma and Sri Lanka, Kate Crosby (2013) notes that while some Theravāda visualization techniques have striking resonances with Tantrism, we must remember that local traditions developed amid a myriad of influences and came to embody unique, regionally specific forms of practice.[22] On the other hand, beyond the question of the incorporation of any Mahāyāna deities into the Sri Lankan pantheon, or the question of the influence of any specific Mahāyāna doctrine or text, there are several instances of what could be interpreted as Mahāyānist trends at the more general level of Sinhala Buddhist ritual life. *Paritta*—the twice-daily ritual recitation of Pali verses by Buddhist monks for apotropaic purposes—as a practice ubiquitous throughout the Buddhist world of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, exhibits obvious similarities to the use of *mantras* familiar from so many Mahāyāna contexts.

Sri Lanka's Buddhist legacy

The Kingdom of Anuradhapura—while never securing its dominion over the entire island—provided the necessary stability for its large monasteries to finalize and disseminate a canon of Buddhist literature foundational to Theravāda self-understanding, generating idiosyncratic templates of Buddhist historiography, ritual orthopraxy, and rites of kingship which would continue to model religious and political life not only in Sri Lanka but also in Southeast Asia through to the twenty-first century.

Sri Lanka's chronicles give an account of a transformative purification of the Sangha in the twelfth century, when Parākramabāhu I expelled the wayward monks from their various *nikāya*s and brought all of the island's monastic bodies under the supervision of the Mahāvihāra. While this event marked an important reconfiguration in the organization of monastic institutions in relation to their royal patrons (involving a series of *katikāvata*s or decrees specifying duties and prohibited activities for monks), the narrative of the straightforward absorption of the Abhaya-giri and Jetavana Nikāyas into the Mahāvihāra at this time is simplistic and implausible for a number of reasons (Gunawardana 1979: 311–321). In truth, the strength of the "nikāya" as an essential brand of monastic affiliation had weakened over the preceding centuries, giving way to alternative markers of institutional pedigree (the eight *āyatana*s or *mūla*s) (Ilangasinha 1992: 67). From the twelfth century, the Mahāvihāra itself ceased to be relevant as a form of monastic self-identification.

From Polonnaruva, the seats of power of the island's Buddhist-majority moved gradually to the southwest, from Dambadeniya in the thirteenth century, to Gampola and Rayigama in the fourteenth, to Kotte (on the outskirts of modern Colombo) in the fifteenth. Overlapping with ordination identities deriving from the eight *mūla*s were factions claiming affiliation to "village dwelling" (*gāmavāsi*) and "forest dwelling" (*araññavāsi*) lineages, though these designations were for the most part rhetorical in nature, not reflections of the actual living circumstances of monks. Buddhist intellectual life in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was concentrated in monastic colleges (*pariveṇa*s), notably the Vīḍāgama Piriveṇa at Rayigama (claiming *araññavāsi* affiliation) and Tōṭagamuva Vihāra on the southwest coast (claiming *gāmavāsi* affiliation). Sri Lanka would look again to Southeast Asia to re-establish its lineages in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, giving rise to the Siam, Amarapura,

and Rāmañña Nikāyas, the three monastic orders still with official recognition on the island today. The initial higher ordinations within each of these *nikāya*s were administered by monks invited from Thailand and Burma.[23]

A number of terms—sometimes treated as synonymous or nearly synonymous—have been offered forward to characterize the connected Buddhist world of Southern Asia: the "Pāli cosmopolis," the "Theravāda Ecumene," the "Pāli Buddhist *imaginaire*." Such designations conceptualize a connected Buddhist world in several, sometimes overlapping, ways: (1) a Buddhist world united in terms of a shared textual and intellectual heritage—the Pali canon, shared literary ideals and textual tropes (Collins 1998; Frasch 2017; Gornall and Henry 2017); (2) a Buddhist world sharing a normative conception of Buddhist polity, involving ideals of kingship, polity, and the relationship between religieux and rulers (Tambiah 1976; Collins 1998); and (3) claims to "universal sovereignty," either rhetorical claims made by Buddhist rulers themselves or supra-regional dominions imagined by Buddhist monks (Goh 2007; Blackburn 2010). Since no single ruler ever came close to achieving universal dominion over Southern Asia, it must be emphasized that definitions of a "connected Buddhist world" involve reconstructing literary and political imaginaries, not actual polities.

This chapter has argued for Sri Lanka's centrality in both the actual preservation and dissemination of Buddhism in premodern South and Southeast Asia, as well as in the imaginations of monastic authors working to account for the pedigree of their own Buddhist tradition elsewhere in the region. While Sri Lanka participated in the cosmopolitan Buddhist world of Southern Asia in the various ways described above, scholars have remarked upon the unique extent to which Sinhala Buddhists viewed Sri Lanka in isolated terms. This involved on the one hand "symbolic distance from the Indic world" (embracing models of Buddhist, as opposed to Hindu, kingship), as well as a conception of Sri Lanka as a discrete geographical and political realm. The latter—the notion of the island as a *dhamma-dīpa* or "island of Dharma"—has remained instrumental to Sinhala Buddhist understanding of their political heritage for two millennia (Hallisey 1988: 175; Schalk 2006). The cosmopolitanism of Sri Lanka's Pāli Buddhism is therefore of a complicated sort: on the one hand, much of the caché and desirability of the island's relics, textual corpus, and ordination tradition is only indirectly "Lankan," deriving instead from the origin of those relics, texts, and monastic lineages in northern India: putatively from Bodhgaya, from the early councils of the *paramaparā* of disciples of the Buddha, and from King Aśoka. Sri Lanka was, for many Southeast Asian Buddhists of the early–mid-second millennium, an intermediary repository of an essentially Indian religious tradition. On the other hand, the gestation of Pāli Buddhism in Sri Lanka imparted to the tradition some "island characteristics"—for example, the foundational narrative in both Sri Lankan and Southeast Asian chronicles of the Buddha travelling from India to prepare or "purify" a distant land in anticipation of the establishment of the *sāsana*, and the image of the "universal ruler" or *cakravartin* as the archetypal Buddhist king (in the Sri Lankan case, dominion over the entire island was always the desideratum, if only rarely accomplished historically).

Notes

1 See contributions to Skilling et al. 2012, especially that of T.L. Perriera, "Whence Theravāda? The Modern Genealogy of an Ancient Term": 443–571. The *Dīpavaṃsa* recounts that 500 elder monks were elected following the death of the Buddha to assemble an authoritative collection of Dhamma and Vinaya, explaining that "because it was collected by the *thera*s, is it called the word/doctrine of the *thera*s (*theravāda*)" (Oldenberg 1879: 4.1–6). It is true, as the contributors to Skilling et al. (2012) acknowledge, that the term *theravāda* is obscure in the Sri Lankan literary record, and does not seem to have been employed as a means of self-identification until the twentieth century.

2 Taṃbapaṃnī," that is Tāmraparṇī, historically has referred to (1) Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, (2) the Tāmbiribaraṇi River, and (3) Sri Lanka. The Mauryan inscriptions say that the lands of the Pāṇḍyas and Cōḻas and the island of Lanka lay outside of their dominion.

3 Some have expressed skepticism about the necessarily Buddhist orientation of Aśoka's "dhamma," with K.R. Norman (2007: 193) reminding us that the missions of Aśoka (described in his edicts) and those of Moggaliputta Tissa (described in the Pali chronicles and commentaries) were to different destinations, with Aśoka's *dhamma* referring to "good conduct" and "fair treatment of Brāhmaṇas and Śramaṇas" in general (and thus nothing specifically Buddhist).

4 Senarath Paranavitana records 1,234 cave donations in his *The Early Brāhmī Inscriptions of Ceylon* (1970). Of the 79 royal donors identified in the inscriptions, none belong to Devānampiya Tissa, though three are attributed to his brother and successor, King Uttiya (r. c. 210–200 BCE) (Coningham 1995: 231). Ponnambalam Ragupathy, in his archaeological survey of early Buddhist sites in the Jaffna area, identifies stylistic continuity between the stupas of Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunikoṇḍa and those of Kantarōṭai. He distinguishes on that basis between a form of "mercantile Buddhism" extending throughout the Tamil-speaking domain of South India and Sri Lanka and the "hydraulic Buddhism" of Anuradhapura and the central dry zone (Ragupathy 1987: 183f.).

5 Neither the convocation of the "Third Council," the character of Moggaliputta Tissa, nor the dispatch of Aśoka's son Mahinda to Lanka are corroborated by the inscriptions of Aśoka (the Pali chronicles are similarly the only source relating the other details the king's biography expounded in later Buddhist texts). John Strong (1983: 19f.) emphasizes the tradition of embellishing the biography of Aśoka with more details in later Sri Lankan and Thai chronicles.

6 Two later works expound further on the putative events of the Third Council and the orthodox position of the Vibhajjavādins: Buddhaghosa's *Samantapāsādikā* and the contemporary commentary on the *Kathāvatthu*, the *Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā* (Gethin 2012: 20–27).

7 Oldenberg 1879: 18: 41, 44 (nuns) and 18:1 (monks). Buddhaghosa himself seems to refer to orthodox monks as "Vibhajjavādins," and by the time the Abhidhamma commentary was written, the term "Vibhajjavādin" appears no longer in reference to a specific school among others but in the general sense of "doctrinally orthodox Buddhists" (Cousins 2001: 136f.).

8 A third-century inscription of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa references the missions of Sri Lankan monks to various locations throughout India, as well as to Gandhara, Kashmir, and China (Vogel 1929: 22f.).

9 Sean Kerr (2012: 4) notes that the colophon of the *Paramatthavinicchaya* identifies Anuruddha as having been "born in a family of status in Kāverinagara, in the fine kingdom of Kāñci." R.P. Wijeratne and Rupert Gethin (2002: xiv) admit the possibility of assigning Anuruddha to the sixth or seventh century.

10 The travel diary of Dhyānabhadra—a Nepalese monk who after a peripatetic life settled in the Yuan country of Toghon Temür—records that a Cōḻa king of the late thirteenth century was a Buddhist, able to recognize and recite "gāthas" (Waley 1931–32: 364). A fascinating legend of a congregation of Buddhist believers and a skeptical Śaiva king of "Kāvīra-paṭṭana" appears in the *Rasavāhinī*, a thirteenth-century collection of stories in Pali based on an earlier work (Rahula 1981: (text) 83–6, (translation) 252–55).

11 On eleventh-century Tamil donations to Buddhist shrines in the Trincomalee district—and the complex relationship between Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, and Buddhist ritual life during this period, see Schalk 2002: 767–783.

12 The text is Śrī Rāhula's *Pañcikāpradīpaya* (Godakumbura 1955: 36f.). It is unclear to what extent regular Buddhist institutional and/or lay devotional practice may have survived until the early modern period in Tamil South India (albeit on an extremely limited scale). On sculptural, epigraphic, and architectural evidence suggesting Buddhist patronage to perhaps as late as the year 1700 in Nagapattinam, see Dehejia (1988). Dehejia also gestures to late Cōḻa period sculptures from the districts of Tanjore and Trichinopoly, suggesting that "coastal Nagapattinam was not a lone outpost of Buddhism in peninsular India" (1988: 74). On the large number of later Buddhist bronzes found in the excavations in the city, see Ramachandran (1954). In the absence of textual accounts of the function and significance of these Buddhist sculptures, however, it is impossible to know what role they served in the devotional life of local Tamils.

13 The "Dambadiva Alaṃkāraya" is translated by H.A.P. Abeyawardana (1999: 217f.). For a survey of Pali and Sinhala literature related to the sacred Bodhi Tree of Anuradhapura, including accounts of its transportation from India, see Jayawardhana (1990–91). A stereotyped description of the geography of north India taking the "Bodhimaṇḍala" as a beginning reference point is contained in the seventeenth-century *Rājāvaliya* (Suraweera 2000: 2f.). There is reason to believe that Bodhgaya continued to

function as a site sacred to Buddhists even in the wake of Islamic incursion into north India. A Tibetan monk, Dharmasvāmin (or Chag lo tsa-ba chos-rje-dpal), in a recording of his visit to Bodhgaya in the mid-1230s, recounts that the king of the city and his subjects retreated to the jungle during a Muslim attack, later to return to the city to rebuild. Accounts of later travelers to the "Vajrāsana" of Bodhgaya also remind us of a sustained Buddhist presence at the site: the Indian and Tibetan monks Śāriputra (1335–1426), Vanaratna (1384–1468), and Buddhaguptanātha (1514–1610) (McKeown 2010: 19–23).

14 The Sri Lankan Pali chronicles speak of Aśoka's dispatch of missionaries to "Suvaṇṇabhūmi"—the actual location of which has been much debated—interpreted by later Thai chronicles and inscriptions to have been the Kingdom of Bago (Pegu, now southern Burma). On the fifteenth-century inscriptions of Dhammazedi, see Aung-Thwin (2017: 246).

15 Anne Blackburn's (2015: 240) translation of a portion of the thirteenth-century installment of the *Cūlavaṃsa* (60: 4–7). The episode of the importation of *bhikkhus* from Rāmañña-deśa (or "Aramaṇa") is also referenced several later Sinhala chronicles, and in a twelfth-century Tamil inscription of Polonnaruva (Paranavitana 1928: 253).

16 Southeast Asian regents seeking Lankan envoys included King Tilokarāja of Chiang Mai (r. 1441/2–87) and King Dhammazedi of Bago (r. 1471–92).

17 For a discussion of the conversion of the Nāgas in the *Dīpavaṃsa*, and the theme of Nāgas as receptive to the Buddha's preaching in other Pali literature, see Scheible (2016).

18 The story of Princess Hemamālā and Prince Dantakumāra is given in a thirteenth-century Pali historical work, the *Dāthāvaṃsa*. On the historical relationship between Sri Lanka, Sukhotai, and Nakhòn Si Thammarat, see Wyatt 2001: 59.

19 On the similarity of northern Thai chronicles to Sri Lankan Pali texts such as the *Dhātuvaṃsa* and *Thūpavaṃsa*, see Swearer 2004: 150.

20 For general references on the presence of Mahāyāna in premodern Sri Lanka, see Nandasena Muniyanse (1967) *Mahāyāna Monuments in Ceylon*. Colombo: M.D. Gunasena; S.A. Hemalatha Goonatilake (1974) *The Impact of Some Mahāyāna Concepts on Sinhalese Buddhism*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of London.; Diran Dohanian (1977) *The Mahāyāna Buddhist Sculpture of Ceylon*. New York: Garland Publishing.

21 On Buddhist "exclusivity" towards other religious systems as a result of competition with Śaiva institution for patronage in Sri Lanka from the tenth century onwards, see Hallisey 1988: 176–192. On conservative vs. cosmopolitan trends in Sinhala Buddhist monastic poetry in the fifteenth century, see Henry 2020.

22 A thorough study of the "Mantra" and "Yantra Books" (*mantra pot* and *yantra pot*) which make up such a substantial percentage of the Sri Lankan manuscript archive remains a desideratum.

23 A Thai monk administered the initial *upasampadā* of the Siam Nikāya in Kandy in 1753; the monks who established the Amarapura Nikāya received their ordination under the Sangharāja of King Bodawpaya of Burma in 1800; the founder of the Rāmañña Nikāya was similarly initiated in Burma in 1864.

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9

THE PLACE OF HISTORICAL NEPAL IN THE HISTORY OF SOUTH ASIAN RELIGIONS[1]

Axel Michaels

'Nepal' as a region is first mentioned in an inscription of the Indian king Samudragupta (ℝc. 335/350–375 CE) and inscriptions of the Licchavi dynasty (3rd–8th century), where it covers an area slightly larger than the Kathmandu valley (hereafter 'Valley'). It is not mentioned in the Aśoka inscriptions, even though Aśoka allegedly came to Lumbini, the birthplace of the Buddha, and despite four so-called Aśoka Stūpas in Lalitpur (also called Patan). At this time, of course, Nepal as a state did not exist. This only happened with Pṛthvī Nārāyaṇa Śāha, who extended his Gorkhā Rājya by conquering many small kingdoms and in 1768/69 the Valley, the political and cultural centre of the country, which alone was then called 'Nepāla' or 'Nepāla Maṇḍala' and ruled by three Malla kings. Only from 1909 onwards did the Rāṇā aristocrats who ruled from 1846 to 1951 use 'Nepal' for the state they had usurped by sidelining the Śāha kings.

The Nepalese Hindu chronicles of the 19th century tell another story of the Valley. For them, the history begins with Paśupatinātha-Jyotirliṅga, a *liṅga* in the form of a light beam, but according to the Buddhist *Svayambhūpurāṇa* and the *Nepālikabhūpavaṃśāvalī* ('Chronicle of the Kings of Nepal'), it was the Vipaśvī Buddha, one of the previous Buddhas, who planted a lotus seed in the middle of the lake that covered the valley. This then turned into a burning flame, the *jyotirliṅga* in Hindu, Buddha in Buddhist eyes. Only after Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī had cut a mountain near Chobhar could the water drain and the Valley be populated. This myth is not only linked to the natural history of the Valley, filled with silico-clastic sediments of fluviolacustrine origin, but also a sign for the strong Buddhist-Hindu syncretism for which Nepal's religious environment is famous.

In general, the Valley proved to be a place of retreat—not only for men but also for gods; Śiva's abode, for example, is believed to be in Nepal or the Himalayas. It further proved to be a meeting place and a place of transit of great religions of South Asia, which in return owe much to this multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious country. On the other hand, it is impressive how indigenous deities and rituals were able to assert themselves, although they were repeatedly under great influence of the Brahmanical Hindu tradition of their southern neighbour.

The origins

In the Valley, there are several archaeological findings of stone statues in the Kushana style, most importantly a statue of king Jayavarman from the 2nd century CE. Nepalese chronicles and Indian sources, however, mention the Kirāta (also Kirãta, Kirātī or Kirātī), whom

they often describe as a tribe or a nomadic people that settled north of the Ganges plain near the frontier, as rulers of the Valley before the Licchavi dynasty. They are also named together with the Cīna (Chinese), the Niṣāda (hunters) or other tribes. In the *Mahābhārata* epic, they are said to fight with the Indo-Aryans from whom they have separated, and the *Manusmṛti* (X.44) says that they 'neglected the rituals and did not seek out the Brahman.' It is not clear whether the Kirātas in Indian sources are identical with the Kirāta named in Nepalese chronicles. It rather seems that 'Kirāta' was more a collective term for a whole group of non-Hindu tribes.

The situation is different with the Licchavi, the first dynasty of Nepal, who ruled over the Kathmandu Valley from the 3rd to the 8th century. According to the more than 200 inscriptions they left, they were a people with a Tibeto-Burman language, although nearly all personal names are in Sanskrit. But many administrative terms and nearly 80 percent of the place and river names are not either. The Newar, whose origins are unknown, have been repeatedly taken into consideration as the speakers of this Tibeto-Burman language, but the relationship of the Kirāta to the Newar remains unclear.

Although the Licchavi themselves are only rarely mentioned in the inscriptions up to Śivadeva I (590–604 CE), Jayadeva II, in his Paśupatinātha inscription of 733 CE, refers to over 30 generations of Licchavi and makes a direct connection to the Solar dynasties (Sūryavaṃśa) in India. These lists begin with Brahmā, followed by the Sun (Sūrya); a historically credible period only begins with Jayadeva I, the 13th ancestor. It seems to be obvious that the Licchavi of the Kathmandu valley are the Licchavi who are so often mentioned in early Indian sources (Jha 1970), who belonged to the Vajji confederation and whose capital Vaishali was the centre of one of 16 great kingdoms (*mahājanapada*). Sometimes these Licchavi are mentioned as tribal, as Indo-Aryan or as *khattiyas* (from Skt. *kṣatriya* 'warrior noble'); in the *Arthaśāstra*, they are mentioned as a confederation of tribes (*gaṇasaṅgha*). The Magadha king Ajātaśatru (approximately 492–460 BCE) is supposed to have defeated the Licchavi and thus perhaps to have driven them to Nepal. The Gupta rulers (about 320–500 CE) in particular influenced the early Licchavi dynasty. Candragupta I (320–330) married Kumāradevī, probably a Licchavi princess, but it remains unclear which Licchavi are involved.

It is unlikely that the Licchavi dynasty in the Valley was ever absorbed by any Indian power, but the influence from India with regard to the social, cultural and religious fields is clearly recognisable, and their content is remarkable, for the Licchavi inscriptions contain the first testimony of the immolation of widows, a culture of great religious tolerance, indications of Tantric Pāśupata ascetics and lay people, a complex ruling administration, the introduction of the hierarchical caste system and much more.

Mānadeva (464–505 CE), for example, prevented his mother Rājyavatī, who was probably originally from India, to be immolated together with his father. In this early poetic inscription from 464 CE, only the tears of her son make her change her mind; she then takes the vow of *satī*, living in chastity, poverty and humility. Mānadeva's other inscriptions are located on the pedestals of *liṅgas* and statues, but at least one, which mentions Mahāyāna Buddhism, is located in a Buddhist monastery (Cuka Bāhāḥ) in Patan—a clear sign of early religious tolerance and syncretism (Petech 1984: 51–59).

Another powerful ruler of the Licchavi, Aṃśuvarman (605–621), declared himself a devotee of Śiva and introduced the nearly stereotypical formula, repeated until the recent past, to later inscriptions: 'favoured by the feet of glorious Paśupati' and the symbol for Śiva's mount, the bull, but at the same time, he did not neglect other Hindu or Buddhist deities. On the other hand, an inscription by a certain Anuparama (Acharya 2009) shows a dispute between Buddhists and Vedic Brahmans over animal sacrifice.

These meetings of Hinduism and Buddhism characterise from the very beginning Nepal's place in the religions of South Asia. It has led to a unique syncretism, in which different forms of Hinduism and Buddhism were and are densely interwoven with each other or exist side by side. Extensive studies on ritual have shown how ritual elements, in particular, are reinterpreted and transferred. Yet many traditions, for instance, certain Tantric ones or certain forms of Hinduism, such as the esoteric Taleju or popular Svasthānī cults, have been preserved only in Nepal. Nepalese Vajrayāna Buddhism, also called Newar Buddhism, too, is unique, as it has Buddhist castes, a hereditary priesthood and monasteries with no monks.

Buddhism

Nepal is the origin of Buddhism—at least as understood by the Tourist Board of Nepal. In fact, the historical Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, was in all likelihood born in Lumbini, in an area in the southern foothills of the Himalayas that in the middle of the 5th century BCE belonged rather to 'India' than to 'Nepal'. The discovery of Lumbini is based on an inscription found there in 1896 and dated to 249 BCE, which says that Aśoka visited this place 22 years after his coronation. Archaeological excavations made in 1995 have confirmed this place to be that of Buddhist worship (Coningham et al. 2013).

Whereas in India, Buddhism increasingly declined and almost collapsed at the end of the 12th century, it survived in Nepal, if in a form considerably different from the Hīnayāna ('small vehicle') and thus the monastic teachings of Siddhārtha Gautama, who taught his followers liberation from the suffering in the world through spiritual and meditative practices. The new developments of this Mahāyāna ('great vehicle') Buddhism, which is not only limited to Nepal, are characterised by four major changes: the deification of the Buddha, the *bodhisattva* ideal with an alternative to the monastic-ascetic enlightenment ideal (*nirvāṇa*) and—connected to this ideal—the transfer of merit, a stronger focus on ritual and the ethicisation in the ideal of compassion (*karuṇā*).

The Kathmandu Valley became one of the first regions outside the Gangetic Plain where this Mahāyāna Buddhism established itself and remained there until today in its original South Asian form with Sanskrit as its sacred language. Even though it was not always supported to the same extent by Licchavi rulers as Hindu gods were, Mahāyāna doctrines and about 13 monasteries are mentioned in the Licchavi inscriptions. Afterwards, there were no more inscriptional references to Buddhism for 400 years, but it is evident from reports of Chinese pilgrims, manuscripts and art objects that Buddhism continued to exist.

Already from the time of the Licchavi onwards, Tantric Mahāyāna Buddhism started to gradually develop in the Valley into Vajrayāna Buddhism, which understood itself as the perfecting of the way to enlightenment in Buddhism, adding the esoteric worship of Tantric deities or *śakti* or *prajñā* as female companion and considering itself a Tantric path to enlightenment which enables the acquisition of magical powers by initiation (*dīkṣā*). Hence, for the Vajrayāna in the Valley, the goal of enlightenment is not so much *nirvāṇa*, but rather (Nevārī) *taray juye*, attainment of the Sukhāvatī heaven or the Pure Land of Amitābha (Gellner 1992; Lewis and Bajracharya 2016).

As early as the end of the 4th century CE, Chinese pilgrims were travelling to India to see the country of Buddha and to study his teachings.[2] However, they did not travel through Nepal, but along the old Silk Road(s), entering India to the west of modern-day Nepal from what is now Kashmir and Pakistan. Among them was Faxian (approx. 337–422), who visited Lumbini and returned with 413 texts, many of which he himself translated into Chinese. Especially during

the Tang Dynasty (618–907), these pilgrimages and expeditions increased in number. The first Chinese pilgrim to mention Nepal was Xuanzang (602 or 603–664), also written Hsüan-tsang; he, too, never reached Nepal, but he knew enough to tell of the Licchavi ('Lichepo'), especially the educated king Aṃśuvarman ('Yangshufamo'), and of nearly 2000 monks in Nepal, with their monasteries and temples.

According to Tibetan sources, the Nepalese princess named Bhrikuti who married the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo (617–650 CE) was instrumental in introducing Buddhism to Tibet. From then onwards, Indian and Nepalese Buddhist masters were invited to Tibet, and many Tibetan monks came to Nepal to study and copy the sacred texts. Following the Islamic invasions of North India, numerous Buddhist refugees also arrived from the south. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of highly regarded scholars and students who had populated universities such as Nalanda, Vikramashila, Somapura or Odantapuri had to leave these when they shut down at a time when, in Europe, the first universities were being founded. The scholars and monks came in hordes with their patrons and pupils to Nepal. Lalitpur in particular became a centre of Buddhist scholarship and spirituality.

According to Tuladhar-Douglas (2006), until the 12th century, Buddhism in Nepal was still widely a part of Indian Buddhism, embedded in a supraregional system of places of pilgrimage, patronage and identity, which essentially expressed itself in Sanskrit texts. Between 1200 and 1450, this relation to India changed, not least because North India returned more and more to its Brahmanical roots, partly through the influence of Islam. Buddhism lost its legitimising and protective function, which it had possessed in the Pāla Empire (750–1150 CE). This led to Newar Vajrayāna Buddhism reforming itself in a distinct manner, by increasingly entering into competition for royal patronage and thus becoming more political and more ritualistic. In Tuladhar-Douglas' words: 'Before the Garland Texts [such as the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha*] we can speak of a Nepalese tradition within Indian Buddhism; after the Garland Texts, we must speak of a Nepalese Buddhism' (Tuladhar-Douglas 2006: 205).

This Buddhism underwent another fundamental change in the 15th century, focusing more and more on a Newar-Buddhist Sanskrit and special rituals and popular festivals such as the widespread cult of the Bodhisattva Amoghapāśa (a form of Avalokiteśvara) or the important Buṅgadyaḥ or Matsyendranātha procession. The life-cycle rituals (*saṃskāra*), in particular, show how much Newar Buddhism followed Brahmanical archetypes (Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 2012). Many of these rituals also included a fire ritual (*homa*), which was modified according to Vajrayāna ideas. Quite distinct forms developed in this process, as is shown by the Ihi ritual, in which young girls are married to the Bel fruit or the Gurumaṇḍalapūjā (Bajracharya 2006), with which nearly every Newar Buddhist ritual begins; in its centre stands the worship of Buddha-Vajrasattva, whom the Vajracharya priests regard as their teacher (*guru*). Vajrayāna is further distinctively characterised by being mixed with the cosmos of Hinduism, the worship of holy men and Bodhisattvas, the laicisation of the monasteries, a hereditary and often rotating priesthood and the acceptance of caste structures. Most importantly, it is a non-celibate Buddhism, even though every Buddhist boy becomes during his initiation for a few days a little monk.

From around the end of the 12th century, the decline of monastic life and the monasteries started, even if some Buddhist communities lasted into the 17th century, and new ones were created toward the end of the 20th century under the influence of Tibetan Mahāyāna Buddhism (Lewis 1996) or missionary Theravāda monks (LeVine and Gellner 2005). Newar Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism also spread among many ethnic groups, especially to the Tamang, Gurung, Sherpa and Lepcha, in the high mountain regions, for example, to Mustang, whose Buddhist population is originally from Tibet.

Hinduism

In general, Hinduism in Nepal is a brahmanically dominated religion, often called *parbatiyā* ('mountain people's') or *smārta* ('traditional') Hinduism. It builds upon its Vedic foundations, which shaped many rituals and their texts, especially the Gṛhya-, Śrauta- and Dharmasūtras that have been copied in great numbers in the Valley.

This Hinduism owes its prevalence to the immigration by Brahmans from various parts of India, along with support through most rulers of Nepal. There is already mention in the Licchavi inscriptions of donations of villages to Brahmans, and one can repeatedly see, in the colophons of early mediaeval manuscripts, 'Indian' names of Brahmans, some from Gujarat, some from Kashmir, Bengal or South India, but large waves of immigration and, with them, greater influences, first came from the 13th century onward, when Muslims had penetrated Bengal. Subsequently, many scholarly Brahmans came from Mithila—which had long been a centre of learning in any case—to Nepal. This is evident in the large number of manuscripts in Maithilī script and language. The *Nepālikabhūpavaṃśāvalī*, too, speaks of Sthiti Malla (1382–95) having brought five Brahmans from Mithila to the court at Kathmandu, a tradition set forth by other Malla rulers. The connections were so close that Maithilī became at this time the court language and numerous dramas, and poems were composed in it, even by kings.

The Brahmans not only contributed significantly to the cultural and religious development in Nepal, among other ways by bringing the caste system, at whose top the Bahun-Chhetri (Brahmans and Kṣatriyas) see themselves, but they also competed to some extent with Newar Tantric Hinduism. To increase their status, other groups, ethnic and otherwise, often took over elements of Smārta Hinduism, thus 'hinduising' themselves to a greater or lesser extent.

The Khasa kingdoms in West Nepal, too, supported Buddhism and Smārta Hinduism, as did the Malla, Śāha and Rāṇā rulers. During the Malla period, Śaiva Tantrism and the worship of the goddesses predominated, as these cults provided strong support for the ruler. The goddess Taleju (Tulajā), in particular, allegedly was brought to Nepal by Harisiṃha, the last king of Mithila, and his wife, when they fled from Muslim invaders in 1326 CE. Taleju is worshipped especially by the Tantric ritual specialists within palace circles and became the outstanding goddess of the Malla, and many rituals were clearly connected to underscoring their claim to power. For this reason, the Śāha and Rāṇā took over this worship of tantric-esoteric goddesses and their connections to the Smārta goddesses. At the same time, Hinduism overlay many old gods and rituals of an originally folk-religious character that had long been at home in the Valley. In this, the Brahmans placed their own emphasis, for instance, modifying Vedic rituals, as is the case with the rituals of passage and in the Hindu worship (*pūjā*) or the fire ritual (*homa*).

The Śāha and Rāṇā propagated Hinduism as a national religion, declaring the state a Hindu kingdom (see subsequently). A neo-Hindu movement like that in India hardly existed in Nepal, but in the last few decades, occasionally groups such as the Hare Krishna followers have appeared, while Theravāda reform movements have reached Buddhism. The emergent middle class is not averse to turning to esoteric or neo-religious ideas and practices or to explicit secularism. The latter was especially furthered by the Maoists and social activists (Gellner & Laetizia, this volume).

In Nepal, various Śaiva traditions were at home from early on (Slusser 1982: 223–239), not least because they enjoyed royal protection. Mahādeva was worshipped as Paramamaheśvara, 'highest god', at least from the time of Narendradeva (643–679) onwards, expressed in thousands of Tantric and Paurāṇic Śaiva manuscripts,

Despite the intensive worship of Śiva, many Licchavi rulers were, at the same time, venerators of Viṣṇu and other gods. Aṃśuvarman, for example, supported Paśupatinātha but also the

Vaiṣṇava Cāṅgunārāyaṇa temple or Buddhist monasteries in equal measure. Aṃśuvarman's seat of power, Kailāśakūṭabhavana, also indicates that he was a venerator of Śiva, for the mountain of Kailāśa is regarded as the seat of Śiva. A hill of the same name, but which contains no larger remains of buildings according to the most recent archaeological knowledge, is located north of the Paśupatinātha Temple.

The *liṅga* cult can be shown to have existed in Nepal no later than the 4th/5th centuries CE. Already in the early Licchavi period—beginning with the Ratneśvara Liṅga (477 CE)—many members of the aristocracy and wealthy merchants set up votive *liṅgas* in the area around the Paśupatinātha Temple, a tradition that brought forth the largest corpus of inscriptions on *liṅgas* in South Asia (Mirnig 2016) and which has been continued into the late 19th century and, sporadically, to this day.

The Paurāṇic worship of Śiva in the form of *liṅga* can be established throughout Nepal's history. At many places, there are beloved shrines which provide rich confirmation of Śiva as a high god ('Mahādeva') or even as the highest god. Texts such as the *Skandapurāṇa*, the *Himavatkhaṇḍa* or the *Nepālamāhātmya* are full of praise for the many Śaiva shrines, as is the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī*, a chronicle from the 14th century, in which Śiva is usually named Bhṛṅgeśvara or Paśupati Bhaṭṭāraka. Many such Śaiva shrines and temples are connected by processions (*tīrthayātrā*).

In iconographic representations, Śiva and his 'family' in Nepal generally do not much differ from Indian Paurāṇic representations and myths. But in the Kathmandu Valley, Śiva is also worshipped in special forms: for instance, as Lukumahādyaḥ or Bhairava, in which the relationship between Śiva and Pārvatī is not always shown as harmonious, owing to Tantric influences. In the Lukumahādyaḥ ritual (Michaels 2008: ch. 9), for example, celebrated in Newar courtyards in Caitra (March/April), a small *liṅga* or an uncarved stone is brought out from beneath the rubbish or out of a hole and worshipped during the night. These stones are called Lukumahādyaḥ in Nevārī, probably meaning 'hidden Mahādeva.' According to orally transmitted myths, Śiva searched here for protection because, depending on the source, wild goddesses, evil demons, or even ignorant Buddhists threatened to make him impure.

Bhairava, too, is sometimes just a naked stone, besides being represented in a statue or a mask. Among numerous Tantric texts, especially the *Brahmayāmala*, the *Śrītantrasadbhāva* and the *Jayadrathayāmala*, is evidence for this cult. Bhairava as the many goddesses is satisfied by being given alcohol and blood sacrifices. It is clear in such myths and rituals that here pre-Hindu cults have become mixed with the highly traditional Śaivism.

A connection of Nepalese Śaivism to the Indian Śaiva Nātha movement is visible in the cult of Gorakhanātha, which from the 11th century propagated alongside theological teachings a mixture of yoga practices and Śiva worship. Gorakhanātha (from Skt. Gorakṣanātha), a holy man and ascetic, is venerated by his footprints and is regarded as a pupil of Matsyendranātha. In a myth recorded in the chronicles, it is said that he caused a drought of several years, because while meditating, he sat on the rain-bringing serpents. The priest Bandhudatta Ācārya thereupon was sent to Assam with Matsyendranātha on the orders of king Narendradeva, where Gorakhanātha had to stand up out of respect for his teacher, thus freeing the serpents, who were then able to bring rain. The annual Matsyendranātha procession (May/June), though only vaguely linked to Gorakhnātha, shows a close association between Hinduism and Buddhism, for the Hindu Matsyendranātha ('The Lord [Śiva] with the form of the Indra of the fishes') is, at the same time, the Buddhist Avalokiteśvara and Karuṇāmaya ('the Compassionate') and the folk religion's god Buṅgadyaḥ 'the god from Bugā' (Locke 1980; Owens 1989).

An important part of Tantrism is the worship of the goddess (Slusser 1982: 307–349; Tachikawa 2001). Already in the Nepalese Pāśupata recension of the *Skandapurāṇa* (6th/7th centuries), Śiva appears with his rival consort. She is then regarded as Śakti, the wild and partly

threatening embodiment of the female cosmic energy (*śakti*) of Śiva, and as Mahādevī, 'the Great Goddess.' As such, she can, to a great extent, lose her association with Śiva or subordinate him to herself, so that the pre-Hindu characteristics of such goddesses shine through all the more, and it is necessary to pacify these, as otherwise, epidemics, earthquakes or bad harvests will result.

Frequently, these goddesses are the local, pre-Hindu divinities who have been there since ancient times and who sometimes kept their original names and functions, for example, Lumādi (Bhadrakālī), Kanga Ajimā (Kaṅkeśvarī), Lutumarī (Indrayāṇī) or Pīgāmāī (Vajreśvarī). But often they have been overlain by the 'Great Goddess,' specifically of the Kālīkula, the 'family of Kālī.' Among these are the goddesses Durgā, Bhadrakālī, Cāmuṇḍā, Caṇḍī and Sītalā, who are understood as (aspects of) Kālī. These deities like to frequent cremation places or similarly dark locations outside settlements. One of their favourite manifestations is as 'Kālī of the south,' Dakṣiṇakālī, who protects the (Kathmandu) Valley from the south. Hidden in a gorge and at a mountain stream is their small shrine, surrounded by images of other Mother Goddesses. Once, this must have been the seat of a pre-Hindu goddess who also only gradually became identified with the Great Goddess of the Hindu pantheon.

No later than the 11th century is the date in the Kathmandu Valley for the *Devīmāhātmya*, the '(Book) of the Splendour of Devī,' in Nepal also known as the *Durgāsaptaśatī* or *Caṇḍī*. It is one of the most widespread Śākta writings, in which the myths of Durgā and Kālī are summarised. The Kāpālika sect of the Śaiva-tantric Mantramārga, who wore necklaces of human skulls and lingered at cremation places, worshipped Kālī, just as those who venerated her in her form of Devīmāhātmya: the goddess of liberation and immortality.

One of the more frequent motifs is that of Durgā, often called Bhagavatī in Nepal, killing the demon Mahiṣa. This motif appears repeatedly, especially on archways over temple entrances or in the wood-carved struts of temples. In these, Durgā is usually standing on the demon Mahiṣa, who has taken the form of a water buffalo terrorising the world, and spearing him with a long spit. This motif comes to life when, in the autumnal Dasaĩ festival dedicated to Durgā, Hindus nearly everywhere sacrifice animals. This festival, also known (especially in India) as Navarātra ('nine nights'), was, from no later than the Malla period onward, the most important royal ritual.

One can see in the cult, the mythology, the forms of veneration and the iconography that it is always the one goddess appearing in different manifestations. In less exalted places, too, the goddess is represented under various names. Her temple or shrine usually lies outside any settlement, so that she can protect the inhabitants. As a rule, in the town itself, a mobile cult image of her is kept in a special god-house (Nev. *dyaḥchẽ*); this image is brought out and carried about exactly established routes during special festivals.

The names and forms of appearance of this goddess and her temples and shrines can hardly be counted in the Kathmandu Valley. It is here these rituals still can be observed, whereas in India, the goddesses have for most part been tamed and sweetened (McDermott 2001). This also holds true for the worship of Kumārī (Tree 2014), who manifests in the veneration of a living girl. All girls in South Asia can be designated thus with this Sanskrit word. But a very few Kumārīs are living goddesses chosen from high Buddhist castes by a process of searching and testing. They have been revered as embodiments of the goddess for centuries, particularly the Rājakumārī, the royal Kumārī, in Kathmandu.

The beginnings of this worship of pre-pubescent girls as living goddesses are unclear, as are the religious origins. Indications that the Kumārīs were already venerated in India, as part of a cult of the virgin, are already there in Vedic texts. The earliest indication in Nepal seems to be the Kumārī Temple in Gache Ṭol in Bhaktapur, constructed in 868.

A special or 'individual' Kumārī (*ekāntakumārī*) is worshipped equally by Buddhists and Hindus at various Newar places, usually in Tantric form. Generally, the Kumārī appears at many festivals in a drove (*kumārīgaṇa*). For Buddhists, she is a form of appearance of Vajradevī or Tārā, for Hindus usually of Durgā or Taleju, the patron of the Malla kings. Monarchy and the worship of Kumārī were thus closely bound from the beginning, but the worship of Kumārī is not necessarily bound to the monarchy.

The royal Kumārī in Kathmandu, who reside in a house finished by Jaya Prakāśa Malla in 1757, the Kumārī Chẽ, come from the Buddhist caste of the Newar goldsmiths (Shakya); in Bhaktapur and Patan, they also come from the caste of the Buddhist Vajrācārya priests, in villages sometimes from peasant castes (Jyapu). Until 2007, the Rājakumārī in Kathmandu were worshipped during a days-long city festival in a special form. On the last day, and as the culmination of the Indrajātrā in August/September, the king appeared and, in a non-public ritual in the Kumārī house, he received a kind of offering (*prasāda*) from the child goddess, who also pressed the *ṭīkā* onto his forehead. With this ritual, the Kumārī confirmed the power of the king for a further year. Today, the king is replaced by the President of Nepal.

Places of pilgrimage

Nepal has always been a land of pilgrimage for Hindus and Buddhists, who flock to holy Buddhist and Hindu pilgrimage sites: to Lumbini, which has developed into a crowded pilgrimage site, especially for travellers from East Asian countries; to the Svayambhūcaitya (also called Svyambhūnātha Stūpa) or to the Bodhnātha Stūpa for Tibetan and other Buddhist pilgrims; to the Paśupatinātha temple in Deopatan east of Kathmandu; to Janakpur, the alleged birthplace of Sītā, Rāma's wife, for thousands of Hindu pilgrims or to the Muktinātha temple at the foot of the Throng La pass in Mustang for both Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims. Of these and many other sacred places of Nepal, only two, by way of example, will be highlighted in the following, the Svayambhūcaitya and the Paśupatinātha Temple, because in them, the religious connections to Nepal's neighbours are particularly evident.

For Newar Buddhists the Svayambhūcaitya is the centre of their religion, also for Tibetans, but more so the Bauddha Stūpa (also called 'Bodhnath'), which has been joined by Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan refugees who have settled around that monument. Bauddha is the largest *stūpa* or *caitya* in the Valley. Its origins are ascribed to Mānadeva (5th century) by the *Nepālikabhūpavaṃśāvalī*. According to Tibetan sources of the 16th century, a Tantric master of the Nying-ma-pa school is supposed to have dug the *caitya* out of rubble and sand at the start of the century. This was the reason for Tibetan monks taking care of the shrine.

The Svayambhūcaitya is located west of Kathmandu on top of a hillock. Legend has it that Mañjuśrī found a lotus at the Svayambhūcaitya, which has been called Svayambhūnātha (Stūpa) only since the last century, when he cut into the surrounding mountains with a sword to drain the lake that once covered the valley. A Mañjuśrī temple, which is also revered by Hindus as the seat of Sarasvatī, the goddess of wisdom and arts, is located west of the Svayambhūcaitya. Inscribed for the first time in the 5th century, the Svayambhū is mentioned in the *Red Annals* of the Panchen Sonam Drakpa from the 14th century, which record the renewal of the central pole (Skt. *yaṣṭi*).

Alexander von Rospatt (2009) believes the *caitya* was erected some 2000 years ago in the place of a site of a pre-Buddhist goddess or female demon, later identified with Hāratī or Hāritī, who 'inspired terror and devoured children in large quantities until the Buddha tamed and converted her.' In fact, there is a tantric temple dedicated to this goddess, also called Sītalā, who protects against smallpox and childhood diseases but who cannot receive blood sacrifices

in this Buddhist environment. This process of overlaying Buddhist identifications and rituals on autochthonous deities is as widespread as similar hinduising or sanskritising processes.

The present form of the *caitya* probably goes back to a comprehensive renewal from 1372, as an inscription indicates. Since the 18th century, the *Svayambhū* has been called *mahācaitya* ('great Caitya'), whose four pairs of eyes on the square dome top look in all directions and are visible from afar. From King Pratāpa Malla (1641–74) comes the large bronze *vajra* (Tibetan *dorje*) on a large *maṇḍala* in the east, dated 1667. In Hindu mythology, *vajra* is a thunderbolt weapon of Indra, but in Buddhism, it is more of a diamond sceptre and symbol of the indestructibility of the Buddha's teachings. Pratāpa Malla also erected two sacred buildings in the style of Hindu Śikhara temples: Pratāpapura and Anantapura, named after him and his favourite wife but dedicated to esoteric goddesses of Vajrayāna Buddhism. The Svayambhūcaitya has been surrounded by a Bhutanese monastery since the 18th century and a Tibetan monastery since 1962, meeting houses for visitors, houses of the guards and caretakers and souvenir shops.

The most prominent shrine of Śiva is the Paśupinātha Temple in Deopatan (Michaels 2008), east of Kathmandu, known far beyond the borders of Nepal and the goal annually of thousands of Indian pilgrims and tourists, especially on the Great Night of Śiva (Mahāśivarātri) in February/March. In the sanctum of the temple, there is a four-faced (*caturmukha*) *liṅga*. Paśupinātha is surrounded by a field, the Paśupikṣetra, with numerous temples and shrines, many of them dedicated to the goddesses, and rest houses and bathing places (*ghāṭa*) on the banks of the Bagmati, where, on platforms, corpses are cremated. The topography is characterised by the Deopatan as an area of settlement, and an uninhabited area, the Mṛgasthalī grove, separated by the Bagmati River; to the north, there is a height, the Kailāśa hill.

It seems that initially, ascetic followers of the tantric Pāśupata cult, who were known for staying at cremation sites and rubbing themselves with the ashes of the burned bodies, looked after the Pāśupati temple. At any rate, the many manuscripts belonging to the Śivadharma, an Indian lay movement within Śaivism that arose under the influence of the Pāśupata, are an indication (de Siminis 2016). Five Licchavi inscriptions also show that the Pāśupata community played a prominent role in the time of Aṃśuvarman. The Paśupinātha Temple is further mentioned as early as the 6th century CE in a Pāśupata version of the *Skandapurāṇa*.

In general, Śiva is associated, in Paurāṇic Śaivism, with the North and especially with the Himalayas. There is also a foundation myth for the appearance of the shrine in Deopatan, related in the *Nepālamāhātmya* (I.9–23). According to this, Śiva came to this area from Kāśī (Benares) and took on the form of a gazelle in order to pleasure himself with his consort Pārvatī, who was also in the form of a gazelle, in the Mṛgasthalī ('gazelle grove'). But through this, the world descended into chaos, and so the other gods set out to find Śiva. When they finally found him, they asked him to give up his gazelle form, but he refused. They tried to catch him, but Śiva sprang to the other side of the river. In so doing, however, his horn broke into four pieces and became a holy shrine in the form of a 'four-faced' (*caturmukha*) *liṅga*. From then on, Śiva was known as Paśupati, the Lord of the Animals.

In the temple itself, which is closed to non-Hindus, a low, silver-plated fence encloses the sanctum, the *jyotirliṅga*. Within this fence, only two groups are allowed: the South Indian Bhaṭṭa temple priests and the Bhaṇḍārīs, who are guardians of the movable temple property and assist the Bhaṭṭas. However, only the Bhaṭṭas are allowed to serve the god directly and to touch worship the *liṅga*, whereas the Bhaṇḍāris are allowed to return the gifts—fruits, flowers and so on—given to God on a plate by the devotees as *prasāda* or consecrated gifts. According to a royal edict issued by King Jagajjaya Malla in 1735, the Bhaṭṭas must come from the area south of the Indian Vindhya Mountains and be Dravidian Telangana (Teliṅgana) Brahmans belonging to the group of Smārta or Vedic Orthodox Brahmans. More precisely, they must be born there.

The document explicitly states that a Bhaṭṭa priest born in the Valley is not allowed to enter the sanctum and to serve Paśupati, because otherwise the king would only live for a short time. In contrast to this rule, Bhaṇḍāris must be born within the Paśupatikṣetra. This constellation was and is quite a challenge: The Bhaṇḍāris must be local Newar Shresthas from Deopatan; the Bhaṭṭas must come from the country of the big southern neighbour. This marks not only a geographical difference but also a ritual one. The ritual insiders (seen from the vicinity of the sanctum), the Bhaṭṭas, must come from outside, and the local insiders become 'outsiders'—a situation that has time and again created criticism against the Indian Bhaṭṭas saying that they are Indian citizens, greedy and corrupt, uneducated and arrogant. The conflict culminated over the years in a chain of public, legal and political incidents.

The only Hindu kingdom in the world

From Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha's day and far into the 20th century, all rulers have propagated a religious strategy of forming unity. The view of the last Hindu kingdom in the world was used for creating an identity for the young state.

The close relations to India are clear in the Hindu and many Buddhist rituals that often begin with even a geographical connection in the solemn decision (*saṃkalpa*) to perform the ritual (Michaels 2005). Such a *saṃkalpa* must consequently fulfil certain formal criteria, which are also of a spatial nature. In such formulaic texts, we can see that almost every major Hindu ritual in Nepal is located by the Brahman priest in Bhāratavarṣa, thus India, and that the Paśupatinātha Temple is part of Āryāvarta, the holy subcontinent of India. The Gorkhā Rājya, too, regarded itself as part of the great southern neighbour. As late as 1951, Prime Minister B.P. Koirala said, at the opening conference of the Nepali National Congress, 'Nepal and India are not two countries. . . . Today the political difference you find is basically the game of selfish diplomats and politicians' (from Prem R. Uprety 1992: 94).

Generally, however, except for the few groups that live in the northern frontier regions, Nepal has always oriented itself towards the south, and even today, those ethnic groups who live near the border orient themselves increasingly to the south. Journeys to Tibet or the consumption of Tibetan-Chinese television, according to David Gellner (2016), are both much less popular even among Sherpa or Tamang than a trip to India or a Hindi film.

Starting in the 18th century, Nepal regarded itself as an especially hallowed land, as the true India (*asala hindusthāna*), that resisted India or Mughallana—thus Pṛthvīnārāyaṇa Śāha in the *Divyopadeśa* [Divya-Upadeśa] (cp. Stiller 1989: 42). And the more India was exposed to 'foreign influences' such as the Muslims, the Christian missionaries and the Western world, and began to form itself into a secular state, the more Nepal propagated itself as the last real Hindu kingdom on earth. Thus, the powerful Prime Minister Jaṅga Bahādura Rāṇā (1846–77) emphasised in the *Ain of 1854* that Nepal was the only country in the world where Brahmans, cows and women were still protected: 'There is a Hindu kingdom whose law is such that killing cows, women and Brahmans is forbidden; an independent land with this merit and with a palace lying in the Himalaya, in the land of the serpent Vāsuki, a place of pilgrimage for the Ārya, in which Paśupati's "Light-Radiating Liṅga" (*jyotirliṅga*) and the reverential seat of Guhyeśvarī lie. This land is the only Hindu kingdom in the Kaliyuga era' ([Mulukī] Ain, Preamble).

In the end, this kind of self-image meant that those parts of Nepal had to be hinduised which did not follow Hinduism, or only in a special form, and where the cow, for example, was not holy. In its core, then, the development of the state was more or less the Brahmanical Hinduisation of non-Hindu parts of the population—a process of nation building that started as early as the Licchavi and continued during the Malla epoch but was especially enforced by the

Śāha dynasty, who had Hindu temples built everywhere in the land for their patron deities and propagated Dasaĩ as a national festival throughout the country.

Correspondingly, the king showed himself mostly on occasions of state ceremony and ritual, for instance, during the Indrajātrā with the Kumārī, who gave him the *ṭīkā* and thus religious legitimation, at Śivarātri, at which the king had to appear in order to bring the land blessings or just as in showing the small black shirt (*bhoṭo*), which symbolises rain and thus fertility during the Matsyendranātha procession.

Of course, Hinduisation was more a matter of ideological and symbolic appropriations than of socioreligious realities. The Hindu Brahmans claimed that the Buddhists were basically Hindu, while many Buddhists regarded only the twice-born as Hindu. In this way, everyone could form their own majorities. Under the cloak of such appropriations were many ethnic groups who had taken up many rituals and teachings, both from Hinduism and from Buddhism, and who put these together. The brahmanically proclaimed religious unity did not catch hold in religious practice, especially not in the northern, often Tibetan Buddhist, areas, and in the east, where, among others, shamanistic religions were practiced.

Notes

1 Parts of this chapter are based on Michaels 2018 with further references.
2 On Chinese pilgrims, see Lévi 1905/I; Deeg 2016; on the influence of Newar scholars on Tibet: Lo Bue 1997.

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10

THE RISE OF VAIṢṆAVA DEVOTION IN NORTH INDIA

On the origins of a Mughal Bhakti sensibility

Patton E. Burchett

The predominant form of Hindu religiosity in North India today is Vaiṣṇava devotionalism (*bhakti*), but until very recently, the historical rise of this Vaiṣṇava bhakti has not been adequately explained. Earlier accounts of the growth of bhakti communities in North India in the Mughal period have largely struggled to properly situate Vaiṣṇava devotionalism's rise in relation to the previously dominant form of Hindu worship, ritual, and religio-political ideology; the early modern presence of Islam (particularly Sufism) and Persianate culture; and the larger social, political, and economic contexts of Sultanate and Mughal India. In a succinct and abbreviated form, this chapter aims to fill these gaps and to provide an appropriately nuanced explanatory account of Vaiṣṇava bhakti's rather dramatic rise to predominance in North India in the early modern period.

According to popular understandings, while the *Bhagavadgītā* (c. first century CE) first brings bhakti into prominence on the Hindu religious landscape at a conceptual, philosophical, and scriptural level, it is in the vernacular language and traditions of Tamil South India, circa sixth century CE, that bhakti—as the grassroots, embodied, emotional, participatory devotional religiosity with which most associate the term—really first emerges. From this point, as A.K. Ramanujan put it, "like a lit fuse, the passion of bhakti . . . spread from region to region, from century to century" (Ramanujan 1973: 40). As the long-running and widespread trope goes, the revolutionary "movement" (*āndolan*) of bhakti took form in the mother tongue of each region as it gradually swept—as if a "wave" of contagious religious emotion and egalitarian social sentiment—from the Tamil country in the south, circa sixth century, to the Gangetic plains of the north into the sixteenth century. John Stratton Hawley's *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (2015) has masterfully shown this notion of a single, pan-Indian "bhakti movement" to be "temporally late, geographically limited, and constructed according to specific political motivations" (Ben-Herut et al. 2019: 3). Recent scholarship has sought to replace "the bhakti movement" narrative and its mistaken historiographical common-sense with a focus on a plurality of bhakti movements developing in multiple, historically specific regional settings but also varying within each region according to the socioeconomic contexts of class and caste.[1] In that spirit, here I focus on the specific qualitative texture of early modern North Indian bhakti and the historically particular cultural and sociopolitical conditions that brought it forth.

Bhakti as normative Hindu religion: questioning a common assumption

Hawley's work (2015), alongside Krishna Sharma's important earlier book *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective: A Study in the History of Ideas* (1987), clearly demonstrate that "the bhakti movement" narrative is a very particular way of remembering the past not geared to "historical accuracy" but to the agendas of specific social groups, namely those of early modern North Indian Vaiṣṇavas, colonial-era Western Orientalist (Protestant Christian) Indologists, and modern-day Indian (Hindu) nationalists. In addition to positing an illusory continuity and coherence to the historical development of bhakti, this narrative has posited a very particular conception of bhakti—as an embodied, emotional, song- and poetry-filled tradition of participatory devotion to a personal God—as the normative and dominant Hindu religious form of the Common Era in South Asia. Despite the historiographical prominence most scholars have given this particular conceptualization of bhakti—as a sort of contagious, grassroots emotional devotion—it is, in fact, but one of many in the various time periods, regions, and religious communities of the Indian subcontinent. In other words, bhakti's meanings—the practices that constitute it, its experiential texture/quality, and its role in the overall religious life—are not stable, consistent, or universal; rather, they are shifting and embedded in context-specific discourses, embodied practices, and institutions. With this in mind, it is worth considering David Gordon White's provocative claim that, contrary to typical scholarly representations, bhakti is *not* India's perennial "mainstream" religion but the religion of India's urban society—brahmin intellectuals, aristocrats, and merchant classes. Bhakti's historiographical prominence, White maintains, has little to do with historical reality and much to do with the revisionist historical vision of modern Hindu reformers (educated urban elites) and the mass of scholars unwittingly following their lead (2003: 2–3).[2] In this chapter, as I trace the remarkable growth of bhakti communities, symbols, and sensibilities into a position of social power and influence in early modern North India, I also want to evaluate White's claim and to question bhakti's position in the overall arc of Indian religious history.

The prelude to Bhakti's rise: worship in medieval North India

According to White, when one examines the sectarian theistic traditions of the medieval Hindu world, bhakti, "the watchword of scriptural reinventions of Hinduism," White states, 'is conspicuously absent from worship practice."[3] In fact, bhakti is certainly not absent from medieval Hindu worship; however, when we delve into the religious history of India's early medieval period (c. 600–1200), we find that it was not bhakti but rather the thought, ritual practice, and institutional presence of the tantric traditions that were predominant in the life of South Asians. While tantra first arose as an esoteric tradition for initiated elites seeking liberation (*mokṣa*) and/or extraordinary powers (*siddhi*), it later became deeply involved with royal power and with India's public temple cult, making tantric ritual, institutions, and ideals of sacred power a fundamental part of mainstream Indian social, religious, and political life.[4]

Scholarship has tended to emphasize the esoteric and transgressive dimensions of the tantric tradition, but here I want to briefly focus attention on the underappreciated medieval Indian reality of "mainstream tantra." Most of the religious communities of early medieval India—whether Śaiva, Buddhist, Vaiṣṇava, or Jain—participated mutually in a distinctly tantric religious and political culture "most of whose structuring assumptions were the same and in which a variety of ritual forms were shared and developed across traditions" (Wedemeyer 2013: 31). Despite their key differences, all of these communities came to share a parallel repertoire

of tantric rituals for initiation, installation (*pratiṣṭhā*), and regular worship, while also sharing patronage relationships in which virtually the same powers and protections were offered to the same royal clients (Sanderson 2006: 6). While a small minority of advanced tantric practitioners did engage (probably infrequently) in transgressive sexual and mortuary rituals, their story is but one small piece of a tantric tradition that includes, more importantly, the preeminent religious communities of the medieval period—Śaiva Siddhānta, Vaiṣṇava Pañcarātra, and Buddhist Vajrayāna—and their pervasive institutional networks, which played a key role in the larger sociopolitical order.

From the seventh century, rulers increasingly looked to tantric rituals and gurus for empowerment and legitimation and sponsored the institutional growth of tantric communities. By the tenth century, temples (many administered by tantric monastic orders) and *maṭha*s (many housing professional tantric ascetics) had become vital economic, political, and religious hubs in the institutional network of medieval society.[5] These sites embodied, expressed, and widely disseminated tantric ideology and ritual; they were the institutions that sustained mainstream tantra and its vital role in the medieval religio-political order.

Bhakti was certainly not absent from worship in the mainstream medieval tantric communities of South Asia; however, they generally understood bhakti not as passionate, emotional love so much as faith, reverence, and service. Furthermore, in all of these traditions, bhakti's value was regularly subordinated to ritual actions, techniques of self-empowerment, and/or the quest for liberating knowledge (*jñāna*). Even when popular medieval devotion did take on a more emotional and/or soteriologically central character (e.g., the Tamil Āḻvārs and Nāyanārs), by roughly the tenth/eleventh century, this bhakti seems to have generally occurred within the frame of—or in necessary interaction with—fundamentally tantric principles, institutions, and ritual prescriptions. Even as we say this, it is imperative to point out that tantra's rise to prominence in early medieval India was inseparable from the growth of popular traditions of worship and devotion. As Alexis Sanderson has remarked, the tantric Śaiva (*mantra-mārga*) traditions that dominated this period "were successful in no small measure because Śaiva devotion had become the dominant religious idiom in the population at large." The rich and powerful of early medieval India were increasingly aligning themselves with tantric Śaiva initiatory lineages, in significant part, because doing so was "particularly efficacious in the eyes of a predominantly Śaiva population, not only among the brahmins but among all social strata, down to and including the lowest" (Sanderson 2013: 224). In other words, it seems that tantric Śaivism achieved its great success largely because it "hooked onto" and was "parasitic" upon a pre-existing, temple-based tradition of lay Śaiva bhakti (Sanderson 2015).

We can gain some understanding of this co-existing tradition of lay Śaiva devotion through its literature, the Śiva-dharma corpus.[6] The earliest texts of the lay Śaiva tradition seem to be the circa sixth–seventh century *Śivadharma* (*Śivadharmaśāstra*) and *Śivadharmottara*, likely composed in North India, but widely known throughout medieval India (De Simini 2016a: 22, 2016b: 236). The easy and affordable lay Śaiva religion prescribed in these texts was open to *śūdra*s, untouchables (*cāṇḍāla*), and foreigners (*mleccha*). As the research of Florinda de Simini on the *Śivadharma* and *Śivadharmottara* illustrates, the devotional religiosity extolled in the Śivadharma tradition centres not on the cultivation of emotion but on faith in the spiritual authority of Śaiva scriptures and professional ascetics and on practices of ritual worship and gift-giving (*dāna*), in particular, offerings of material support to the community of initiated Śaiva *ācārya*s and yogis (De Simini 2016a: 46, 66). Overall, the most common topics in these two earliest Śivadharma texts seem to be (a) instructions for and praise of the ritual worship of the *liṅga* (a sphere of worship practice that would be adopted and adapted as the core of the tantric Śaiva ritual repertoire); (b) praise of (and merits accrued by) constructing and maintaining a Śaiva temple; and

(c) rules, fruits, and proper recipients of *dāna* (Ibid, 58). The window that Śivadharma texts give us onto early medieval lay Śaivism suggests that, in fact, popular devotion was lived out most centrally in performing rituals of worship to Śiva in the aniconic form of the *liṅga*) and offering material support to (patronizing) the larger Śaiva community.

The role and conception bhakti found in preeminent medieval tantric communities, together with the practice and character of devotion seen in medieval lay Śaiva scriptures, powerfully suggest that certain commonplace scholarly assumptions about bhakti—that is, that it is of the nature of passionate, emotional love and that it constitutes "normative" Hindu religion in the Common Era—are inaccurate and in need of serious reconsideration. In reference to our central topic of concern, this is to say that when Vaiṣṇava bhakti became dominant in North India in the early modern period, this was something quite new, and furthermore, the Sufi-inflected emotional, aesthetic, and ethical character of this bhakti (to be discussed subsequently) was also something quite distinctive.

With the spread of Persianate Turkish power across North India from the twelfth century, the relationship between ruler and *tāntrika* rapidly declines, with political authority no longer relying upon tantric ritual and institutions as it had been, and this brings about a significant change in the religious landscape. As White writes (2011: 577):

> The rise and fall of Hindu Tantra as a religious "mainstream" is directly linked to the rise and fall of its royal patrons. In north and central India, Hindu Tantra thrived as the royal cultus under the Kalacuri, Somavamshi, Chandella, Calukya, and other dynastic lines, until their lands fell into the hands of Muslim rulers in the 12th century. . . . For so long as [the] relationship between kings and tantric specialists remained in force, Tantra persisted as a sanctioned religious force in India, with the ceremonial life of the kingdom being conducted in a tantric mode. When that relationship was dissolved, as Hindu kings were overthrown or reduced to vassal status by Muslim [Persianate Turkish] rulers (or, from the 16th cent. forward, increasingly opted for a devotional religious style), Tantra disappeared.

It is not that all tantric religiosity vanishes at this time, but that tantra as a mainstream, public tradition—held together as such by royal patronage and participation in an overarching politico–religious ideology and institutional culture—largely disappears. While tantric religiosity in North India would live on, it would do so primarily (a) in more private, secretive contexts among Hindu royal families now subordinate to Sultanate and Mughal rulers; (b) among particular (less institutionalized, non-brahmanical) lineages of tantric practitioners, like the Nāth yogis; and (c) as ritual procedures and techniques detached from tantric religiosity *per se* but persisting in new (non-tantric) contexts (e.g., Vedāntic, *bhakti*, and yogic frameworks). Overall, as we enter the Delhi Sultanate period, tantric paradigms of thought and behaviour increasingly find themselves marginalized and subordinated to Hindu religious practices and perspectives more congenial to the new social environment and its increasingly prevalent Islamicate world-views. This is the setting for Vaiṣṇava devotionalism's remarkable emergence in North India.

Sultanate India: setting the stage for North India's bhakti poet-saints

The story of Vaiṣṇava bhakti's rise to predominance in North India begins in the Delhi Sultanate (1206–1526).[7] The military conquest of India by Persianate Turks in the early thirteenth century ended an era in which tantric religio-political paradigms and institutions had been

an important feature of the subcontinent for centuries. This shift in the sociopolitical order resulted in new patterns of circulation, encounter, and exchange that would, in time, create the conditions for the growth of new bhakti sensibilities, communities, and forms of literature.[8] The Sultanate period was a time of cultural translation, a complex, dynamic, and extended encounter of Persianate-Islamicate and Sanskritic-Indic cultures that led to several momentous changes in north and central India: the decline of mainstream, royally patronized institutional forms of tantra; the spread of Persian courtly and literary culture; the expansion of popular Sufism; and, relatedly, the growth of a trans-religious North Indian culture of vernacular literary composition and performance. All of these Sultanate-era developments paved the way for the emergence of the bhakti poet-saints of North India.

Shortly after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in the early thirteenth century, Mongol invasions devastated Iran and Central Asia, leading to a massive influx of elite Persianized migrants into India. In this context, Persian cosmopolitan culture and its distinctive ethics, aesthetics, and political practices gradually took root in northern India and, later, the Deccan, overlapping and interacting with the pre-existing Sanskrit cosmopolis. The ideals of the Persian cosmopolis—just like those of Sanskritic culture—were not imposed but gradually assimilated and, over time, increasingly emulated (Eaton and Wagoner 2014: 26).

As the Persianized Turks and Afghans of the Sultanate subjugated local Indian populations, a slow process of cultural and linguistic assimilation began, exemplified in the Sultanate elites' "adaptation of local literary and artistic forms to express new poetic and religious agendas within a complex multilingualism of religious and symbolic vocabularies" (Behl 2012a: 16). By the end of the thirteenth century, a significant part of the Sultanate aristocracy was Indian born and raised. Most would have been native speakers of Hindavī, the general vernacular spoken language of North India. The Tughlaq dynasty (1320–1414) is known to have cultivated Hindavī verse, patronizing its musical and recitative performance, and the very first work of Hindavī literature—a Sufi romance (*premākhyān*)—the *Cāndāyan*, was composed in 1379 at a Tughlaq provincial court in Avadh. The Tughlaqs were also the first to make tentative attempts to bring Hindus into the Sultanate's central ruling apparatus. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, then, we see the beginnings of significant cultural exchange and hybridity—a simultaneous Indianization of Persianate traditions and a Persianization of aspects of Indian culture[9]—a trend that would eventually result, in the fifteenth century, in the blossoming of a shared vernacular culture.

While the expansion of Persianate courtly and literary culture represents a key dimension of the broader cultural change occurring in Sultanate India, related to this expansion, and just as important as it, was the spread of Sufism. The form and style of Islam that flooded into India from Central Asia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was one largely defined by Sufism, and more specifically, by a new brand of Sufism centred on popular devotion to the Sufi saint. The practices and symbols of this mass-based, saint-centred form of Sufism were far more important in moulding Indian worldviews than the texts and traditions of doctrinal Islam. As Richard Eaton has shown, for most Indians, who would have been illiterate or non-Arabic speakers, the Quran was not a particularly compelling source of sacred authority; rather, it was Sufis—their words and actions—that served as the representatives and the embodiments of Islam (Eaton 2003: 263). As Sultanate power spread outward from Delhi, Sufis played a key role in extending settlement and cultivation, with provincial communities often centred on the establishment of Sufi hospices (*khānqāh*s) and tomb shrines (*dargāh*s) (Digby 2004: 302–305). The rituals conducted at these local Sufi institutions "made Islam accessible to non-lettered masses, providing them with vivid and concrete manifestations of the divine order, and integrating them into its ritualized drama both as participants and as sponsors" (Eaton 2003: 264). Centred

around the charisma of Sufi saints, the shrines and hospices associated with South Asia's differ-ent Sufi orders gradually spread across the subcontinent and together functioned to incorporate local cultural systems into a larger Indo-Persian, Islamicate culture that would have a clear impact on developing bhakti sensibilities.

By the mid-fourteenth century, the Tughlaq conquests had reached their limits and the Delhi Sultanate was forced to face the challenges of scale, with the sultans often at major pains to prevent the rise of local bases of power. In the latter half of the fourteenth century, Delhi's authority began to decline, with regional governors becoming wealthier and more autono-mous. Already tottering, the Tughlaq dynasty received a crushing blow with Timur's invasion and sacking of Delhi in 1398, which significantly altered India's political and cultural land-scape.[10] With the capital city's authority destroyed, regional governors took the opportunity to strike out on their own and, in the fifteenth century, Delhi became just one of many regional power centres as a series of independent sultanates arose in Bengal in the east, Jaunpur in the mid-Gangetic region (between Delhi and Bengal), Gujarat in the west, Malwa in central India, and the Deccan, along with the emergence of several Rajput kingdoms in Rajasthan.[11] In all of these regional kingdoms, new artistic ventures, literary styles, and cross-religious collabora-tions flourished. Regional rulers patronized new forms of poetry and arts at their courts as part of the project of establishing political legitimacy. At the same time, the overall decentralization of power across North India meant the increased prominence of rural gentry, local warlords, and merchants who provided local resources to regional rulers and who (like those rulers) also sought to assert their status and authority by patronizing poets, scholars, and performers (Sreenivasan 2014: 243–247). In this environment, there was widespread demand for literary specialists (many of whom were Sufis), who utilized prestigious Persian and Sanskrit conven-tions while adapting their works—in style, narrative content, and theme—to the distinctive concerns of their patrons to produce sophisticated new *vernacular* literary works.[12] While the fifteenth and early sixteenth century have been characterized as "the twilight of the Delhi Sultanate," in fact, as Francesca Orsini notes, this was "a period of considerable regional politi-cal, cultural and religious dynamism" and "the beginning of the widespread vernacular literary production in north India" (2012: 227). Indeed, the rise of bhakti in North India was tied to the development in the late (post-Timur) Sultanate of this new vernacular literary and performative culture, in which Sufis played a key role.

Orsini explains that in the fifteenth century, circulation and trade across North India was "easy and intense" and that "while north India was not a homogenous region in political terms, it seems to have been a fairly well-connected cultural and linguistic region" (Ibid., 228–229). North India's "high"[13] languages at this time were Arabic, Sanskrit, and, most especially, Persian, which spread through sultanate administration, madrasa education, and Sufi religious culture, eventually being taken up even among Hindu elites and artisanal classes (Orsini and Sheikh 2014: 14–15). Operating alongside these languages was the generally intelligible "common tongue" of Hindavī. A composite indigenous North Indian language, Hindavī, or *bhākhā (bhāṣā)*, was a generic spoken vernacular (a sort of proto-Brajbhāṣā) that could be written in multiple scripts (Persian, Kaithī, Devanāgarī, etc.). Locally produced compositions in Hindavī—primarily stories (*kathā*s), songs, and poetic couplets (*dohā*s)—"could travel and be understood over the whole of North India" and were performed in regional and subregional courts, Sufi *khānqāh*s, and in the "open, 'Bhakti public sphere' of towns and villages" (Ibid., 14–16). Thus, in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, North Indian society was a multilingual and multicultural one in which the growth of vernacular Hindavī literary forms was happening in conjunction with the spread of Persian language and literature (Orsini 2014a: 404).

It was in this diverse and interactive socioreligious context, in the fifteenth and early six-teenth centuries, with its emerging vernacular literary-performative culture, that the age of the great bhakti saints of North India began with figures such as Kabīr, the iconoclastic weaver from Benares, whose fierce rhetoric criticized Muslims and Hindus alike for not truly loving God but getting lost in egoistic concerns, ritual obligations, and doctrinal details; Raidās, the "untouch-able" leatherworker, also from Benares, who was a model of humility in his devotion to a formless, transcendent *nirguṇ* ("without attributes") God that cherished the troubled and lowly as much as anyone; Narasī Mehtā, the poor but ever-generous Brahmin Vaiṣṇava devotee from Gujarat; Pīpā, the Rajasthani king who abdicated his throne to serve God and the community of *bhakta*s; Nānak, the great Punjabi *nirguṇ bhakta* who founded the Sikh community; Sūrdās, the artful (and reputedly blind) poet and Kṛṣṇa devotee of Braj; and Mīrābāī, the Rajasthani princess and passionate devotee of Kṛṣṇa. The exact dates for most of these important bhakti fig-ures are disputed, but the key point is that these poet-saints—who all composed in the vernacu-lar—all seem to have flourished in the culturally dynamic period stretching from the fifteenth through the mid-sixteenth century (i.e., post-Timur and pre-Akbar). Furthermore, this list of saints demonstrates the social and geographic reach of the emerging bhakti movement in that they came from all social backgrounds (from Brahmin to "untouchable") and from places across the breadth of North India (from Gujarat, Panjab, and Rajasthan to Braj and Benares). During Akbar's reign and throughout the seventeenth century, important bhakti poets and community leaders would continue to emerge and flourish, including figures such as Tulsīdās, the Brahmin devotee of Rām and author of the famous vernacular Hindavī rendition of the Rām story, the *Rāmcaritmānas*, and Dādū, the *nirguṇ* devotee who started a bhakti community in Rajasthan known for its prolific literary production.

The growth of bhakti in early modern North India was, in significant part, a literary and institutional phenomenon and was therefore closely linked to the rise of Hindavī (and by the end of the sixteenth century, specifically Brajbhāṣā) as a vernacular language of artistic sophis-tication, culture, and status, a development in which Sufis played a major part. Behl has shown that in late Sultanate India and throughout the Mughal period, Hindavī compositions were popular "among groups of cultivated listeners in courts, Sufi hospices (*khānaqāh*s), and other spaces where poetry was sung or recited" (2012a: 286). Indeed, in North India, it was actually Sufis who inaugurated the literary use of vernacular languages. By the fifteenth century, most Indian Sufis would undoubtedly have spoken Indian dialects as their mother tongue; thus, it should come as no surprise that Sufis in North India appreciated and composed poetry in their own vernacular of Hindavī.[14] Orsini explains that, for North Indian Sufis,

> Arabic was the scriptural language, Persian was the textual language of exposition and poetry, and Hindavi was comfortably the local language of Islam and a parallel poetic language to that of Persian. . . . [W]hereas the *textual* world of North Indian Sufism appears to have been overwhelmingly Persian, its *oral* and *oral-literary* world must have been more substantially Hindavi.
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> (2014b: 223)

While India's traditional Sanskrit-based literary culture did not encourage the use of ver-naculars for literary purposes, Sufis were not enculturated into (and thus not bound by) the codes of Sanskritic tradition and were therefore well situated to lead the way in transforming the spoken idiom of Hindavī into a courtly language and a literary tradition. In this regard, it is particularly important to discuss the new and uniquely Indian genre of the *premākhyān*, or Sufi romance.

The Indian Sufi romances were composed in Hindavī, generally followed the conventions of the Persian *masnavī* (a long romantic, martial, or didactic poem written in rhyming couplets), incorporated the Indian aesthetic theory of *rasa*, and utilized regional Indian narratives and imagery. This Muslim-penned genre actually constitutes "the first substantial body of devotional and narrative literature in pre-modern Hindi" (Behl 2007: 321). The major *premākhyān*s are Maulānā Dā'ūd's *Cāndāyan* (1379), Qutban's *Mirigāvatī* (1503), Jāyasī's *Padmāvat* (1540), and Manjhan's *Madhumālatī* (1545). As Aditya Behl has shown so masterfully, these Hindavī Sufi romances took Persian concepts and poetic forms along with Islamic models of piety and represented them "in Indian dress," using local Indian aesthetics, imagery, religious practices, and narratives to communicate Sufi cosmology, metaphysics, and devotional sensibilities (2012a: 16–22, 328–329). The cultural and literary impact of this vernacular Indian Sufi literature—particularly upon North India's burgeoning bhakti tradition—was significant. Indeed, one of the signature literary achievements of the bhakti movement and arguably the most popular religious text in North India today, Tulsīdās' *Rāmcaritmānas*, composed in Hindavī (Avadhi) in 1575, adopted and adapted the language, narrative technique, and meter of the *premākhyān*s, thereby bringing a Sufi tradition of expression "into the center of north Indian Vaiṣṇava devotionalism" (Digby 2004: 351).

The *premākhyān*s participated in a "double system of circulation and performance" in which, on one hand, they were performed orally in the courts of nobles and rulers, at Sufi shrines and hospices, in bazaars, and privately in the homes of the affluent, and, on the other hand, they were also "circulated across great distances in manuscript form and became the object of artistic virtuosity and courtly connoisseurship" (Williams 2014: 88). These Sufi romances were crucial in making a place for Hindavī as a language of *written* literature, fit for performance at court, and relatedly in making a place for Hindavī manuscripts as material forms of status and power in the Indo-Persian aesthetic and political culture of the day. While bhakti compositions initially circulated almost entirely through oral channels, around the late sixteenth century—following the lead of the Sufis—bhakti communities began to produce thousands of hand-written manuscripts of vernacular bhakti literature that would circulate throughout North India, connecting *bhakta*s far and wide to each other as well as to the halls of Mughal and Rajput power.

Mughal India: the growth of Vaiṣṇava bhakti institutions and communities

While North India's bhakti movement began in the specific social and cultural conditions of the later Sultanate, it was during the Mughal period that bhakti became a major institutional and literary phenomenon in North India. In this section, I explore the Mughal-Rajput sociopolitical context that allowed bhakti institutions and literature to flourish in early modern North India, focusing in particular on the reign of the third Mughal emperor, Jalāl ud-Dīn Muhammad Akbar (r. 1556–1605), or "Akbar the Great." The religious policies, political alliances, and administrative structures developed during Akbar's rule were crucial in facilitating the successful growth of Vaiṣṇava bhakti traditions.

As Christian Novetzke notes, scholars have too often treated bhakti "as if it existed in a hermetic theological and literary sphere . . . bypassing the ways *bhakti* is embedded in fields of power" (2019: 122). With this in mind, in this section, we stay attuned to the crucial political and economic context and interests that shaped the development of bhakti, and religion more generally, in Mughal India. Important here is the research of Irfan Habib, who, among others, suggests that the institution of a new land revenue system in the Sultanate period helped to establish an economy in which (in certain key areas) agrarian exploitation—the systematic

appropriation of agricultural surplus by the ruling class—fuelled urban growth and, correspondingly, an expansion in craft production and commerce. In the Mughal period, the basic character of this economy seems to have continued and to have reached an even more developed form (Habib 1963, 2002: 370–385).[15] The growth of merchant and urban artisan classes and the dispossession and disempowerment of (at least certain segments of) the peasantry that occurred in the Sultanate and Mughal periods were likely related to the rise of both devotional communities and soldiering (warrior ascetic) groups that we see in North India from the fifteenth century, if in ways that are not yet fully understood.[16]

Vasudha Dalmia and Munis Faruqui identify three other interrelated historical-material phenomena that had particularly significant effects upon religious life in the Mughal Empire (Dalmia and Faruqui 2014: xii–xiv). First, the gradual absorption of northern India's post-1398 regional kingdoms within a single imperial state—the consolidation of Mughal authority from Kabul to Bengal, Kashmir to the northern Deccan—created a political context that no ambitious religious group could ignore. Second, a network of roads and related facilities (stepwells, roadside hostels, etc.) were built in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, greatly improving communications and the ease of travel, facilitating commerce and the expansion of economic networks. Third, the growing wealth of India from the late fifteenth century—an increase in gold and silver coming into India from its many exports (cotton and silk textiles, spices, manufactured goods, agricultural products)—spurred great economic development. In the seventeenth century, the Mughal empire possessed greater wealth and manpower than all other early modern Islamicate empires, including those of the Safavids, Uzbeks, and Ottomans (Moin 2014: 263). As Dalmia and Faruqi state, "This wealth not only enhanced the military and administrative capacities of the Mughal Empire," it also provided resources that would lead to "widespread temple and mosque construction, the expansion of old pilgrimage sites, rising numbers of Hindu and Muslim pilgrims, as well as increasing religiously oriented textual production" (Dalmia and Faruqui 2014: xiv.) We really begin to see the effects of these historical developments—political consolidation, improved transportation and communication, and rising wealth—on India's religious landscape in the reign of Akbar, and these conditions would persist through the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century.

Under Akbar, the Mughal Empire became the largest and most bureaucratically sophisticated political entity that India had ever seen. Akbar and his allies constructed "a new corporate and inclusivist ideology of service to emperor and state" that successfully drew together a disparate range of ethnic groups in the leadership and administration of the Mughal empire (O'Hanlon 2007: 889). The Rajputs—a politically powerful, ethnically diverse, and geographically widespread Hindu status group often associated with warriorhood[17]—played an especially vital role in these political and administrative innovations. The Rajputs were also crucial in the formation of a joint Mughal-Rajput court culture whose cosmopolitan codes and symbols of virtue, deportment, and aesthetic sophistication contributed to, and were intertwined with, the rise of Vaiṣṇava bhakti.

A cornerstone of Akbar's new imperial ideology was the celebrated ecumenical policy of *ṣuḥl-i kull* in which all were to be treated equally and respectfully; that is, non-Muslims were officially accorded the same rights as Muslims. Akbar's adoption of this open-minded, tolerant perspective as the basis for his imperial religious policy was one key factor—among others such as, especially, his alliance with Hindu Rajputs—that helped to produce a sociopolitical environment in which bhakti communities and their institutions would flourish in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Just as tantric religiosity emerged in and reflected a certain medieval feudal political environment, as Ronald Davidson (2002) has demonstrated, bhakti's successful growth in early modern North India also had to do with a resonance between Mughal

imperial ideology, with its "patrimonial-bureaucratic" political structure, and the ideology of Vaiṣṇava devotion. The new Mughal dynastic ideology of the latter sixteenth century "glorified Akbar as the living embodiment of the Empire itself, and focus for the direct personal devotion of the imperial nobility" (O'Hanlon 2007: 889). While the regional sultanates had been structured by horizontal ties (of both marriage and military give-and-take), things changed with the Mughals—especially under Akbar—as they successfully "open[ed] up a hierarchical chasm between themselves and those whom they 'commanded'," in which the emperor was "the single source of political legitimacy and authority" (Alam and Subrahmanyam 1998: 21; Richards 1995: 56). There are fascinating similarities between the devotion, loyalty, and service that Mughal officials gave to the emperor and that offered by Vaiṣṇava *bhakta*s to God. As Kumkum Chatterjee has stated, "the intensely personal, unquestioning bhakti that underlay the phenomenon of Vaiṣṇava devotionalism in northern India during this period, constituted a parallel, at least at the conceptual level, with the cult of devoted imperial service and devotion" to the Mughal emperor (Chatterjee 2009: 157–158). She notes, for instance, the striking parallels between the Mughals' royal ceremonies (such as the custom in which the emperor appeared on the palace balcony to give his *darśan* or "viewing" to gathered subjects) and the daily rituals of bhakti temples (such as the awakening of the deity and its ceremonial *darśan* by devotees at specific times in the day). The new Mughal system succeeded because it synced with and helped to transform the values of high-status warrior-aristocrats like the Rajputs, assisting in a "shift from personal, lineage, or sectarian pride—that of the 'free' warrior chief—to a more impersonal, imperial pride—that of the 'slave' warrior-administrator" (Richards 1998: 129) who understood service to the emperor or his subordinates as no different from service to God (or from service to a local ruler or *ṭhākur*). In this context, it is not surprising that Akbar came to be regularly associated with Viṣṇu (especially Rām) and even described by Hindu contemporaries as one of his *avatār*s (Truschke 2016: 39–40, 204–205).

From the early Mughal period onward, local Hindu rulers across North India increasingly came to ally themselves with Vaiṣṇava bhakti communities and their institutional forms and symbols while often moving away from those of tantric Śaivism and Śāktism. As Catherine Asher and Cynthia Talbot have written, "Although elite Hindus in previous centuries had primarily focused on Śiva as the object of their worship . . . the situation changed from *c.* 1500 onward, after a wave of devotion toward Vishnu became more widespread" (Asher and Talbot 2006: 108). William Pinch similarly states that, "the major Rajput clans underwent what might be deemed a kind of 'conversion' process, from Śaiva and Śakta cult affiliations in the early 1500s to more 'orthoprax' Krishna and Rama devotion by 1800, and . . . this occurred in tandem with participation in the overarching framework of the Mughal imperium" (Pinch 2009).

There is plentiful evidence for this broad shift toward Vaiṣṇava bhakti. Samira Sheikh has discussed the rise of devotional Vaiṣṇavism in Gujarat in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in association with a decline in Śaivism, which had been dominant there for centuries (Sheikh 2010: 130–175). Orsini and Sheikh have noted how, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, "Rajput groups formerly associated with goddess or Shiva worship began to link up their genealogies with Krishna" (Orsini and Sheikh 2014: 42–43). Popular oral traditions from Rajasthan, Panjab, and the Kullu Valley (western Himalayas) each relate the defeat of tantric Nāth yogis and the subsequent conversion (corroborated in historical records) of the local ruler and populace to Vaiṣṇava devotional sensibilities in the early modern period (Burchett 2019: 131–137). Charlotte Vaudeville has demonstrated that Śaivism and Śāktism dominated Braj prior to its takeover by Vaiṣṇava (Kṛṣṇa) bhakti in the sixteenth century (Vaudeville 1976: 204–208). In a study of *Rāmāyaṇa*-related pilgrimage sites that became popular in the early modern period, Diana Eck

has shown how early modern Vaiṣṇava bhakti movements in North India took over, and were superimposed upon, what had long been Śaiva religious territory (Eck 1991). Heidi Pauwels has drawn attention to the deliberation move by the Bundelā rulers of Orchha (Madhya Pradesh) from Śākta-centred religious practice to that of Vaiṣṇava bhakti in the sixteenth century (Pauwels 2009). In Panjab, Kathleen Erndl has discussed evidence for the predominance of Śāktism prior to the emergence of devotional Vaiṣṇavism there in the seventeenth century (Erndl 1993: 43). Pika Ghosh's work on Bengal has documented the rise of new, devotional types of temple construction in association with the rise of Vaiṣṇava bhakti there in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and its challenge to the brahmanical tantric institutions and goddess cults of Bengal (Ghosh 2005).

The evidence for a general historical shift from tantric Śaiva-Śākta religiosity to devotional Vaiṣṇavism in early modern North India is clear and abundant; however, there are some important caveats. This was a *shift*, not an erasure. Tantric Śaivism and Śāktism in no way disappeared; rather, generally speaking, their role—especially their public presence—diminished and often became subordinate to the ideologies, institutions, and symbols of devotional Vaiṣṇavism.[18] Furthermore, this shift toward Vaiṣṇava bhakti was not a universal fact but an incomplete and uneven process, occurring at different times and fashions in different locations, and varying in impact among different social strata. Very generally, the early modern shift to institutionalized forms of *saguṇ* ("with attributes") Rām- or Kṛṣṇa-focused devotional Vaiṣṇavism seems to have occurred especially among North India's rulers, aristocracy, brahmans, and merchant class and to have been less widespread among peasant and pastoral castes. In some areas, such as the Western Himalayas, while *saguṇ* Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* was taken up by the ruling class, it does not seem to have held much appeal or to have spread widely among the broader populace (Moran 2013: 22–24). Even in Braj (the Vrindavan-Mathura area), the beating heart of early modern North India's rising Kṛṣṇa devotional movement, the region's indigenous peasant and pastoralist inhabitants tended to be excluded from or marginalized within the major Kṛṣṇa bhakti *sampradāy*s and to maintain earlier traditions revolving around the worship of goddesses and nature and/or the pragmatic services and occult powers offered by locally renowned charismatic ascetics (Vaudeville 1976: 204–213, 1980: 12, 15, n. 36; Rana 2006: 127–128, 131–134). Indeed, the Braj region's dominant peasant caste, the Jāṭs, seem to have held an "intense hostility" toward, and to have been in active conflict with, the rapidly growing brahmanical Vaiṣṇava (Gauḍīya and Vallabhite) establishments based in the area (Rana 2006: 125).[19] None of this is to say that the spread of bhakti in early modern North India was only an upper-caste affair or one that served simply "to endear the dominant to the subordinate and thereby justify servitude" (Guha 1997: 47–50).[20] In fact, bhakti's growth occurred at all social levels and, as Kumkum Sangari (1990) has brilliantly shown, it involved the empowering of low-castes and women and the subversion of traditional structures of dominance even as it often perpetuated the inequities of status quo caste, class, and gender relations.[21]

The growth of Vaiṣṇava bhakti, then, was certainly a popular phenomenon; nevertheless, in making sense of the various dimensions of *bhakti*'s rise in early modern North India, the trend among Rajputs and other political elites of taking up the symbols and allying with the institutions of *saguṇ* devotional Vaiṣṇavism (often to the detriment of previous Śaiva-Śākta loyalties) is particularly important because of the new patronage, prestige, and public visibility it afforded to Vaiṣṇava bhakti. Importantly, these Hindu rulers would not typically have considered the matter an either/or choice between tantric Śaiva-Śākta religion and Vaiṣṇava bhakti. Since the power and appeal of sacrifice-demanding clan goddesses and the reputations of charismatic tantric yogis were typically quite localized in nature, rulers often continued to give them a measure of local support that was meant to complement the cosmopolitanism

of Vaiṣṇava bhakti, which increasingly came to serve as the more public face of Hindu king-doms, able to link rulers into a larger empire-wide network of shared values and symbols of authority, purity, and virtue. Mahesh Sharma's work, for example, shows how rulers of the western Himalayan kingdom of Chamba in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attained "consent-to-rule" from subjects in their core area by appropriating and supporting local symbols and sacred centres linked to goddesses and Nāth yogis, while simultaneously legiti-mating their authority and fostering "an association with the subcontinental cosmos" by pub-licly adopting and formally associating themselves with devotional Vaiṣṇavism (Sharma 2009: 72–76, 135–137). Even the Kacchvāhās, the first and most influential clan of Rajputs to ally with Akbar, who were major patrons of bhakti and great devotees of Govindadev (Kṛṣṇa) and Sītā-Rām, also continued to place themselves under the protection of their tutelary goddess Jamvai-mātā and the guardian of the royal territory, the tantric goddess Śilā-devī. As Jason Schwartz (2012) has suggested, it seems likely that Śākta Tantra was present *behind the scenes* at several major sites where Vaiṣṇava bhakti was being publicly trumpeted in Mughal India, including the Kacchvāhā court. Thus, it seems that some Hindu rulers in Mughal India sup-ported locally esteemed tantric cults of worship or sought out tantric (Śākta) empowerment in private, esoteric settings at the same time that they openly espoused Vaiṣṇava bhakti and publicly displayed its cosmopolitan symbols.[22]

The Mughals directly patronized the growth of Vaiṣṇava bhakti, most often through tax-free land grants which served to secure the political loyalty of Vaiṣṇava bhakti institutions in strate-gic locations, such as the key region of Braj. State support of bhakti communities (in the form of charitable grants to Vaiṣṇava community leaders and institution-builders) may have been designed to create a class of influential Hindus who would act as apologists and propagandists for the Mughal regime, but it also suggests a Mughal appeal to the larger quotidian populace of devotees supported by the very Vaiṣṇava temples and *maṭha*s being patronized, a way for the state to cultivate positive relations with a growing bhakti public that clearly had a certain politi-cal power and utility.[23]

In general, as Audrey Truschke has stressed, "the Mughals cultivated a notably multilingual and multicultural courtly environment that included royal support of Hindi, Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit" (Truschke 2015: 252). In Akbar's India, power derived in large part from aes-thetic practice, with political influence often exerted and/or acquired through literary, intel-lectual, and cultural endeavours. Corinne Lefevre has remarked upon the enormous political significance and prestige associated with cultural and literary-artistic activities in Mughal India, not just at the imperial court, but also among subimperial nobles and non-state actors (Lefe-vre 2014: 79). With regard to the rise of bhakti, particularly noteworthy is Mughal support of Brajbhāṣā and the self-assertive literary activity in Brajbhāṣā we see at subimperial Mughal courts and in devotional communities of the period. The trailblazing work of Allison Busch has shown how Brajbhāṣā "functioned as a zone of sociolinguistic contact, a medium that the Persian-using Mughals and the Sanskrit-proficient Hindu literati had in common" (Busch 2014: 194). As she explains, the vernacular of Brajbhāṣā "had the innate ability to foster the partici-pation of multiple groups and linkages between them. In contrast to Sanskrit and Persian, . . . Brajbhasha was readily intelligible to most North Indians from Gujarat to Bengal and . . . was a marvellously adaptable linguistic resource because writers could manipulate registers to suit diverse literary contexts and patrons" (Ibid., 194–195). Beginning at the end of the sixteenth century, there would be an unprecedented explosion of Brajbhāṣā literary activity, much of it driven by emerging bhakti communities who, in the Mughal cultural environment, increas-ingly sought patronage and power—and forged their sectarian identities—through their literary practices and products.

A Mughal bhakti case study: the Rāmānandīs of Galta

A brief examination of the Rāmānandī bhakti community of Galta, near modern–day Jaipur, and a few of its influential members, is instructive for fleshing out some of the broader inter-twined political, literary, and religious trends we have been discussing. Particularly important is Agradās, a disciple of Kṛṣṇadās Payahārī (head of the initial Galta community) and supposed founder of the Rām-*rasik* sect,[24] who flourished in the latter half of the sixteenth century and is the first Rāmānandī to have produced any significant body of written literature. Agradās wrote at a time when Brajbhāṣā was already well established in bhakti religious circles and was on the rise as a sophisticated literary idiom, rapidly gaining importance in courtly contexts. Agra wrote in Rajasthan, within the orbit of the Kacchvāhā rulers of Amer, who were taking the lead role in establishing "a transregional Rajput courtly culture that was evolving in dialogue with the Mughal imperial system" (Busch 2011: 46), and was significantly informed by the values, images, and narratives of Vaiṣṇava bhakti. This developing cosmopolitan court culture engen-dered a new interest among Rajput rulers in literacy and books, which manifested in the second half of the sixteenth century in an explosion of written texts (that increasingly supplemented oral practices) and the first development of libraries (Busch 2011: 173).

Agradās found himself in the midst of all these trends and the new patronage conditions to which they gave rise. By producing written texts, especially ones that interfaced with the increasingly popular Kṛṣṇaite-influenced *śṛṅgāra* literary culture, it was possible for bhakti poets to plug into the petty noble circuit and perhaps make even bigger court connections that would bring the benefits of both prestige and patronage to themselves and their communities.[25] Agradās wrote at a time when Brajbhāṣā literary production and the Vaiṣṇava devotion with which it was so often associated were increasingly becoming part of Rajput kingly self-presentation, a self-fashioning designed to display the Rajput rulers' worthiness, prestige, sophistication, and power to: (a) the Mughals, who, crucially, could participate firsthand in the "cultural repertory" of Brajbhāṣā, unlike with the far more inaccessible realm of Sanskrit (Busch 2011: 163); (b) rival Rajput houses; and (c) their own local subjects. Agradās composed polished vernacular works on Vaiṣṇava themes according to time-honoured Sanskrit aesthetic conventions and thus made the Rāmānandī *sampradāy* into an active participant in an emerging cosmopolitan Mughal-Rajput literary culture. His literary project provided the Rāmānandīs a level of dignity, distinc-tion, and deportment that was vital in their competition with other religious communities for the support and patronage of those with wealth, sophistication, and power.

While earlier (as well as many contemporaneous) Rāmānandīs seem to have operated within an ascetic, yogic, and Sant devotional culture not much concerned with either brahmanical propriety or the composition of literature, Agradās spearheaded an effort to secure respectability and legitimacy for the Rāmānandīs among other sectarian Hindu communities by producing vernacular devotional literature that engaged Sanskritic traditions and interfaced with the devel-oping Mughal-Rajput court culture. With the Rajputs' rise to political power within the system of Mughal rule developed under Akbar, paralleled by the intertwined ascent of *rasik* aesthetics and Vaiṣṇava bhakti, religious communities found themselves in a new patronage milieu, and in works such as his *Dhyān-mañjarī*, *Kuṇḍaliyā*, *Prahlād-caritra*, and *Nām-pratāp*, Agradās took the lead in adapting and representing his own community in light of these developments, all the while promoting the saving power of bhakti and praising the great *bhakta*s.

Agradās's disciple Nābhādās, in accord with Agra's directives, continued this project. At the beginning of his widely influential hagiography, the *Bhaktamāl* (c. 1600), Nābhādās explains that it was Agradās who ordered him to compose his famous work in praise of the devotees of God. In the fourth *dohā*, he states, "Guru Agradev gave the order: 'Sing the glory of the

*bhakta*s. There is no other way to cross the ocean of existence.'"[26] Agradās himself composed several Brajbhāṣā works creatively retelling stories (all found in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*) about exemplary *bhakta*s—namely his *Nām-Pratāp*, *Prahlād-caritra*, and *Dhruv-carit*—in order to praise the power of Vaiṣṇava devotion. Nābhādās's *Bhaktamāl* appears to have been a work directly inspired by and dedicated to Agradās's conviction that divine favour, even liberation, can be attained by singing the praises of the great *bhakta*s, cherishing their memory, and following their model. Agradās's grand-disciple Anantadās (a disciple of Agra's disciple Vinod) also continued this literary project of praising the great *bhakta*s and popularizing the power of their devotion through compositions in Brajbhāṣā. While technically he was Agradās's "grand-disciple," Anantadās was a contemporary of Nābhādās and thus was likely not any more distant from Agra than was Nābhā. Anantadās composed a number of *parcāī*s—separate hagiographical works in praise of individual *bhakta*s, namely Nāmdev, Pīpā, Kabīr, Raidās, Trilochan, Sen, Dhanā, and Aṅgad—that constitute, along with Nābhā's *Bhaktamāl*, some of our earliest and most significant textual sources for understanding bhakti in early modern North India.

In their respective works, both Nābhādās and Anantadās boldly claimed five widely renowned Sants—Kabīr, Raidās, Sen, Dhanā, and Pīpā—as disciples of Rāmānand and thus members of their own *sampradāy*. Whether this assertion was justified, in publicly laying claim to these highly popular Sants, who were from different regions and castes (though generally from the lower classes), the Rāmānandīs raised themselves up as the preeminent representative of a bhakti transcending the boundaries of geography and social (caste) location. In the case of the *Bhaktamāl*, at the same time that Nābhādās claimed these heterodox, low-caste *bhakta*s, he also explicitly linked his community to one of the loftiest symbols of Vaiṣṇava orthodoxy, the south Indian brahmin *ācārya* Rāmānuja and his Śrī *sampradāy*.[27] By claiming themselves as one (arguably the most prestigious one) of the four great Vaiṣṇava sectarian communities, the *cār sampradāy*, Agradās and Nābhādās sought to give their socially inclusive Rāmānandī community, which consisted of many members from the poorest echelons of Indian society, an enhanced social status that would allow them to compete more effectively for both patronage and followers. In many respects, the Rāmānandīs had more in common with the *nirguṇ* followers of Nānak (the Sikhs) and Dādū (both of whom are left out of Nābhā's otherwise inclusive "garland of devotees") than they did with the other three members of "the *cār sampradāy*," the sectarian communities of Caitanya (the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas), Vallabha (the Puṣṭi Mārg), and Nimbārka. These three *saguṇ sampradāy*s were distinct from the Rāmānandīs but quite similar to each other, in that they all focused rather exclusively on worship of Kṛṣṇa, had clear brahmanical roots, and generally held a greater concern with caste practices and orthodox social/religious propriety.

In seeking to occupy a sort of middle ground among Mughal India's burgeoning sectarian bhakti communities (in terms of theology, social ideology, and literary output), the Rāmānandīs offer us an especially informative picture of Mughal India's religious marketplace and the spectrum of bhakti within it. Agradās and Nābhādās were faced with the challenge of appealing to both low-caste rural communities and the political and intellectual urban elite. They sought to maintain and assert their community's Sant (socially liberal and ascetically tinged) values even as they provided the Rāmānandīs with orthodox brahminical respectability and opportunities for elite patronage. In their literary works, these Rāmānandīs made a number of shrewd strategic moves as they laid claim to the most popular heterodox (*nirguṇ*) Sants (as disciples of Rāmānand), while simultaneously associating themselves with the burgeoning orthodox (*saguṇ*) Kṛṣṇaite communities of Braj who seemed increasingly to be the favourite beneficiaries of Mughal and Rajput patronage.

The Mughal bhakti public and its sensibility

In terms of bhakti's social demographics in Mughal India, the popular Kṛṣṇa-focused sectarian communities of Vallabha (Puṣṭi Mārg) and Caitanya (Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava) tended to have a more orthodox, brahmanical orientation appealing to urban aristocrats and merchant classes, whereas lower-caste (peasant, pastoralist, artisan) groups more often participated in *nirguṇ*-oriented *bhakti* communities (e.g., the Sikhs, Dādū-panth[28]) or less brahmanical, if still *saguṇ*-friendly, Vaiṣṇava sects (e.g., the Rāmānandīs).[29] This being said, one certainly did not need to be formally associated with an institutionalized sectarian bhakti community (whether *saguṇ* or *nirguṇ*) in order to be a part of the expanding bhakti public of early modern North India. At the popular level, it could just as easily mean unaffiliated participation in a spreading, trans-sectarian, colloquial Vaiṣṇava bhakti ethos, sensibility, and practice—most especially the singing and remembrance of the divine Name. Hawley argues that in late Sultanate and Mughal India, despite differences (even conflicts) of perspective within it (e.g., Kabīr versus Tulsīdās), there was a common, non-sectarian "vulgate Vaiṣṇavism" that was both broad and strong in its shared use—singing, recitation, and meditative remembrance—of specifically Vaiṣṇava names of God, such as Rām and Hari (Hawley 2016: 10, 14–15).[30] In addition to their faith in the divine Name, *bhakta*s of this era, regardless of their social (caste-class) and theological differences, also shared a general ethical, aesthetic, and emotional sensibility, one that resonated with Sufi values and perspectives while diverging from certain tantric religious attitudes and approaches.

Francoise Mallison has discussed how in late Sultanate India, to be a Vaiṣṇava often meant, first and foremost, to follow a certain code of ethics, namely compassion; humility; tolerance; control of passions; not lying, stealing, or committing adultery; and helping to relieve the suffering and misery of others (2000: 292). These basic ethical ideals are closely mirrored in the teachings of South Asian Sufis like the great thirteenth-fourteenth century Chishti sheikh Nizām al-Din Awliyā', as seen in the *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* (*Morals for the Heart*).[31] In addition to sharing core moral principles and striving to uphold analogous ethical virtues, the *bhaktas* and Sufis of early modern North India also valued the cultivation of similar emotions. Indeed, the experience of the Divine, in both Sufism and bhakti at this time, was closely linked to the experience of emotion, an emotion that could be evoked through participation in and aesthetic response to poetic verse, song, and music. In particular, Indian Sufis and *bhakta*s in Sultanate and Mughal India both celebrated the erotic sentiment and the emotion of love—a passionate love that "exceeds all bounds [and] draws the self outside of itself" (*'ishq/prema*) (Behl 2012b: 34). Both also gave special emphasis to impassioned human longing for the absent beloved (*viraha/firāq*) as a metaphor for—and a vehicle to the experience of—pure love for the Divine. A comparative study of early modern North Indian religious literature reveals that, in general, Sufis and *bhakta*s alike valorized humble, selfless love and emphasized passionate longing for an absent Beloved while criticizing hubris, envy, hatred, and greed. Moreover, they used similar aesthetic styles to express and evoke the emotions and ethical ideals they valued. As I have argued elsewhere, this was a shared devotional (ethical-emotional-aesthetic) sensibility positioned in pointed contradistinction to the tantric religious sensibility represented by Śāktas and, even more so, the ubiquitous early modern figure of the Nāth yogi (Burchett 2019).

Beginning in the late Sultanate period, we see the advent of an expansive bhakti public—a broad, imagined bhakti community—in North India united by similar aesthetic tastes, a common moral sense, and shared norms of emotional value and expression. Later, from the mid-sixteenth century, an array of more tightly bounded bhakti sects (*sampradāy*s and *panth*s)—from the Rāmānandīs, Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, Puṣṭi Mārgis (Vallabhites), and Nimbarkis to the Dādu Panth, Nirañjanis, and Sikhs—and their institutions also emerges. While these bhakti sectarian

communities differed from one another in specific doctrines and practices, expressed sometimes-contrasting social ideologies, and competed with each other for support, all looked outward toward the larger social sphere of early modern North India's bhakti public, a trans-sectarian community of belonging and participation limited only by the constraints of bhakti's circulation in performance and text. Through the movement of manuscripts, itinerant ascetics, and travelling singers and scholars, bhakti's metrical verses spread across North India, sung, recited, and heard in public settings in which they conveyed bhakti ideas and values and rendered them as a distinctive sensibility—as facts of the body, not just the mind[32]—while fostering a consciousness of belonging to a trans-local bhakti community. Sectarian devotional communities—patronized especially by rulers, wealthy land-owners, and merchants—provided institutional nodes crucial for the production and spread of bhakti teachings and manuscripts; yet bhakti songs and stories themselves (embodying and expressing the ethos and sensibility I speak of) circulated and were performed not only within these institutional settings but in the vast spaces between and all around them as well.

In summary, while higher castes and more politically and economically powerful classes were absolutely critical in the growth of Vaiṣṇava bhakti, it would be quite inaccurate to understand bhakti in White's terms, as the religion of the urban elite. It is true, as we have seen, that bhakti's success in North India did not come primarily as a grassroots movement of the common people. Rather, bhakti's rise depended upon Rajput and Mughal patronage, was enmeshed in courtly literary cultures, and often flourished in economies that encouraged commerce and urbanization while exploiting peasant agricultural labour. Nevertheless, we have also seen that the bhakti public of Mughal India was an expansive and inclusive one in which Indians from all social strata actively participated. It was undoubtedly both popular and elite, or perhaps, to use the language of Christian Novetzke, it was *quotidian*, "the space where elite and nonelite meet" (2016: 9). Quotidian as it was, the Mughal bhakti public should not be seen as some sort of triumph of Hinduism's normative religious mainstream. The emotional, aesthetic, and ethical sensibility that characterized the Mughal bhakti public was not something perennial that had been lying in wait to be released by the forces of vernacularization. This bhakti sensibility, like those found in earlier eras and in other regional cultures of India, was a distinctive product of historically specific forces and actors. Vaiṣṇava bhakti has endured from Mughal times as the predominant Hindu religious form in modern North India, but as the foregoing context-focused analysis would suggest, it would be all too naïve to assume that its specific early modern meanings and sensibilities have also endured.

Notes

1 See Hawley (2015: 328) and, for instance, eds., Gil Ben-Herut, Jon Keune, and Anne E. Monius, *Regional Communities of Devotion in South Asia: Insiders, Outsiders, and Interlopers* (2019); eds. John Stratton Hawley, Christian Lee Novetzke, and Swapna Sharma, *Bhakti and Power: Debating India's Religion of the Heart* (2019); Patton E. Burchett, *A Genealogy of Devotion: Bhakti, Tantra, Yoga, and Sufism in North India* (2019). Also see David Lorenzen (2004: 208) who, well prior to this spate of research, discussed the historical development of bhakti in terms of a plurality of bhakti movements, each associated with different regions, languages, social ideologies, and theologies, for example, Śaiva, Vaiṣṇava, Śākta, *nirguṇ*, and so on.

2 In another essay, White states that, in fact, "the Hindu 'mainstream' has always consisted of the worship of local and ancestral deities: devotion to the high gods of the *bhakti* tradition has historically been limited to an elite minority" (2006: 23).

3 From syllabus course description of David Gordon White's RS 206J Seminar in Indic Religious Studies, "Worship Without Devotion: History of South Asian Polytheism" (University of California-Santa Barbara, Department of Religious Studies, Spring 2018).

4 For the fully developed argument of this position (fleshing out much of what is all too briefly mentioned in this section), see Burchett 2019: 29–63.

5 Medieval kings primarily allied themselves with Saiddhāntika Śaiva tantric communities and institutions, which subsumed and preserved the Brahmanical social order; however, the broad shift of tantra (from esoteric, private contexts) into mainstream, public settings also involved elements of the heterodox non-Saiddhāntika tantric traditions, particularly in rituals conducted to assistant and protect the king and state against enemies and calamities; see Sanderson 2009.

6 The Śivadharma corpus, which has not yet been critically edited, consists of the Śivadharma, *Śivadharmottara*, *Śivadharmasaṃgraha*, *Umāmaheshvarasaṃvāda*, *Uttarottaramahāsaṃvāda*, *Śivopaniṣad*, *Vṛṣasārasaṃgraha*, *Dharmaputrikā*, and *Lalitavistara*. The first two texts (the *Śivadharma* and *Śivadharmottara*) of this corpus are broadly attested and were clearly composed against a Pāśupata (Śaiva Atimārga) background, but the full corpus is attested only in Nepal, with the later texts of the corpus reflecting the concerns of other (non-Pāśupata) communities. Florinda De Simini, personal email communication, 6/9/2018.

7 The "Delhi Sultanate" is typically understood to have lasted from 1206 to 1526 CE under the leadership of five major dynasties: the Mamluks (1210–90), the Khaljis (1290–1320), the Tughlaqs (1320–1414), the Sayyids (1414–51), and the Lodis (1451–1526). The periodization is somewhat misleading, however, in that the Sultanate was a centralized, trans-regional power only until the late fourteenth century, when—toward the end of Tughlaq rule—multiple remote areas began to break away and form independent sultanates, and some local Hindu Rajput dynasties in the north recovered power.

8 Cf. Finbarr Flood 2009: 5.

9 Emblematic of this process is the great Persianate Indian poet and musician Amīr Khusrau Dihlavī (1253–1325), patronized by both Khalji and Tughlaq sultans. Born of an Indian mother, he proudly modeled a distinctly Indic tradition of Persian poetry, was a disciple of the Chishti Shaikh Nizām al-Dīn Awliyā', and is famous for his influence on Indian musical traditions, credited with begetting the South Asian Sufi musical form of *qawwālī*.

10 As Samira Sheikh has argued—drawing on Simon Digby's important essay "Before Timur Came" (2004)—contrary to its common scholarly portrayal, Timur's invasion was more of a "tipping point" than a "transformative cataclysm." The decentralization, increased mobility, extension of trade routes, sprouting of new towns, and linguistic experimentation usually associated with the (post-Timur) fifteenth century was already well underway in the (pre-Timur) second half of the fourteenth century but were given a great deal of further impetus by the devastation (and population dispersal) caused in Delhi by Timur's invasion. Sheikh 2017: 35–36.

11 In fact, the Bahmani sultanate in the Deccan had declared independence from the Tughlaqs in 1349, beginning the fracturing and decline of the Tughlaq dynasty into multiple smaller regional sultanates.

12 Ramya Sreenivasan (2014: 243–247) has demonstrated that some of the earliest literary works in (local forms of) the North Indian vernacular of Hindavī—Dā'ūd's *Cāndāyan* (c. 1379), Nārāyaṇdās's *Chitāī-carita* (c. 1526), and Jāyasī's *Padmāvat* (c. 1540)—were patronized by and addressed specifically to the particular political concerns of rural gentry and local warlords in the hinterland. Also see Behl 2012a: 48.

13 Orsini (2014a: 407) quite rightly suggests that in understanding the use of language in Sultanate and Mughal India, we should not think "purely in terms of High and Low but rather in terms of a continuum, something that makes us more aware of the importance of recognizing registers both within High and Low: 'ornate Persian' versus 'simple Persian'; 'Persian-near' or 'Persian-far' and 'Sanskrit-near' versus 'Sanskrit-far' vernaculars."

14 See Ernst 1992: 166–167; Orsini 2014a: 409, 415.

15 Habib's basic argument has been disputed, and there is no doubt he considerably over-emphasized the centralization, uniformity, and pervasiveness of the "Mughal agrarian system" (see Alam and Subrahmanyam 1998: 12–16; Asher and Talbot 2006: 270–272), but a general conclusion that many (though not all) peasant populations were impoverished and disempowered by exploitative agrarian revenue policies is attested by the reports of European travelers to Mughal India and, in my view, seems sound. For a useful analysis, qualification, and complication of Habib's original argument (1963), attending to differences in types of peasantry (those in *khalisa* lands versus those in *jagir* lands) and types of villages (*zamindari* versus *raiyati* villages) and to the impact and extent of the monetization of the Mughal economy, yet confirming how the Mughal agrarian system (and its revenue demands) furthered urbanization and commerce while depriving many peasants of the vast majority of the agrarian surplus they produced, see Raychaudhuri 1998 [1965].

16 For a summary (and critique) of Habib's speculations on how the Sultanate-Mughal economic system affected the development of bhakti in North India, see Krishna Sharma 1987: 31–34.

17 The term "Rajput" is a status title/category to which a variety of local groups, of differing ethnicity but often with warrior backgrounds, assimilated themselves over time. While entry of clans into the Rajput status group seems to have been relatively open at first (circa eleventh–twelfth century), over time, genealogical purity was increasingly stressed, and by the seventeenth century, Rajputs had essentially become a caste. See Tambs-Lyche 1997: 86–87; Kolff 1990: 71–116.

18 As the work of Rachel McDermott (2001) on Bengali goddess traditions and Ann and Daniel Gold (1984) on the Nāths in Rajasthan attests, in some cases, tantric Śaivism and Śāktism were not supplanted or demoted and actually maintained a central place but often in modified, "devotionalized" forms reflecting the rise and influence of *bhakti* attitudes and approaches.

19 Rana argues: "Vaishnavism in the Braj country was primarily the religious universe of high-caste Hindus. It could even be termed an official religion, for it was closely aligned to the Mughal empire and the Amber state during the seventeenth century. Its patrons and practitioners lived off the surplus product of the peasants, who largely belonged to the lower castes. These peasants and the peers of their caste had their own views on religion" (131–132).

20 Following a Marxist line of interpretation seemingly originating with D.D. Kosambi, Guha says the *bhakti* mode of religion is "an ideology of subordination *par excellence*" that has been used throughout Indian history as a means to "spiritualiz[e] the efforts and frustrations experienced by the lower classes in the labor they provided to the elite" and thus make submission appear "appear self-induced, voluntary, and collaborative."

21 David Lorenzen has also written eloquently on this paradoxical bhakti sociology in which bhakti can support (especially in its *saguṇī* forms) or challenge/subvert (especially in its *nirguṇī* forms) traditional hierarchical *varṇāśramadharma* ideology. Lorenzen 1995b: 189–192. Relatedly, Krishna Sharma (1987: 29–34) shows how the Marxist historical approach to bhakti can be and has been used to present bhakti in completely contradictory fashions, as either "a corollary of the feudal order" (justifying servitude) or as "a revolt of the lower classes," depending on the orientation of the particular scholar. Tyler Williams (2019: 200) puts the matter this way, "The power of bhakti . . . lies not in its ability to produce liberation or submission but in its ability to *restructure* relationships of liberty and submission," sovereignty and submission (italics mine).

22 Cf. White 2003: 147–150. Also, see Tambs-Lyche 1997: 96–170.

23 Cf. Novetzke 2016: 97–101. Novetzke discusses Yadava patronage of the Vitthal temple in Pandharpur, Maharashtra (c. 1189–1317 CE) as an indication of the political state acknowledging the bhakti public as a political force and seeing the value in supporting the quotidian world of bhakti.

24 Rām-*rasik* bhakti seems to have first emerged in response to and in dialogue with the earlier *rasik* tradition of Kṛṣṇa devotion, which the Gauḍīya Vaishnava Gosvāmīs of Vrindavan developed in the first half of the sixteenth century. Agradās's best known composition is the *Dhyān-mañjarī*, a late-sixteenth-century Brajbhāṣā text that appears to be the earliest Rām-*rasik* meditation manual, a genre of texts offering detailed descriptions of Rām, Sītā, and the beautiful city of Saket with which the initiated Rām-*rasik* could conduct elaborate visualizations of the intimate life (characterized by the quality of *mādhurya*, or erotic sweetness) of Rām and Sītā, typically taking on the role of either a female companion (*sakhī*) or maidservant (*mañjarī*) of Sītā or a male companion (*sakhā*) of Rām in order to participate in their divine *līlā*.

25 Tyler Williams, personal email communication, November 24, 2011.

26 *Dohā* 4. *śrī guru agradev ājñā daī bhaktan kau jasu gāy/bhavsāgar ke taran kau nāhin ān upāy//4*

27 On the topic of why and how early modern North Indian bhakti communities (which had little to do with the south) claimed links to South Indian Vaishnavism, see Hawley 2015: 99–147.

28 In its first century of existence, the Dādū-panth comprised Hindus, Muslims, and castes ranging from brahman to artisan to Jāṭ (Horstmann 2017: 2).

29 Lorenzen (1995a: 21) has argued that North India's *nirguṇ* bhakti communities tended to originate among artisan and other lower-middle-class groups and then spread among peasants in the countryside and that their *nirguṇ* devotion should be seen as "an ideological and religious contestation to *saguṇ* bhakti (at the same time that it appropriates many of the latter's basic beliefs and practices)."

30 Hawley (2005: 285–300) first coined and elaborated the term "vulgate Vaiṣṇavism." The loose or "vulgate" Vaiṣṇavism of *nirguṇ* bhakti traditions is illustrated by (among other things) their regular use of the word "Vaishnava" as a synonym for *bhakta* and their active, fond remembering of the stories of ideal *bhakta*s (e.g., Dhruva, Prahlād), all drawn from Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas, especially the *Bhāgavatapurāṇā* (Lath 1999: 102–103).

31 See Lawrence 1992. The *Fawā'id al-Fu'ād* was composed by Nizām al-Din Awliyā's disciple, the poet Amīr Ḥasan Sijzī Dihlawī, and inaugurated the new genre of the *malfūzāt*, the recorded conversations and teachings of the Sufi master.

32 Cf. Lee 2015: 42–80.

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11

NĀTHA SAMPRADĀYA AND THE FORMATION OF HAṬHAYOGA PRACTICES IN INDIA[1]

Adrián Muñoz

Introduction

The term Nātha Sampradāya or Nāth Panth collectively designates a South Asian religious order of different "sorts" of ascetics usually associated with yoga. Although most of its adherents are renunciates, there are also householder castes associated with the Nāths. They are more present in the northern part of the Indian peninsula, but there are Nāth branches in other regions, too (Mallinson 2011b: 6–9). The most famous and influential temple nowadays is the Gorakhnāth Mandir, in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, now not only the Nāth headquarter but also home to Yogi Adityanath, both the *mahant* of the Gorakhnāth Mandir and Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. The followers of the *panth* are commonly known as Nāth Yogis, but in the extant literature and in folklore, they are sometimes also called *jogīs* (the vernacular for *yogī*), *siddhas* (that is, perfected beings), or *avadhūtas* (i.e. somebody who has rejected the bonds of secular life). Also, there are indigenous and academic texts that speak of "Nāth Siddhas", a rather ambiguous term.

In different sources and from different periods, the use of these and other appellations is not always consistent. The actual meaning and denotation of them seem to vary greatly as well. James Mallinson says that, from what he surmised, the term 'Nāth(a) Siddha' was not used in Nāth literature prior to the second half of the twentieth century (2014: 172, n.31). The amalgamation of the two terms may be the outcome of a loose combination in some scholarship of Northern Yogis with Tamil Siddhas or of a constant interaction of ascetics that went by one or the other name, without necessarily merging into one single tradition, or *sampradāya*. We do know that by the nineteenth century, the authoritative status of a symbolic idea of a group of Nine Nāths (not to mention that of the Eighty-Four Siddhas) was seemingly well established, since the motif was an important feature in some of the temples constructed by Man Singh of Mewar. It is possible that it was around the sixteenth century that a group of Śaiva ascetics began gradually to set themselves apart from other kindred groups and to use the term Yogī in a specific sense, differentiated from a generic sense.

The Nāths (as they are commonly referred to) are embedded in a tradition associated with the practice and mastery of yoga. The particular type of yoga linked to the Nāths is haṭhayoga, although in recent scholarship, this association has been put into question. Haṭhayoga did not only belong in a Nāth province but was intensely practiced by other ascetic groups. Be that as it may, the Nāth-yoga relationship has been an important item for the formation of a Nāth

identity, especially in recent times. Thus, an important part of the literature linked to the Nāth Yogis deals with yoga and sometimes with haṭhayoga specifically.

A very interesting feature of the Nātha Sampradāya is that its imagery and ideology rely on three literary corpuses, namely a) Sanskrit texts on yoga, b) a sundry literature in vernacular languages, and c) folk legends. Nāth tradition, in a sense, depends on a construal of these three sources. The actual attribution of Sanskrit texts on yoga to Nāth authors is difficult to ascertain, but the tradition has established such a link, so that symbolically, the yogic aspect has been strengthened. The vernacular literature mainly consists of religious dialogues and of poetry; the verse production dates approximately to the seventeenth century, is of the mystical and devotional kind, and shares aesthetic traits with the *bhakti* verses of the Nirguṇī poets of North India, who were especially active in the second millennium. The legends of Nāth reputed figures have been a powerful way to spread the influence, aura, and appeal of the Nāths, through the stories of paradigmatic personages, such as Gorakh, Matsyendra, Gopīcand, Cauraṅgi, and others. Ideally, there is a list of nine sanctified Nāth Yogis, a group that sometimes works on a par with the group of the Eight-Four Siddhas. Consequently, the Gorakhnāth Mandir press has profusely published books, pamphlets, and periodicals with both Sanskrit yogic literature and hagiographical compilations and, to a lesser degree, the vernacular poetry.

Traditionally, the Nāth Yogis conceived themselves as followers of the alleged founder of the *sampradāya* or *panth* (i.e. the order), Gorakhnāth (Sanskrit Gorakṣanātha), a renowned yogi who, some claim, may have lived sometime between the eleventh and twelfth centuries. He is seen as the ultimate and perfect yogi; sometimes also understood as a total or partial reincarnation of god Śiva. Also, the Nāths sometimes venerate Śiva in his terrible form, Bhairava, as well as Devī, the Goddess, understood as an all-powerful Energy, or Śakti.[2] According to tradition, Gorakh's guru was Matsyendranātha, the first human yogic guru, who heard the teachings, and received initiation, from Lord Śiva. Both Matsyendra and Gorakh had disciples of their own and therefore engendered a number of lineages; as already mentioned, the compilation of sacred stories of these yogis informs a vital part of Nāth folklore.

More general and detailed data regarding sectarian marks, idiosyncrasies of both wandering and resident yogis, and Nāth-related literature can be found in Bouillier 2018 and Mallinson 2011b, among other works. In this chapter, my general aim is to address issues of community formation and identity-shaping from a broad-spectrum viewpoint. I will revisit the topic of name markers and the production of lists of proverbial gurus and then later will also consider the Nāth understanding and revaluation of yoga.

Identifying Yogis and Siddhas

One could argue that the term "Nāth" may not be the more historically appropriate name for these yogis, given such denominational disruptions as found in the copious literary and epigraphic material. So what should we call them? Well, the very name they give themselves, of course. More than inquiring into the pertinence of calling them so or so, the question is: Why did they try or claim to be called that, and through which processes? As Véronique Bouillier (2017: 1–2) has put it, the Nāth Yogis have been the only ascetic group who "have referred to themselves as yogis, throughout their history and to claim the appellation as their identity marker".

The identity of the order of the Nāth Yogis has proved an intriguing topic, both because of its long history and because of the wide scope of religious and communal vicissitudes. Notably, the notion of nine legendary, authoritative Yogis has been a recurrent motif in Nāth hagiography and historiography. However, the list of the Nine Nāths is not stable or consistent; in fact,

there have been—and still are—different accounts of who these nine Yogi Masters are. These lists have received relatively little attention from scholars,[3] but a careful examination of them can shed some light on questions of Nāth genealogy, lineage, and identity. More important than bringing in every list—and accounting for every discrepancy between them—it is essential to try to figure out both the contexts and the reasons for agreement or disagreement between lists.

The genealogy of the Nāth Panth can best be analyzed alongside a related tradition featuring in a number of sources: that of the Siddhas. The overlap between Nāths and Siddhas is a recurrent phenomenon in the literature both directly and indirectly related to the Nāth Panth. The two terms get easily confused with the "*yogī*" in a wide range of contexts; all three of these appellations refer to characters that have pursued advanced stages in a *sādhanā*, and they are therefore capable of controlling natural forces, exercising magical and supernatural powers (*siddhi*), and imposing their will on other beings.

In many instances, the Siddhas and the Nāths are the same characters referred to by different appellations preferred by separate religious factions. In a wider sense, both terms just designate illustrious figures who have attained a high spiritual achievement, particularly through the practice of meditative and yogic techniques. In other cases, specific groups within the context of Indian alchemy apply the term "Siddha", whereas the term "Nāth" (Sanskrit *nātha*) usually refers to a haṭhayoga practitioner and follower of one of the many parties related to Gorakhnāth, the legendary leader of the Nāth Panth. Often, both terms are just synonyms of *yogī* in general. For example, in one of the various extant dialogues between the North Indian *sant* Kabīr and other characters, Kabīr calls Gorakh both a *jogī* and a *siddha* (Lorenzen and Thukral 2005: 169).[4] Similarly, Nānak is thought to have imparted a discourse to a group of Yogis, including Carpaṭ, who are also addressed to as *siddhas* (Nayar and Sandhu 2007).

Over time, countless lists of Siddhas and Nāths were elaborated, and the "perfected beings" named there often transcended the boundaries of any specific religious community, attesting to their great socioreligious importance in South Asia. In many of the songs attributed to Kabīr, for example, there is mention of characters such as Gorakh, Bharthari, and Gopīcand. Other important religious and philosophical authors, from Abhinavagupta to Jñāndev on to Gurū Nānak, have also referred to great Siddhas and Yogis in their works.[5] In this way—especially from the eleventh century onwards—*siddhas*, *nāthas*, *avadhūtas*, *rasa siddhas*, and *yogīs* gained special significance, a significance they had not known before (cf. Kapstein 2000: 52). The mystical Buddhists (also known as Siddhācāryas or Mahāsiddhas) flourished between the eighth and twelfth centuries (Bagchi 1982: 68). In some ways, even the contact with Islam and the Sufis contributed to the flourishing growth of all these related personages.[6] In the nineteenth century, the Rāj of Jodhpur, Mān Singh, ordered the construction of several temples dedicated to the Nine Nāths and the Eighty-Four Siddhas, in particular to Jālandhar and Gorakh (Gold 1996: 125).

Groups of nine and eighty-four: pseudo-canonical lists

Typically, in order for a religious lineage to achieve widespread success and influence in South Asia, it must possess each of these three elements (Gold 1987: 85): the figure of a charismatic guru (a *sant*, for example), the development of a tradition or line of spiritual descent (*paramparā*), and the formation of a sectarian institution (*panth*). Name-indexes are ways to establish or outline the *paramparā* on which a *panth* is rooted. What has remained a complex issue is the fact that lists of Nāths and Siddhas share names. I will first deal with various lists and sources from different times and places and then proceed to discuss possible typological imports. Later on, I will address issues of lineage and kinship so as to evaluate dynamics of community formation and identity.

Analyzing each and every list is a task beyond the scope of this chapter, but by construing some of the motifs in them, we can still arrive at some significant conclusions. Those readers interested in the details of the specific names in these lists, and the differences and similarities between lists, can consult the more exhaustive discussion in White (2004: 78–101). Before analyzing some lists of Nine Nāths, I would first like to ponder lists of Eighty-Four Siddhas.

The list of the Eighty-Four Siddhas usually belongs to the Vajrayāna Buddhist tradition, but it is significant because it includes the names of prominent Nāth Yogis, that is, alleged Śaiva ascetics. The relevance and imagery of Siddhas and Nāths becomes more evident when considering that both terminologies (*nātha, mahāsiddha*) are used indiscriminately in a single text. Such is the case of the *Gorakṣasiddhāntasaṃgraha*, a composite work made up of patches from various previous compositions. When this text addresses the issue of the important role of the guru on the path of yoga, it mentions "*mahāsiddhas*", even if apparently this noun does not connote the reputed Buddhist teachers (1979: 124, 132, 134, passim). Indeed, "The popularity of the *siddhas* transcended sectarian boundaries" (Mallinson 2011b: 3), making the tag "*siddha*" a sort of common label for "perfected" practitioners, whether human or semidivine. A similar example is featured in a dialogue attributed to the Kabīr Panth; there Kabīr explains to Gorakh that the ultimate spiritual state—that is, Alakh Nirañjan—lies beyond orthodox philosophical schools, the individual, the ascetic, and even the "Eighty-Four Nāths" (Lorenzen and Thukral 2005: 170). This indicates that the terminology and the genealogy of both traditions constantly intersect; no doubt this is indicative of a shared common parlance, if not of origin and context. It is rather difficult to ascertain which list (the Eighty-Four Siddhas or the Nine Nāths) was first or whether they originated simultaneously. What seems fairly likely is that the two lists have influenced each other at different times.

In the circa 1500 CE *Haṭhapradīpikā* (HP) by Svātmārāma (1975) there is mention of about 30 prominent gurus who have taught the principles of haṭhayoga; these are: Ādinātha (=Śiva), Matsyendra, Śābara, Ānadabhairava, Cauraṅgī, Mīna, Gorakṣa, Virūpākṣa, Bileśaya, Manthāna, Bhairava, Siddhi, Buddha, Kanthaḍi, Koraṇṭaka, Surānanda, Siddhapāda, Carpaṭī, Kānerī, Pūjyapāda, Nityanātha, Nirañjana, Kapālin, Bindunātha, Kākacaṇḍīśvara, Allāma, Prabhudeva, Ghoḍācolin, Tiṇṭiṇi, Bhānukin, Nāradeva, and Khaṇḍa Kāpālika (HP 1.4–9). Further on in HP 1.18, the text reveres Matsyendra and Vasiṣṭha. Despite the inclusion of the names of the god Śiva and the Hindu savant Vasiṣṭha, this appears to be a list that responds more to a Buddhist background than a Śaiva one. If the HP were a work on some form of Śaiva yoga, it would certainly be odd that it does not mention important names for the Nāth tradition, such as Gopīcand or Bharthari, who habitually feature in renderings of the Nine Nāthas lists. Buddha, on the contrary, does appear in the HP's list, as also do Virūpākṣa (o Virūpa), Cauraṅgī, Śābara (Śāvarīpa), Carpaṭī (Cabaripa), and Kapālin (Kapālapa), some of which almost surely stem from a Vajrayāna background. Even though the Buddha is not mentioned in the list of Eighty-Four Siddhas cited before, it is quite reasonable to believe that the Buddha alluded to by the HP is Siddhārtha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism; after all, overlapping between Nāths and Siddhas is highly recurrent.[7] Moreover and not unlike the list of Mahāsiddhas, in the HP, Matsyendra and Mīna designate independent figures, whereas they typically refer to the same person in most Śaiva-yoga lists.

The Nāth Panth has also elaborated its own lists of eighty-four legendary figures. In a prayer to the Eighty-Four Siddhas included in the *Śrī Nāth rahasya* (a contemporary publication of the Nāth centre at Haridwar), there is an interesting list of names (*Nāth rahasya* 2003: 305–307). It is worth noting that this list seems to be an elaboration from, or based on, the model that inspired both the HP and the Vajrayāna list. Some of the names in the list quoted previously appear only in the HP or in the Tibetan lineage, and just a few appear in both: Mīna, Śābara,

Kānipā, Virūpakṣa, Carpaṭa, and maybe Ṭiṇṭinī, and Kākacaṇḍī. The cases of Jñāneśvar, Nivṛtti, Mārkaṇḍeya, and Yājñavalkya are intriguing because they usually do not feature in traditional accounts of either the Nāths or the Siddhas, at least in the north of the subcontinent. Surely their inclusion in this list tries to seek credibility and legitimacy by including real and authoritative figures while at the same time trying to account for a symbolical significance by filling out an emblematic number (eighty-four). Some of the remaining names will feature in lists of the Nine Nāths or later hagiographies: Jvālendra, Gahinī, Dharma, Ratan, Mānika, Masta, and so on. The variety of names in this list seems to indicate that it is not merely a sectarian inventory, for there are names with clear Hindu undertones (Mārkaṇḍeya, Prakāśa, Brahmāī) along with Buddhist (Nāgārjuna, Buddha) and even Muslim ones (Mallīk, Garīb, Allama), independently of each one's historicity. For this reason, this list is quite significant; it somehow reflects what could have been an "evolution" in part of the history of the sect. The Nāth Panth amounts to a tradition formerly nourished by the combination of both Hindu (mainly Śaiva) and Buddhist elements and referents, which eventually also experienced an interplay with Muslim ascetics, particularly the Sufis.

As already stated, whereas Vajrayāna Buddhism has elaborated a list of Eighty-Four Siddhas, Nāth genealogy usually offers a list of nine legendary Nāthas. The Nine Nāths list—like its Tibetan counterpart—is just as irregular; names can vary greatly from one source to another. They are also frequently referred to just collectively (*navanātha*), without any separate specification of single names, and with praises addressed to them.[8] We can learn much by comparing a few of these lists. There is a vernacular "Praise to the Nine Nāths" (*Navnāth vandanā*), published in Rajasthan along other praises and verses from the Nāth Yogis. The sagas and reputation of the Nāths are particularly famous in this Indian state, and consequently the number of publications on the Nāth Sampradāya is considerable. In this praise, after saluting Śiva and the Eighty-Four [siddhas], the following names are given:

> *oṃ namo navnāth gaṇ caurāsī gomeś /ādināth ādi puruṣ śiv gorakh ādeś //*
>   *śiv gorakh ādeś machandar jvālā karuṇī nāg /gahanī carpaṭā revaṇ vando gopī bhartharī jāg //*
> *navdurgā navnāth meṅ racyo bandhyo jag vyom/siddhanāth kī vandanā so 'ham sākhī om //*
>   (*Nāth vāṇī prakāś*: 15)

In this list, we find names that usually appear in most cycles of Yogi legends. The first one to be revered, however, is Gorakh and not his teacher Matsyendra (Machandar; also Macchendra), as it should be according to custom. Presumably, this is due to the fact that it is Gorakh who is the mainstay of the *panth* and not Matsyendra who, as legend has it, once yielded to the webs of temptation and had to be "rescued" by Gorakh from a kingdom of women. The rescue story itself may be an ingenious, literary comment on ideology discrepancy between competing Yogi sects (cf. Muñoz 2011). For his part, Briggs (2001: 136–137) gives two supposedly famous lists; unfortunately, he fails to mention his source. We can hardly confer legitimacy to the second list both because of its divine associations and because of the lack of frequency of some of the names therein. Moreover, Briggs' transcription is dubious and of little help. These and other lists differ to a great extent on the names enlisted as well as on the place given to each of them.

A related and interesting list is submitted in Rāghavadās' *Bhaktamāl* (written ca. 1720) and commented on by Nārāyaṇadās in the second half of the twentieth century). The list comprises verses 57 and 307 of Rāghavadās' text. Santnāth, number 4, does not feature in other lists, but the rest do. The issue gets all the more complicated, for the same text offers more lists, one of Nine Nāths and another of Eight Siddhas (Rāghavadās 1969: 444).

What is of interest here is not so much how and whence all the lists developed (and much less on questions of validity) but rather to ponder the nuances that various developments convey. It may be that these sundry nuances can reveal different mechanisms in efforts of community formation, regardless of whether such formations succeeded. They also partake of common idioms in South Asian religiosities throughout geography and time, idioms which provide constant material for shaping and redefining religious communities.

More than giving an exhaustive account of all available lists of Nāths and Siddhas, my aim has been to ponder the changing nature of these lists, which suggests that there was no actual institutional guideline for the shaping of a "canonical", definite list of gurus. This also attests to the great juxtaposition of kindred yet distinct religious traditions in South Asia. The most important lists are of course those of the Eighty-Four Siddhas and the Nine Nāths, but there is also a list of the Four Yuga Nāthas. The first two lists complement each other, whereas the third is to some extent independent and probably older. The Four Yuga Nāthas list is useful in trying to balance the motivations behind the other two lists.

After revising different lists of Siddhas and Nāthas—both internal and external to the Nāth Sampradāya, as well as both "traditional" and "extra-traditional"—we can safely state that the most recurrent names are Ādinātha, Matsyendra, Gorakṣa, Jālandhar, Cauraṅgī, Nāgārjuna, Carpaṭa, Gahiṇī, Śābara, Kṛṣṇapāda (under various name forms), Gopīcand, and Bharthari. Most of the remaining names seem to refer to abstract concepts or metaphorical categories and not to real people. Authors like N. Upādhyāy have tried to identify with great punctiliousness all recurrent names and have concluded that there are thirty-eight names common to the Buddhist Siddhas and the Nāth Yogis (Upādhyāy 1991: 18). In one of his songs, Sundardās mentions six Nāths: Gorakh, Bharthaṛī, Gopīcand, Carpaṭ, Kāṇerī, and Cauraṅgī (Lorenzen 1996b: 162). It is worth noticing that the song does not mention Matsyendra and that Jālandhar/Hāḍipā gives way to Carpaṭ. However, in all cases, they play leading roles in many important legends.

After analysing different lists from Bengal, Maharashtra, Pañjab, and Andhra Pradesh, David White (2004: 93–96) concludes that the consolidation of the Nāth Panth, as a religious movement or order proper, may have taken place between the twelfth and the thirteenth century. More recently, Mallinson has opined otherwise, however, as hinted previously. This should not necessarily imply that personalities like Matsyendra or Gorakh could not have lived earlier but that some time had to pass before the followers of the doctrines fostered by these two characters were fully aware that they constituted an autonomous *panth* and consequently felt the need to consecrate a spiritual lineage of their own. What I have discussed allows pondering the possibility that these various name-lists have been a paradigmatic reformulation or, in other words, an attempt to systematize archetypal symbols embodied in notorious personages, whether real or no. This also suggests that enough time should have elapsed to generate many alternate lists of teachers, even if Matsyendra and Gorakṣa continued to hold a privileged place in most lists. It is quite possible that this moment coincides with a growing need to shape a literary corpus, and perhaps texts such as the late *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* (in Mallik 1954: 1) and the *Gorakṣasiddhāntasaṃgraha* belong to this phase.

Judging by the divergences among the various available lists, neither the names nor the figures seem to have a reliable historical basis: the names vary a great deal from one list to the other, many names and/or epithets of the same personality are repeated, etc. Likewise, the apparent confusion may well indicate that the two traditions of Buddhist Siddhācāryas and Nāth Yogis share a common, theoretical tantric milieu, which can be verified in their practice and terminology. Dasgupta (1995: 204) suggests that we at least can declare that these Siddhas may have flourished around the tenth to twelfth centuries and that it was probably due to their popularity that some Nāth Yogis were eventually incorporated in the lists of Siddhas. From Dasgupta's

theory, we can conclude that in the beginning the differences between Siddhas and Nāthas would have been more or less clear; kindred as they were, they would have belonged to distinct religious affiliations. Nevertheless, I do not think this is liable to be proved. As a matter of fact, it is likelier that they were but alternative appellations to designate a cluster of people engaging in a set of similar Yogic practices (and eventually also tantric and alchemical). The same should apply to terms such as *yogī* and *avadhūta*. The Nāth *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*, for instance, devotes a huge part of the last chapter to elucidate the meaning and features of an Avadhūta.

It should be convenient to consider whether the processes involved in defining the four *vaiṣṇava cār sampradāy* tradition (the lineages of Rāmānuja, Nimbārka, Madhva, and Viṣṇusvāmī) somehow influenced the Yogis' own routes for outlining a tradition both determined and defined by a symbolical, prototypical number of founding gurus or whether it was the other way around. In the case of the four *sampradāys*, the process took place especially between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and particularly among Nirguṇī circles (cf. Hawley 2012: 30–31). Especially if we take into account the thesis propounded by Mallinson and others that the Nāth Panth—as a fixed, institutionalized order—was shaped at a rather late date (around the eighteenth century), then it could be possible that some sort of feedback took place.

Speaking of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' *sants* in relationship to the idea of tradition, Daniel Gold noted "they often managed to deal creatively with their religio-historical situations. Tracing long lineages of gurus and disciples, they demonstrate the ways in which bonds of coherence exist among idiosyncratic holy men" (Gold 1987: 5–6). This is a fitting scheme for the Nāths, even though more work needs to be undertaken. Various symbolic or esoteric references of the tradition are codified in different manners; at some point, many symbols may conjoint to produce a particular element, in this case a lineage or line of transmission with a variable number of members. As Gold writes:

> The patterns of esoteric usage within a lineage, however, in transmitting specific experiences of subtle reality through time, can appear as a lineage's "genetic" code . . . this attitude can be combined with the perception of the lineage originator as a singular personality.
>
> (Gold 1987: 147)

The will to create lists of notorious or authoritative figures for a religious tradition is a common practice in different religious movements in South Asia and will be determined more by symbolic imports than by historical demands. To a great extent, this is a practice quite close to that of homiletic etymologies, but in this case, the goal is also to re-signify a particular personality so that it can acquire a specific symbolic import for its tradition. In other words: "A tradition such as Shivaite tantra presents a configuration in which all three major foci are important: a living guru, embodying the personality of Shiva, is embedded in a greater Hindu heritage" (Gold 1987: 8). True, the Nāth Panth is not a Śaiva tantric school, but it works in similar ways. Gorakh, the "living" guru, became a manifestation of Śiva, and both ascetic and yogic feats embed him in Hindu folklore. (Similarly, for example, for the Rāmānandī order, Rāmānand is commonly considered an avatar of Rām or Viṣṇu.)

Transmission and lineage: genealogy of an order

The creation of name indexes seems to be a fairly recurrent phenomenon within the religious movements akin to both the tantric and the *sant* traditions. Yet the differences between sects (*panth*), genealogies or lineages (*paramparā*), and schools or traditions (*sampradāya*) are frequently

somewhat difficult to draw in a satisfactory way. According to a typology suggested by Nelson Graburn, a lineage could be understood as a descendant group originated from a known ancestor and clan as a descendant group from a shared mythical ancestor (in Gold 1987: 18). David White opines that the Nāths's and Siddhas' lists reveal a sort of clan lineage transmission of doctrines (White 2004: 78), somehow melding the two concepts discussed by Gold. In the case of the Nāths, this classification does not readily solve the difficulties, for both phenomena seem to occur simultaneously; the line of transmission really goes back to two characters at the same time: Matsyendra and Gorakh. Above them, there is only Ādinātha, the Divine Guru. Even though Matsyendra is in principle the founder of the lineage, it is rather Gorakh who, for all practical purposes, established the order or sect. Besides, the historicity of both figures has not yet been proved satisfactorily, and it is likely that Matsyendra was no real person at all. However, there are a fair number of accounts so as to think that a real Gorakh may have existed sometime. Thus, the sect of the Nāth Yogis could best be understood *as a clan* of sorts from Matsyendra as well *as a tradition* from Gorakh.

As we can see, the agenda of shaping a lineage, as it turns out, does not follow clear guidelines. Nāth texts such as the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati* (SSP) call the Nāth tradition the "doctrine or path of the Siddhas" (*siddhamata*; SSP 1.3), which indicates a lack of specific sectarian motivations toward the figures of the Siddhas. The term *siddha* vaguely designates some type of skilled ascetic, with no particular religious affiliation. Similarly, it is claimed that there is no higher path than *yogamārga*, thus equating it with the *siddhamata* (SSP 5.21). The members of the spiritual genealogy of the *panth* are yogis and Nāths and Siddhas and even Avadhūtas, as the SSP declares in its sixth chapter. They are called by many names, but at the same time, some of these designations are not exclusive to the Nāth Panth. The Dattātreya-related *Avadhūtagītā* seems to offer a soteriological apparatus closer to Advaita Vedānta than to the Siddhamārga; the text itself states that yoga alone cannot bring about the purification of the self (*Avadhūtagītā* 1998: 1.48).

In this sense, *siddhamata* and *yogamārga* (the "path of yoga") as well as other designations are synonymous within the Nātha Sampradāya, at least in some circles. The *Yogabīja* (1982), for example, gives three different appellations for the tradition: *nāthamārgamata* ("the doctrine of the path of the nāthas", YB 7, 189), *siddhamārga* ("the path of the siddhas", YB 8), and *yogamārga* ("the path of yoga", YB 82, 87, 180).[9] Some scholars would argue that the appellation "Nātha" in this text most likely refers to Śiva, conceived as the primeval guru. Yet taking into account that various lists of Nine (or other numbers of) legendary yogis called "Nāthas" predate the *Yogabīja*, I am inclined to believe that *nātha* here can very well stand for *yogī*. *Siddha* and *nātha* (both intent on the path of haṭhayoga) are synonymous in this text's tradition. Now, this association with yoga has been problematic and problematized.

In a poem attributed to Gorakh (Lorenzen 2011: 37–38), the famous Yogi somewhat unexpectedly and strangely criticizes various religious groups and praises the *avadhūta*; at some point, the poem reads:

> O pandit, there are no debates among the devotees.
>> He who does not speak is a [true] avadhuta. . . .
>> The nine Naths and the 84 Siddhas became Asanadharis. Those of Yoga did not get
> to the other shore. Wandering in the forests they died.
>
> <div align="right">(Gorakhbānī, pad 38.7)</div>

This may not be a Nāth poem but belong to a different, probably Nirguṇī, fore. For our present purpose, it is important to acknowledge that the Eighty-Four Siddhas and the Nine Nāths belong together. Especially significant is that they share the practice of yogic postures (*āsana*).

However, *siddhas* and Yogis, they are all lumped together, but only as abstract clusters, not as definite groups of more or less tangible personages.

In still older poetry, there are mentions of specific names of Yogis and Siddhas, but that is not sufficient to reach any conclusive statements. Gorakṣa, Cauraṅgi, Nāgarjuna, Carpaṭa, Kanthali, Kapāla, Nāgabodhi, and Vyāli are not mentioned or included in either the ca. twelfth-century *Caryāpadas* or the *Sādhanamāla* (White 2004: 81). On the other hand, the eighteenth-century *Gorakṣasiddhāntasaṃgraha* (1979, and Kaviraj, 40) gives the following account: Ādinātha, Matsyendranātha, Udayanātha, Daṇḍanātha, Satyanātha, Santoṣanātha, Kūrmanātha, Bhavanārji, Gorakṣanātha; they constitute the divine succession (*īśvarasantānaḥ*). Is this to mean a tradition, or a genealogy?

There are more than 400 years between the *Caryāpadas* and the *Gorakṣasiddhāntasaṃgraha*. David White (2004: 78) indicates that the various lists of both Nāths and Siddhas proliferated between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. Yet it is somewhat intriguing that in all this time, no consensus was reached as to what would be the actual members of such lists. Since the *Gorakṣasiddhāntasaṃgraha* is a late work that presents us with a more or less institutionalized outline of the order, it would be worth studying in greater detail. It can help us understand not only how the Yogis tried to sketch the Nāths' and Siddhas' lists but also what type of sources they resorted to in doing so. Among the texts quoted by the GSS when alluding to both the Nine Nāths and the Eighty-Four Siddhas, we can find the *Ṣoḍaśanityātantra*, a portion of the *Padmapurāṇa*, the *Mahāṃavatantra*, and the *Paramahaṃsopaniṣad*. These sources obviously give different accounts, but they may shed some light on particular ideological inclinations from the GSS's redactors.

It is quite likely that at some point the two traditions (Nāths and Siddhas) were akin and therefore mistakable. Probably there were spiritual teachers that accepted disciples indiscriminately; once the latter finished their training, they might (re)incorporate to their respective school (Buddhist, Śaiva, etc.) while at the same time remembering and paying due homage to their guru's name. Thus both the Nāth Yogis and the Siddhācāryas share a common origin. In the seventh chapter of Kaviśekharācārya's *Vaṃaratnākara* (ca. 1300 CE), written in Maithili, there is a list of gurus with names that feature in both Tibetan sources and the Sanskrit *Haṭhapradīpikā*. The most frequent and recurrent names are those of Matsyendra, Gorakṣa, Cauraṅgī, Jāladharnāth, Kṛṣṇapāda (or Kānha-pā et al.), Bharthari, and Gopīcand.

The influence of the Nine Nāthas is unquestionable; it has endured well beyond the Nāth Sampradāya. Rigopoulos cites the case of a tradition called the Navanātha Sampradāya: a tradition or lineage of the nine Nāths that supposedly reaches to our times. Despite its originally being related to the haṭhayogis, this *sampradāya* would rather be associated with the cult of Dattātreya (Rigopoulos 1998: 252–253). In fact, it is Dattātreya who possesses the highest seat in this genealogy, while other sources do not even mention Dattātreya as a member of this group. Another unusual name included by the Navanātha Sampradāya is Revaṇanātha, seventh in the list.[10] He is said to have founded a Nāth subsect.

This tradition owes a great deal to the Vārkarīs, founded by Jñāndev in the Marathi region. The *Yogīsampradāyāviṣkṛti* declares that Dattātreya gave birth to the lineage of the nine Nāthas (Rigopoulos 1998: 99). We ought to bear in mind that it was greatly due to the Vārkarīs that Vaiṣṇava elements were introduced into the Nāth Panth, especially through the development of the Nine Nārāyaṇas tradition discussed previously. Jñāndev belongs into the thirteenth century, and thus his rendering of the Nāth genealogy is not necessarily historically reliable. The allocation of the origins of the Nāth lineage to Dattātreya likewise surely corresponds to a later time from the emergence of the tradition and the list of the nine legendary Nāthas. At any rate, this stresses the deep influence of the figure of the nine Nāth gurus throughout time.

In such a context and with so many changing facts, there are problematic issues to consider: Is a *paramparā* somehow determined by a geography-based line of transmission? What other likely features or factors were determinant for this process? If a line of transmission was sketched, where does it stop? This is matter for future research.

A special starting point is to consider a possibility: the Nāths must have tried to "canonize" the order at some point at which at least some among them felt the need to seek stable patronage. In other words: without a "doctrine" or institutionalization, there can be no sponsorship. That is to say they were formerly non-unified ascetics and later became more "organized" and settled. This may have produced tensions among different circles of yogis. For the Nāths, at least in more recent times, institutionalization has gone hand in hand with sponsorship of particular temples and monasteries; I will come back to this later. Suffice it to say that changes in ideology, dynamics, or organization usually depend of the significant location of specific *maths*. As Daniela Bevilacqua pointed out to me, "Different places have different histories and development that affect the lineage and the religious approach of ascetics".[11]

James Mallinson (2011b: 411) has suggested that the term "*nāth*" did not refer to a well-defined order before the eighteenth century. Whereas groups of semi-divine Nāths were extant in the tenth century, they were not linked to any historical Nāth Yogi *samprādaya*. This may well be the case, and it does impinge on issues of community formation. Yet, the recurrence of name-indexes seems to suggest that there already was a notion—however vague—of a community of Yogis brought under the spiritual authority of legendary gurus. Evidently, there was a cohesive item that helped frame the Yogis' identity as *nāths*. And, of course, there were already Tantric *paramparās* and other *panths* around. The Nāth Yogis would definitely have tried to establish a similar solid lineage and sect. It is obvious that they were successful; otherwise, the *sant* poets would not have attacked them so vehemently and frequently from the fifteenth through the seventeenth century.

The need to fashion a collection of saints seems to have changed in the course of time and probably also across geography. This ambiguity is due to a great extent to the fact that the Nāth Panth responds to tantric methodologies—of which they are heirs—and to practical motivations, that is, consolidation both in the spiritual and the social spheres. In other words: the Nāths do not reconstruct their lineage by merely copying tantric models but enact major dissentions. This is why the name-lists lack real coherence: the Yogis are not simply inheriting older models without questioning them but contesting them, because in doing so, they are defining and telling themselves apart from other lineages.

In general, the tantric schools do not tend to divinize their gurus, although the guru is deemed the receptacle of divine knowledge and therefore sometimes even more influential for the *sādhaka* than the deity itself. Whereas devotion toward the master or teacher is a prerequisite of spiritual practice, in most tantric sects, the guru is worthy of reverence because he can substitute the divine persona for practical purposes. At the same time, these sects are usually indifferent toward tracing a real, historical founder.

Therefore, the historicity of tantric lineages easily gets lost in time, as though it were a line that reaches back into eternity, as Daniel Gold put it (1987: 196). For the Nāths, Gorakh plays a more significant role than most tantric gurus. Whereas Abhinavagupta may be venerated, he is seldom worshipped in the manner that Gorakh definitely is (usually, more than intense veneration, what is to be found is sacralization, as we can see from the various pictorial representations in temples and ashrams). If Gorakh is an important figure, it is not so only because he is said to have founded a new religious order and preached a new path or because he was the retainer of sacred knowledge but because the tradition eventually conceived of him as a manifestation of Lord Śiva.

In more than one sense, the Nāth lineage partakes of the same characteristic phases that Daniel Gold (1987: 85) has identified in Sant lineages, each of which displays a growing tendency of the guru's authority: a) the lineage begins with a solitary and independent figure that engenders no followers (corresponds to the *sant*); b) the lineage continues through renowned figures who remember the former gurus (corresponds to *paramparā*); and c) the lineage becomes a sectarian institution with a *mahant* or abbot presiding over a centre, temple, or monastery (corresponds to *panth*). Although the Nāth Panth does not follow this process verbatim, it somehow entails the three phases. For the Nāth Yogis, the figure of Matsyendra remains like a solitary figure of sorts, almost alienated from the order, with Gorakh as his best disciple (although not necessarily the only one). From Gorakh and his followers onwards, the transmission line (*paramparā*) becomes stronger albeit only apparently because the lack of consistence between lists betrays any consensus. Gradually the ambiguous links that connect them with Buddhist and Kaulas tend to be forgotten or reduced; the order gains growth and power; temples and monasteries are built so as to expand their presence, and the sect finally becomes an autonomous *panth*, differentiated from Mahāsiddhas and Yogis in a general sense and a distinctive *sampradāya*, although with a vague *paramparā* or genealogy. Curiously, these yogis as a *panth* tried to become autonomous, while as a *paramparā* they still reached back to the figure of the almighty *siddhas*.

Even though the historicity of the Nāth Panth is far from solid, here we can find a similitude with the later Nirguṇī movements. In a general sense, the Vedic, Brahmanical, and Tantric religions do not give authority to historical precedence, whereas the Nirguṇīs, more than the Saguṇīs, tend to trace their genealogy in a more reliable manner (Lorenzen 1996a: 18, 181). So one is tempted to allege that the religious movements regarded as "heterodox", and more or less akin to Hinduism, may partake of a historical conscience in a deeper sense than their "orthodox" counterparts. In the end, the more orthodox schools hold sacred authority as emanating from the non-human, eternal being; it therefore lies beyond any historical foundation that would be transitory and could then contradict the ideal of *sanātana dharma*, the "eternal religion", a very cherished notion in contemporary Hinduism.[12]

There is little than can be said with accuracy about the lists, except that there is a recurrence of some names, more or less identifiable in South Asian religious history, and that there has been an overlapping of different traditions. The number of figures included in each list indicates that these are no historical accounts but symbolical records. The numbers nine and eighty-four have a symbolical relevance quite prominent in South Asia—both transport people or objects from earthly planes to sacred forums. In other words, the Nāths that make up these lists are considered more than mere human figures that attained spiritual success; in time, they became sacred personalities, even semi-divine. The Nāths are thus also counted among the guardian spirits of the Himalayan range (Briggs 2001: 137).

Haṭha and Nāth yoga

Our general understanding of yoga can be divided into two main approaches: a scholarly approach and a practitioner approach. In some cases, they may coincide, although a distinction can also be made between South Asian "traditional" practitioners and contemporary non-renouncer (usually urban) practitioners. The scholarly approach depends on textual sources, primarily written in the Sanskrit language, but also on documents in the vernaculars from about the eighteenth century onward. By judging from these sources, haṭhayoga appears as something somewhat different from what contemporary practitioners put into practice in yoga studios around the globe. Contemporary haṭhayoga, as opposed to "textual" haṭhayoga, lays much more stress on bodily postures (*āsana*). In pre-modern written sources, the main motif of haṭhayoga

seems to have been breath control (*prāṇāyama*), the perfection of which can be attained through various techniques (*mudrā, bandha*).

The association of the Nāth Yogis with haṭhayoga depends on a Nāth attribution to various texts on yoga, usually in Sanskrit. It is not possible to ascertain that these texts were in fact produced by "Nāthas". However, many of them have been continuously published by Nāth monasteries and presses, and this editorial effort has helped boost the link. Some of the relevant titles haven already been cited previously. Among the most notable texts are the *Gorakṣaśataka*, the *Vivekamartaṇḍa*, the *Amaraughaprabodha*, the *Yogabīja*, the *Amanaskayoga*, the *Gorakṣasiddhāntasaṃgraha*, and the *Siddhasiddhāntapaddhati*; most of these compositions have been ascribed to Gorakh or other legendary Nāth Yogis. There are other texts on haṭhayoga that, although related, have not been attributed to the Nāths (*Haṭhapradīpikā, Gheraṇḍasaṃhitā, Śivasaṃhitā*); other works, though credited to Matsyendra, do not directly deal with haṭhayoga or the *panth* (*Kaulajñānaniṃaya*, for example). A collection of late Sanskrit texts on yoga, known as the Yoga Upaniṣads, very likely have a great deal of influence of haṭhayoga, although the exact quantity of a possible Nāth influence is yet to be surveyed (cf. Muñoz 2016: 215). Moreover, a problematic thing to be taken into account is the fact that many texts generally conceived in relation to early haṭhayoga do not really define their system as "haṭha" (Birch 2011: 529).

As for the ascetic practitioners' approach, there is an interesting gap between textual understanding and these yogis' understanding. As shown by a recent ethnographic study, to ascetics from different denominations (Nāgas, Rāmānandīs, Nāth Yogis), haṭhayoga may or may not always mean the same thing. For many ascetics, haṭhayoga is almost equal to austerities in general (*tapas*) and not necessarily a separate yoga system (Bevilacqua 2017: 188–191). Most scholars understand haṭhayoga as a "forceful yoga" (Birch 2011: 531–532, 537–538) due to its hard practices, but there is also another widespread meaning that explains this yoga in a symbolical manner. *Haṭha* is the sum of the syllables HA and ṬHA, which in turn denote the sun and the moon, that is, subtle channels within the yogic body. Thus, haṭhayoga would mean the union of the two main breaths, which seems to be in accord with some pre-modern sources that lay stress on breath control. However, in a recent ethnographic study, just three out of eighty respondents referred to this symbolic, esoteric explanation of haṭhayoga (Bevilacqua 2017: 81–82). Clearly, the idea that there is a harmonized continuity of haṭhayoga and its transmission is put into question.

In general, haṭhayoga imagery depends on an intense work with and on an energetic, subtle physiology. The yogic body is widely conceived as a complex of subtle nerves (*cakras*), knots (*granthis*), and conduits (*nāḍīs*). The key motivation is to channel vital energies, namely the *prāṇa*, itself a rich network of breaths, and the *kuṇḍalinī*, a powerful life force that, if properly "awakened", can boost unthinkable capacities as well as immortality. It is possible to identify two main trends in haṭhayoga. The first and seemingly older one is focused on the retention of the semen (*bindu, amṛta*), inasmuch as this substance stands for the seed of life everlasting. The second one is centred on raising the subtle, psychophysical force called *kuṇḍalinī* (Mallinson 2011a). The main objective in both cases is to achieve success and extraordinary powers (*siddhi*), as well as liberation while still living in the body (*jīvanmukti*). In this sense, liberation in this scheme is not otherworldly but asserted in the phenomenal realm. It should be noted that haṭhayoga seems to have first appeared in Buddhist tantric literature, and then later entered both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava texts that sometimes dealt with rājayoga (Birch 2011).

It has been noted previously that the Nāth attribution to the Sanskrit texts is uncertain, as is the actual relationship that the Nāth Yogis had with haṭhayoga in pre-modern India. It has to be pointed out that some scholars (James Mallinson, Jason Birch, Seth Powell, among others) are working on visual evidence such as sculpture, miniature, and painting so as to ascertain that

the ascetics depicted there in *āsana* and *prāṇāyama* practices were Nāths. It is still a matter to be confirmed whether theses yogis were in fact Nāth Yogis and not members of a different ascetic order or lineage, especially because we cannot as yet determine from when the Nāths began to use their distinctive insignia as exclusively as today. Nevertheless, haṭha has now become a key factor in Nāth tradition and imagery. Curiously, the *yogasthala* in Gorakhnath Mandir is not guided by a Nāth ascetic, nor is it attended by renunciate yogis but by lay locals. This need not be the case of other Nāth sites.

In an illustrative leaflet issued by the Gorakhnath Mandir and Gita Press, we find what can be taken as an institutional stance on yoga. The text in question is *An Introduction to Natha-Yoga* (henceforth, INY). It bears no author or publication date but no doubt was published in the last decades of the twentieth century and intended to promote an official view of the yoga of the Nāths. In thirty-one chapters and a bit less than a hundred pages, the INY discusses a wide range of yogic themes, from philosophical concepts to physical practices, from institutional sites to aspects of worship. In general, the INY offers a summary of previous, standard knowledge of yoga. It clearly echoes Patañjali but more emphatically haṭhayoga scriptures. It does not provide quotes, direct references, or bibliography, but the aura of Svātmarāma's *Haṭhapradīpikā* lurks behind the exposition, despite the fact that the *Haṭhapradīpikā* is palpably not a Nāth text. It also mentions Prof. Radhakrishnan, G.W. Briggs, Mohan Singh, Sylvan Levi, and Dr. Shahidullah as sources of information.

Even though the INY is not necessarily upheld by all Nāth ascetics, it does reflect an institutional attempt at sponsoring an ideal Nāth image associated with haṭhayoga. Whatever the historical accuracy, the fact is that this association is important. In any case, the hagiographical tales already presented the Nāths as power brokers on account of their being masters of yoga.

It is also worth taking into account a biography of Baba Gambhirnath, a former *mahant* of the Gorakhpur Temple, penned by A.K. Banerjea, who also authored other works on the Nāths, such as *The Philosophy of Gorakhnāth*, from 1962 and periodically reissued. Even though this is not a treatise on yoga, it is possible to gain some insight into how is yoga understood in relation to Gorakhpur Nāths in general. Not surprisingly, Banerjea explains yoga as a system based on Pātañjala philosophy (1954: 6 ff.). In this life story, Gambhirnath appears as a renunciant who had mastered all aspects from the reputed philosophical system. Yet, the young Nāth *bābā* decided to undertake a long pilgrimage so as to further penetrate into the mysteries of yoga. In several pages, Banerjea speaks of "esoteric aspects of yoga", thus implying that some issues are not covered in the *śāstras*. Gambhirnath was to spend a few years in Varanasi and Prayag intent on fully mastering yoga, although it rarely receives a qualifier—it usually just remains "yoga" in general.

Unlike the INY discussed before, Gambhirnath's biography does not speak on behalf of anything called "Nāth-Yoga", yet it does touch upon certain types of yoga. It directly draws from Patañjali, as already stated. It also literally refers to "Karma-yoga", defined as "the well-regulated performance of different forms of work with one high ideal in view" (Banerjea 1954: 11). This is fitting, since the biographer seeks to present his subject as a great devotee, meaning here a "true bhakta-*sādhaka*", not only a renouncer who had taken on all Nāth insignia but who also professed infinite and unrelenting veneration and respect toward his guru, Gopalnath. Gambhirnath would constantly appear as engaging fervently in "yoga and deep meditation", especially "in some solitary places" (Banerjea 1954: 13).

Even though in most haṭhayogic texts the word *sādhaka* is rarely used as synonym for *yogin* (Mallinson 2014: 168), in the biography by Banerjea, the word is used quite frequently to refer to Gambhirnath, who is also referred to as a king or conqueror of yoga, *Yogirāj*. Indeed, there is a conflation of notions such as deeds, devotion, meditation, and energy control not unlike the

general understandings that other *sādhus* and *saṃnyāsīs* share, as Bevilacqua's study shows. Just like with the interplay with different Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Buddhist realms that the lists evince, so here the concept of yoga also negotiates with the ethos and praxis of various religious groups. Yet the Nāths still make a point to differentiate themselves from other religious orders.

By contrasting these sources, we can see an amalgamation of different types: a yoga-related ascetic and a devotion-driven renouncer. The first one can be seen as very energetic and a possessor of multiple supernatural powers, whereas the second appears as a more passive figure, wholly immersed in pious meditation. There seems to be a negotiation between a former tantric—and powerful—aura, on the one hand, and a later devout halo of *sant*-like ethos, on the other.

For the Nirguṇi poets, the key figures are not the Vedic *ṛṣis* or related figures. They aren't for the Nāth Yogis, either. To them, the key figures are the semi-legendary Nāth Siddhas that have dwelt in the popular imagination for various centuries. The sole exception is Ādinātha/Śiva, the divine expounder of the secret lore of yoga that gave rise to the *panth*. After Śiva, all teachers have been human personalities with an alleged historical basis. They are perfect yogis. Yet unlike some Nirguṇī Sants, the Nāth hagiographical narratives do not abound in biographical details that allow us to adequately fix these personalities in time and space. We ought to be aware of the fact that Nāth historiography is rarely about certitude. If the Nāths differ from the Nirguṇīs in this regard, that is because, in the end, the Nāths are not *sants* in the exact sense of the word; the Nāths are akin to most Sants but never identical. Rather, in some way (probably in oral or minstrel traditions), the Nāth Yogis act as proto-Nirguṇīs, inasmuch as they anticipate the sort of vernacular poetry that would appeal to the masses and would display a set of mystical meanings demarcated from Brahmanic and Islamic orthodoxy.

Final remarks: yogi assembly, or the construction of tradition

There may be at least two motives underlying the endless list-making process of the Nāths: a) motivations of tantric-oriented religiosity (i.e. names of ontological concepts or goals) and b) sectarian and social motivations (i.e. an attempt to really trace a lineage so as to form an independent sect). It would not be odd to presume that because of ideological reasons the two sorts of motivations sometimes harmonized and sometimes departed. Judging by the different lists of Siddhas and Nāthas consulted here, it seems that the lists were at first created after tantric models: generic and abstract names or cabalistic numbers (the eight or nine Bhairavas, the sixty-four Yoginīs, etc.). At some point, and maybe due to a will to differentiate themselves from most tantric sects, the Nāths began to elaborate lists that could be relevant for their own tradition, including names from reputed teachers more or less identifiable in time. Notice that most of these gurus are not supposed to have lived in a far-off period (that is, they lived within years, not ages); for people living in the fifteenth century, the Nāth Siddhas of the earliest lists would not have been too remote, even if they had lived in the tenth century. At any rate, this still means the same cosmic age. That is why their deeds belong to hagiography more than mythology.

All this may help explain why the Nāth lineage has been subjected to modifications throughout time (in both quantitative and qualitative terms), whether out of schisms between different schools or the influence of religious elements from different origins (Śaiva, Śākta, Vaiṣṇava, Buddhist, and Jain currents, general as well as local). Or simply there has never been a real consensus on who—and how many—were the exemplary Nāths. From the recurrences in different lists and narratives, the Yogis that we can apparently and safely take for historical members are Tirūmūlar, Nivṛtti, and Jñāneśvar, whose historicity is beyond dispute but who, *stricto sensu*, do not belong into Nāth hagiography in most northern sources. Other names with some (if yet

uncertain) historical basis are: Matsyendra, Gorakṣa, Jālandhar, Cauraṅgī, Gopīcand, Bhartṛhari, and Kṛṣṇapāda. In fact, there is a direct relation between almost all of them in terms of spiritual ancestry.

The continuity of the Nāth tradition is tightly tied to some *maths* (monastic institutions) and to the configuration of a confederation of Yogi lineages. Both have been important actors in the actualization and transmission of a shared culture, however heterogeneous. There are various *maths* and sub-*panths* all around South Asia; often but not always, *maths* are linked to specific lineages. Recognized and authorized *panths* are accounted for in the Akhil Bharatvarshiya Avadhut Bhesh Barah Panth Yogi Mahasabha, or Great Pan-Indian Association of Twelve Yogi Branches. The Yogi Mahasabha itself dates from the twentieth century, but there is evidence, notably in Sikh literature, that Yogis were distributed in twelve branches already around the sixteenth century; there is doubt as to whether this meant a more or less organized partnership. Although in principle they all depend on or vow allegiance to a master *math*, each lineage can operate in independent ways.

The more or less autonomous administration of each Nāth *math* somehow illustrates the *sampradāya's* lack of agreement of list members, which in turn attests to failure in the project of the order's institutionalization. Each yogi *panth*, of course, is in principle covered under the wing of the Barah Panth Confederation. Then, of course, which twelve are these exactly and which not remains a matter of debate. A common feature concerning the location of *maths* is that many of them have tended to be linked to urban spaces that are logistically important for commerce, transportation, or politics and in turn contribute to spread a Nāth network (cf. Kasturi 2018). From an important location for sugarcane production, Gorakhpur gradually gave way to the strengthening of the Gorakhnāth Mandir or Math. Its growth hastened especially under the administration of Baba Digvijaynath, who became *mahant* under very tense circumstances (Kasturi 2018: 222–225). Eventually, this *mandir* became the alleged Nāth stronghold.

If we take into account Gambhirnath's biography and kindred literature, we should bear in mind that yoga and devotion, as general ideas, merge into Nāth ethos. Could it be that in a way the Nāths partook of a supposed "trans-sectarian community" (i.e. one composed by a shared aesthetic methodology as instrumentalized by yogis and *siddhas* and maybe later on also by *sants*)? It seems likely. Now, for some reasons worth pondering, the Nāths felt a need to differentiate from other religious groups, whether ascetic or bardic. Why? How? It begs some thought on issues of belonging and denominational detachment, a matter probably still present in the sentiment of the *sampradāya* as a whole.

The process arguably began or was accelerated at a moment of Nāth power growth. It is sensible to think that in order to secure more official and governmental patronage, the potential beneficiary has to make sure he is different from others, not just in terms of practices or outward features, but also—and especially—in terms of denominational identity. The various Nāth insignia may have played a relevant role in achieving this. They could not just keep going under the general name of *jogīs* but were in want of a more concrete, specific defining label that would account for a successful organizational process.

If there was a common ground shared with other *bhakti* groups, one wonders whether these yogis ever thought of tracing a more factual *paraṃparā*, maybe resorting to historical personages that received patronage at some point. It seems that Nāth lineage remained more in the sphere of the legendary and the symbolical, and therefore the yogis were not successful in pinning down a more or less historical lineage. Why not? If they did try, why have they failed? These questions cannot be answered in the present chapter.

Yet, in trying to establish or "fix" a *paramparā*, both a *math* and a presiding figure must have been important, as with the *pusti margīs* or the four Vaiṣṇava *sampradāys* or Daśanāmīs.

Maybe, since must yogis in Mughal and premodern India were mostly wandering ascetics, it was far more difficult to achieve that. We should also take into consideration that the yogis were less sanscritized than—say—the Vallabhācāryas or Śaṅkarācāryas, that is, less liable to institutionalization.

The Nāths seemed to more or less have forged a sect (*panth*) and a tradition (*sampradāya*) but not an uncontested spiritual genealogy (*paramparā*). That can partly explain the huge discrepancies between the lists; it also undoubtedly proves the lack of cohesion and denominational identity in the early phases of the order. The yogis were not simply inheriting older models unhesitatingly but contesting them, because in doing so, they were defining and distinguishing themselves apart from other lineages in premodern India. More importantly, the various lists attest to a conflation of diverse regional traditions, sometimes clashing but sometimes simply merging into one another. While the Nāths' identity and kinship remain an open debate on names and numbers, these issues are key in understanding Nāth historiography.

In particular, the Nāth lineage affiliated with Gorakhpur has been intent on making the Gorakhnath Mandir a major yogi centre; they have tried to make of it the Nāth capital, so to speak. By promoting the sacred biographies of the proverbial yogis, the Gorakhnath Mandir has tried to enhance a spiritual legacy and strengthen their link to an all-powerful yoga. And by promoting the lives and deeds of their former *mahants*, the temple has reinforced a spiritual pedigree, as well as the temple's significance for South Asian yogic milieu. In a publication from the Gorakhnath Temple, we read:

> When those spiritual vibrations are created by the *sādhanā* and *siddhi* of a long line of spiritually great men from time immemorial, they become perpetual and inexhaustible and indestructible, and the soil and water and air of the locality become saturated with their influence. This is the case with most of the places which are regarded as holy.
>
> (Banerjea 1954: 24)

The propagandist efforts of the Temple are indeed directed at enhancing Gorakhpur's soil as holy and meritorious as any other famous Hindu pilgrimage sites. They draw from the success (*siddhi*) of their former yogi gurus and leaders.

Notes

1 Valuable comments by different colleagues have been of immense help at different stages of this chapter, even if they do not wholly endorse my views. I would like to thank David Lorenzen, Daniel Gold, and Audrey Truschke. Special thanks to Daniela Bevilacqua, David White, and Patton E. Burchett, whose keen, careful reading helped me improve substantial parts of the text.

2 More general information about the worship of divinities in the Nāth tradition can be found in Bouillier 2017: 29–39.

3 Among the few and worth reading exceptions are Dvīvedī 1996; White 2004.

4 It is worth taking into account that in common parlance, there can a difference between a *yogī* and a *jogī*, the first meaning a practitioner of yoga and the second implying a mischievous, "sinister" character. (cf. Mallinson 2014: 169 n.18). Both words, however, derive from the Sanskrit *yogin*.

5 See Bagchi 1986: 26. Abhinavagupta (2000) praises Mīnanātha (TĀ 1.6–7, 4.237, 26.71). For references to the Nāth Yogis in the Kabīr Panth, see Hawley y Juergensmeyer 1988: 44, 45; Lorenzen and Thukral 2005; Lorenzen 1996b: 158. For references in Nānak, see Hawley and Juergensmeyer 1988: 68, 69, 71 79, 86; Shapiro 1995: 154, 156; see also Nayar and Sandhu 2007 for a study and translation of the Nānak-Yogis dialogue known as the *Siddh Goṣṭ*.

6 There are some legendary figures whose significance lies exactly in the role they play toward the arrival of the Muslims in the subcontinent, as is the case of Gugā Pīr in Rajasthan.

7 It has purportedly been noted that the Buddhist *Majjhimanikāya* refers to the Buddha as a teacher of haṭhayoga (cf. White 2004: 422 n.83, citing Nowotny).

8 Cf. GorSS: 40, 124, an alleged quote from *Ṣoḍaśanityātantra*.

9 Despite being a relevant document for haṭhayoga history, little attention has been paid to this text until now. A brief discussion of some editions of the *Yogabīja* can be found in Muñoz 2016. Currently, the first critical edition is under preparation by Jason Birch and James Mallinson, as part of the collective work of the Hatha Yoga Project.

10 Cf. the list provided by Dasgupta (1995: 207): Matsyendra, Gorakṣa, Gahinī, Jvālendra, Kāriṇa-pa (Kaṇerī?), Carpaṭa, Revaṇa, Bhartṛ, and Gopīcandra. Note that Revaṇa is also mentioned by the NSCar.

11 In personal communication. These issues were amply discussed by Bevilacqua in her PhD thesis.

12 However, one should be aware that the idea of an "eternal religion" emanating from the Vedas is a late ideological construction. See Hawley 2009.

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12

AURANGZEB AND ISLAM IN INDIA

50 years of Mughal Realpolitik

Tilmann Kulke

Prelude—Aurangzeb's life in a nutshell

Muhammad Aurangzeb Alamgir was born on November 3, 1618, in Dahod, India, as the third son of the great Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (1592–1666) and his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal (1593–1631).[1] After a bloody fratricidal war (1657–1659)[2] and controversial rise to power, Aurangzeb managed a successful internal and external expansion in his first phase of government (1658/59–81). In 1681, after years of intensive preparation and planning, he led a gigantic Mughal army from the northern regions directly into the heart of highlands of the Deccan. His goal was to finally subjugate the entire Indian subcontinent under the rule of the glorious Mughal dynasty, which had dominated northern India since 1526 and had since expanded steadily. Ruling all of India, the epitome of Asiatic wealth and luxury, was the dream of every ruler, from Alexander the Great to Aurangzeb's ancestors, who were in no way inferior to the latter in their goals of expansion. But no one came so close to realizing it as Aurangzeb himself, who ruled the Mughal Empire for nearly 50 years until his death in 1707 and brought it to its greatest extension.

For a short time, Mughal officers collected gigantic revenues from the southernmost regions, and it seemed as though the Mughal Empire, under Aurangzeb's leadership, would truly become the undisputed and most powerful state in the world. It was only a matter of time, according to Aurangzeb's calculations, until India was firmly under Mughal control. But nothing was to come of it: the new territories, and soon thereafter the entire empire, collapsed like a house of cards after Aurangzeb's death, and the rulers who had just been subjugated freed themselves from the rule of the Mughals on all fringes of the empire. Aurangzeb's last letters shortly before his death (1707) bear witness to the grief of a failed life, and instead of entering the history of his dazzling dynasty as the most glorious ruler and conqueror, historiography presented him as a bigot tyrant and Muslim fundamentalist. In these writings, Aurangzeb is held responsible for the Mughals' demise, the division of India's society and, moreover, for the Indian–Pakistani separation 240 years after his death (Kulke 2016: 10–13; Truschke 2017: 7–8, 103–104).

This chapter seeks to present the most complex Indian ruler from a different perspective, based on my own research and the latest state of the art. In some places, I will present a brief comparison with Aurangzeb's contemporaries in Europe and classify the emperor's often-controversial decisions into a broader context.[3] To begin with, I will present Aurangzeb's

perception in recent published standard works. As we will see, the latter is still described in the traditional and classical way as an ultra-orthodox, bigoted and extremely cruel ruler, even by leading historians (Osterhammel 2014, 2018) and experts of Islamic history and culture in the most prestigious publishers (Steinfels 2013). Then, in the main part of this chapter, I will discuss each of the problematic parts of this classic narrative and present new and alternative approaches.

On Aurangzeb's issues with research

For decades, the Indian historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar had the last word on Aurangzeb Alamgir.[4] In his historiographical masterpieces that bear witness to an extraordinary workload and often brilliant translations, he ultimately produced a one-sided image of this complex ruler, namely that of an ultra-orthodox and bigoted Muslim who, because of his determined hate of Hinduism and political break with his tolerant predecessors, contributed decisively to the later decline of the empire.

And although there were some concurrent attempts to design a more diverse picture of Aurangzeb than that of Sarkar and his disciplines, these studies received little attention.[5] On the one hand, they were out of line with the common and easy-to-explain doomsday scenario of early modern India, in which Aurangzeb, with his ultra-radical Muslim religious policies and never-ending expansion, is assigned the essential guilt of the empire's decline; on the other hand, these works have been interpreted as too partisan, especially when written by Muslim scholars Jnan (1957), Husain (2002). Fortunately, leading scholars had published pervasive and pioneering studies in recent years, but their argumentation remained primarily limited to an intra-academic discourse (e.g. Alam 2004; Faruqui 2014; Copland et al. 2012). A real turnaround, which was perceived by the general public with quite the turmoil, came into play with the recently published and impressive study by Audrey Truschke (2017).

It will certainly take more time until the innovative results of these pioneering studies are firmly anchored within the academic and public discourse, as the simple telling narrative of Aurangzeb as the Mughal's bad guy gets retold by even the current most-praised historians, such as Jürgen Osterhammel in his *The Transformation of the World* (2014) and *The Unfabling of the East* (2018), both published by Princeton University Press. And although one can argue that Osterhammel is not an expert on Islamic and South Asian history, we find the exact narrative on Aurangzeb's reign that reads like a summary of Sarkar's key messages in yet another standard work, surprisingly also published by Princeton University Press, namely the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought*; this time written and edited by leading experts of that precise field.

In the following, I would like to present this classic narrative and show how it works by quoting briefly from these three studies. After that, I will discuss each of these problematic points step by step, arguing that these one-sided representations of such a complex ruler are no longer viable. To begin with, let us take a look at how Aurangzeb is summarized in the introduction to the *Princeton Encyclopaedia of Islamic Political Thought*. I have numbered the respective points I will discuss in the following in square brackets [1–6]:

> Dara Shikuh (1615–1659), inclined toward the Qadiri Sufi order, inspired the translation of the Upanishads into Persian and championed religious assimilation with Hinduism. His program of religious openness [1] was not to last long when he was executed on the orders of Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), his brother and rival. Aurangzeb stood up against the eclectic traditions of his predecessors [2], breaking the renewed vigor of Hinduism with a reform centered on Islamic values [3] and supported by the Naqshbandi Sufi order. . . . Emperor Aurangzeb (1650–1707) repudiated Akbar's

tolerance toward Hinduism; he reintroduced a unified legal system of Sunni ortho-
doxy based on Hanafi law and reimposed the poll tax on non-Muslims. [4]

<div align="right">(Bowering 2013: xiv)</div>

And now an excerpt from the actual article:

> Many of Aurangzeb's policies, especially in religious matters reflected his sober and
> pious personality and his commitment to a shari'a-oriented Islam. In a departure
> from the practice of his predecessors, he disallowed wine drinking, opium use, music,
> and dance at court; [5] forbade the building of new Hindu temples and the repair of
> existing ones; restricted tax-free grants to only Muslim recipients; and, most radi-
> cally, imposed the jizya (poll tax) on non-Muslims in 1679. Aurangzeb was not the
> patron of the arts that his father and grandfather had been. Instead, he commissioned
> the important compendium of Hanafi law, Fatawa-yi 'Alamgiri (The 'Alamgir com-
> pendium of legal rulings), and personally occupied himself with copying the Qur'an.
> Aurangzeb's discriminatory policies toward his non-Muslim subjects have been seen
> by some scholars as a factor in the Rajput and Maratha rebellions and as a cause of
> general discontent and the ultimate destabilization of the empire. [6]

<div align="right">(Steinfels 2013: 50)</div>

These two excerpts summarize pretty much all the allegations against Aurangzeb that are usually
brought against him and his governmental practice. What is still missing is that of the extraor-
dinary cruelty and radical religious policy that contributed to the empire's later downfall. These
two characterizations can be found in both of the previously mentioned and praised studies of
Jürgen Osterhammel. In *The Unfabling of the East*, Osterhammel describes Aurangzeb in clas-
sic style as "fratricidal" and "more brutal and closed-minded than almost all his predecessors"
(Osterhammel 2018: 336). This thoroughly negative and concise description of Aurangzeb
continues in *The Transformation of the World*, where Aurangzeb even appears as a responsible
jihadist:

> When the dynasty under Emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658–1707), the only jihadist mogul
> ruler, changed course and tried to impose sharia throughout the empire, it contrib-
> uted to the tensions that resulted in the collapse of mogul rule in the early eighteenth
> century.

<div align="right">(Osterhammel 2014: 879)</div>

Let us now look step by step at whether there might be an alternative reading of Aurangzeb's
rule. We will start with the controversial beginning of Aurangzeb's reign.

Aurangzeb's controversial rise to power—back to the middle ages? [1–2]

Pretty much any traditional representation of Aurangzeb begins with the conflict with his
brother and the argument that Aurangzeb had broken from the outset with the tolerant policy
of all his pro-Hindu predecessors. Whereas his older brother Dara is described as a cosmopoli-
tan, who, thanks to his dialogue with the Hindus, could have led the Mughal Empire into a
new era, Aurangzeb, as the bigoted Muslim, broke with the cosmopolitanism of his tolerant
predecessors and catapulted the Mughal Empire directly back to the Middle Ages.[6]

Only a short time ago, Munis Faruqui and Rajeev Kinra managed to break through this deadlocked narrative which is often accompanied by counterfactual games of thought (How would India's history would have developed under Dara's rule?) and provided new and convincing interpretations. Already during his lifetime, Dara was exposed to strong public criticism from the most prominent authors of the empire, such as Baba Lal,[7] Chandar Bhan and Sarmad, who attacked his decadent and elitist way of life, which would make it impossible to become a good and just king. This criticism led to many important Hindu nobles opting for an alliance with Aurangzeb even before the outbreak of the fratricide, seeing him as the more reliable and suitable commander and later ruler.

It is, of course, tempting to wrap complex contexts in such simple narratives, but this duality of Dara = good and rosy future versus Aurangzeb = evil and dark Muslim Middle Ages simply does not work, in particular when we deal with such a highly complex history, society and culture as seventeenth-century India.[8] Additionally, it must be mentioned that the frightening adjective *fratricidal*, which Osterhammel uses in his short description for Aurangzeb, is ultimately irrelevant and rather misleading. After all, since Akbar's successor, every Mughal prince has been a possible fratricide murderer, as this was a systemic feature of the Mughal state and should bring to the throne the most appropriate successor.[9]

We must also note that the attempt to strengthen the Islamic institutions and to centralize the state did not suddenly begin with a radical break under Aurangzeb, as classical argumentation explains. Rather, these tendencies set in after the death of Akbar in 1605 and were further expanded by Aurangzeb's two direct predecessors, Jahangir (1569–1627) and his father Shah Jahan. After decades of successful networking and expansion of power, the religious scholars (*ulama*) had therefore already gained a lot of power when Aurangzeb came into power.[10] As a result, Aurangzeb made important commitments to the *ulama* during his reign, which resulted in two of his most controversial laws, as we shall see subsequently. Of course, Aurangzeb should not be portrayed as a victim here, but we must take into account the tendency of the prior strengthening of the religious scholars as they turned into a power factor in Aurangzeb's state that he could not bypass endlessly. Also, Aurangzeb was fully aware that in no way could he break entirely with his famous and gloried predecessors, which he emphasized on the day of his seizure by choosing a ruler title that firmly and directly fit the tradition of his predecessors. Here, the new king explicitly referred to his prominent predecessors Jahangir (1605–1627), the World-Seizer, and Shah Jahan (gov. 1627–1658), the World-Emperor, by choosing the programmatic title *'Alamgir*, the World-Seizer.[11]

Finally, at this point, it helps us to take a brief look at sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Here, the absolutist-ruling monarchs also tried to promote the centralization of their state and to strengthen their influence on religious matters, for example, by founding state churches, in order to limit the influence of Rome. It is striking, however, that these attempts at state and religious centralization during that time are by no means so badly valued but rather interpreted as an important process towards a 'modern' society.

On Aurangzeb's Islamic values and jihadist adventures [3]

We also have to be very careful about the third point. By emphasizing the *Islamic values* under Aurangzeb's government, we must first of all clarify what they actually mean, since these are by no means defined in a fixed and clear manner. Premodern Islamic concepts of just governance were based primarily on Greek and Persian philosophers and epic narratives, in which far fewer religious concepts played a role than the question of the correct political and ethical behaviour (*akhlaq* and *adab*) of kings, respectively, the narrative's protagonists and heroes towards

their subjects (Truschke 2017: 10). In addition, Aurangzeb was also surrounded by other masterpieces of world literature, such as the Hindi translations of the Sanskrit epics *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. They had already been translated under Akbar and enjoyed an ever-increasing popularity at the Mughal court, influencing with their 'Hindu' versions of the righteous ruler the discourse of the Mughal elite. In fact, Aurangzeb even composed poems in pre-modern Hindi himself (*Braj Basha*) (Truschke (2017: 18), while other Muslim nobles of his family and acquaintance went even further and wrote Hindu poetry with Hindu names as pseudonyms. To describe Aurangzeb and his closest entourage as a *jihadists* who only sought to convert all India to Islam with a clear sharia agenda is therefore not tenable. As Muzaffar Alam, in his important study on the languages of political Islam in premodern India, argues:

> there was no single dominant Islamic tradition or any single reading of the s*chariʿa* which shaped and determined the course of Muslim polity in pre-colonial India. In fact, different Islamic traditions were often at loggerheads with one another. The umma was rarely united in historical Islam.
>
> (Alam 2004: 178–179)

Let us now turn to the 1670s of Aurangzeb's reign, where we will discuss two of the emperor's highly disputed decisions.

Two controversial decisions of the 1670s—Aurangzeb's land reform and the poll tax on non-Muslims [4]

Two decisions are seen as particularly discriminatory steps against the non-Muslim population and evidence of Aurangzeb's fundamental anti-Hindu attitude, in addition to Aurangzeb's destruction of the temples, which we will discuss in detail subsequently: Aurangzeb's reform of land granting to the Hindus (1672) and the poll tax (*jizya*) collection on non-Muslims (1679). These decisions were harshly criticized right from the start, both from influential and loyal Hindu nobles and Aurangzeb's closest Muslim advisers. And the empire-wide and cross-cultural debate that followed serves, as a side note, as a good example of the Mughal's vibrant *public sphere* (Kinra 2009: 177; Kulke 2016: 49–53). Let's start with the 1679 adopted *jizya*, which all non-Muslims were required to pay. With this decision, Aurangzeb wanted to prove above all that he had not forgotten the powerful religious scholars (*ulama*), whose influence had grown steadily among his predecessors. Since his accession to power, they quite well realized that he defied his discretion over their religious requirements whenever it suited his concept of Realpolitik. In that context, it is in fact surprising that Aurangzeb did not install the *jizya* much earlier in order to pacify the *ulama*, since Aurangzeb's imprisonment of his father was a constant issue between him and the clerks. In fact, he only received the crucial legitimization and blessing of his rule by naming his candidate of choice as chief *qazi*, namely the notorious corrupt Abdul Wahab Bohra, who remained in this position for 16 years and left office with an assumed sum of 3.3 million rupees after designing several *fatwas* for Aurangzeb's political and military aspirations (Richards 1995; Copland et al. 2012: 115). Aurangzeb's controversial decision to implement the *jizya* should therefore rather be seen as a tactical concession to the clerics and not as a discriminatory and spontaneous mood of a bigoted Muslim king against the majority of its non-Muslim population.

Aurangzeb's calculus regarding the *jizya* becomes particularly clear given that he later showed a striking flexibility in this very controversial decision. He abolished this tax in 1688–1689 for the famine-stricken region of Hyderabad, and in 1704 even for the entire Deccan (Chandra 2003: 14), squeezed out by decades of war. Due to his own aggressive foreign policy from 1681

onwards, Aurangzeb was considerably responsible for this catastrophic condition, which must have become clear to him shortly before his death and most probably caused his turnaround. In addition, the collection of the new tax was sluggish right from the start, or not enforced at all, as it was subject to a constant and considerable opposition throughout the empire. It is therefore striking that Aurangzeb did not specifically order draconian punishments against this tacit protest but ultimately accepted this obvious criticism without having too many concerns, as his real intention, a clear concession to the *ulama*, at least on paper, had been achieved.

Yet there is another crucial aspect that we need to consider regarding the *jizyah*. Islamic jurisprudence treats the *latter* within the chapters of *jihad* and in the works of Islamic martial law, in which the rights and duties of non-Muslims are specified. By paying this poll tax, they became protected persons (Arab. *dhimmi*) who enjoyed protection of their lives and property under Muslim authority, as well as the right to freely practice their religion, which, of course, was subject to the restrictions of applicable Islamic laws. For our argument, it is crucial to understand that non-Muslims were therefore exempted from military service by establishing this particular *jizya*. Here, I argue, the timing of the adoption of this tax is crucial, as it was adopted when the empire was already in the midst of preparing itself for mobilization for Aurangzeb's gigantic Deccan expansion. Aurangzeb could not only pacify the Ulama with this step, as he strongly needed their blessing and legitimization for his future fights against Muslim states in the Deccan; he might even have interpreted this decision as a significant concession to all of his non-Muslim subjects, who were now freed from the bloody and loss-filled campaigns in the Deccan. Furthermore, when talking about the *jizyah*, we must also bear in mind that its precise definition and characterization were endlessly debated within the Islamic *umma* from the early beginning of its history. For many of the orthodox, this entire concept was a never-ending concession to the infidels, as, by paying this tax, non-Muslims were not only relieved from military service but also from paying the Islamic charitable levy (*zakat*) (Copland et al. 2012: 97).

The situation is similar to the reform of land distribution of 1672 that was passed only some years before the controversial *jizya* bill. Although the land reform at first glance undoubtedly looked like a slap in the face for all Hindus, as it would have deprived all Hindus of the land assigned to them and distributed it only to the religious scholars, it ultimately never came into effect (Truschke 2017: 83). Richard Eaton, in his important study on the rise of Islam and the Bengal frontier, pointedly summarizes the limits and actual consequences of this controversial decision:

> It is known that in 1672–73 the conservative emperor Aurangzeb ordered that all *madad-i maʿāsh* (endowments) granted to Hindus be repossessed, with future such grants reserved for Muslims only. But Delhi, as the old Persian proverb went, "was still far away." During the emperor's reign, Mughal officers in Sylhet issued more *madad-i maʿāsh* to Hindus after the 1672–3 order than before the date.
>
> (1993: 263)

That all said, we realize how carefully we must deal with highly perplexing decisions such as those of Islamic jurisprudence. For though both decrees would undoubtedly have meant huge losses for Hindus and ideally fit into any argument that seeks to prove Aurangzeb's bigotry and hate of Hindus, it looks different on closer inspection.

No time for arts and pleasure—for anyone? [5]

Turning now to the fifth point, a true classic in the traditional literature about Aurangzeb: Here, the narrative goes, Aurangzeb renounced and strictly forbade all personal worldly pleasures,

based on his bigoted and fundamentalist and ultra-Muslim way of life ("In a departure from the practice of his predecessors, he disallowed wine drinking, opium use, music, and dance at court"). In that particular context, the work of Katherine B. Schofield (née Brown) should be pointed out, which could convincingly prove that this *ban* came much closer to a *bid* (2007). Like any sovereign of his time, Aurangzeb set his own standards immediately after taking the throne in order to set himself apart from his predecessors and to appeal to them in other decisions. While Aurangzeb personally decided to renounce all these amusements and expected those surrounding him to act accordingly, arts in general and music and drug consumption continued to boom in the Mughal Empire nonetheless once the emperor was at distance. Here, one contemporary and later chronicler of his reign, Musta'idd Khan, wrote cautiously and with awareness of this tacit agreement of the emperor with his pleasure-seeking noble surroundings (Kulke 2016: 285–291).

It is interesting to see in this context that Aurangzeb's prominent German contemporary made almost identical demarcations from his luxury-loving predecessor in order to publicly stage his new martial government line. Frederick William I (1688–1740), known as the Soldier King, strictly rejected all the previously listed forms of enjoyment and arts (except tobacco and beer), which his father Frederick I (1657–1713) had once valued and held enormous sums for. Once on the throne in 1713, Frederick William I grabbed the red pen and initiated his politics of austerity (Clark 2008: 84). He disliked any sort of fine arts, in particular flute music, which he perceived as French softened (*verweichlicht*), and costly and pompous courtly festivities and has since been described as 'Prussia's greatest inner king'. While rigid austerity, militarism, laboriousness, discipline and obedience are acknowledged as the basis for Prussia's later greatness and have always been instrumentalized as true German virtues, in particular in recent years, Aurangzeb's identical decisions and governmental maxims, on the 'Asian-Muslim' side, are perceived and seen solely within the context of his religious and Islamic piety. In this way, however, we embark on a classical narrative, which recognizes rational and enlightened monarchs only in the Europe of the Enlightenment and, on the other hand, religiously motivated despots in Asia (Conrad 2012). In this context, Catherine B. Asher and Cynthia Talbot argue convincingly:

> While orthodoxy is the reason usually given for Aurangzeb's rejection of much of the pomp of Shah Jahan's courtly ritual, he may well have realized that the extreme formality, hierarchy, and ceremonial of the court was in fact backfiring.
>
> (2006: 207)

Therefore, instead of seeing Aurangzeb's decisions as purely religiously motivated, we should rather interpret his differentiation from his predecessors as a deliberate political self-staging, an innovative form of empowerment and legitimization of rule.

Moreover, it would be grossly wrong to describe Aurangzeb as a non-humane Muslim programmed machine that had lost all enthusiasm for aesthetics, beauty and the arts, condemning anyone who felt differently and only feeling pleasure in studying the Koran. Aurangzeb simply preferred other art forms. While others celebrated, he preferred the silence of a prayer; he loved prose and soon made a name for himself as a gifted poet, even in Hindi, and accepted satire that was openly critical of him (Asher and Talbot 2006: 230; Truschke 2017: 77).

He invested enormous sums in the construction of the then largest mosque in the world, the magnificent Badshahi Mosque in Lahore. And not only Islamic-influenced architecture struck his heart: As he visited the famous Ellora Temple only shortly after his accession in 1650, which is generally characterized by his sudden break with his tolerant ancestors and the beginning of Islamization, he sees the temple's beauty a clear proof of God and describes it as "marvels of the

work of the true transcendent Artisan" (Faruqui 2012: 70; Kulke 2016: 127–133). Additionally, Aurangzeb allowed influential Mughals to increasingly function as patrons of gifted Hindu poets, even within his closest family circle, such as his uncle Shaysta Khan.[12] And for those Muslim nobles who did not show any enthusiasm for Hindi culture and language learning, serious and systematic efforts were made under his reign to motivate them to do so, as evidenced, for example, by Mirza Khan's impressive compilation *Tuhfat al-Hind* (Alam 2004: 178).

Let us now turn to the penultimate point, which perceives the constant discrimination of Aurangzeb against the Hindus as a decisive reason for the later collapse of the empire.

On Aurangzeb's discriminatory policies toward his non-Muslim subjects [6]

Without a doubt, many of Aurangzeb's decisions disturbed his non-Muslim subjects and many of his closest Muslim advisers (Alam 2013: 16), giving fuel to the many uprisings that Aurangzeb fought in his reign, not to mention the uprisings that followed his death. But we need to rid ourselves of the idea that all Hindus of India stood *en bloc* in opposition to Aurangzeb's empire. In fact, we have to bear in mind how complex this term actually is and which population groups it includes and which not (Truschke 2017: 14). And, by doing so carefully, we recognize that the situation, again, was much more complex. We already saw at the beginning that many important Hindu generals joined arms with Aurangzeb before the fratricidal war, and it did not stop once his alleged fundamentalist break with his tolerant predecessors came into play; in fact, we rather observe the exact opposite: In the course of his reign, the number of Hindus that joined Aurangzeb's notion of empire increased considerably (Ali 1997).

On the one hand, the reason for this surprising tendency might have been the realization that, once the outrage over a discriminatory law had passed, the actual adoption of a decree did not immediately lead to its implementation. Additionally, the aspects of performance and meritocracy were key components of Aurangzeb's government, which he underlined impressively and explicitly in his letter to his influential vizier Asad Khan: "the work of government should be entrusted to people with prized experience and a head for business, not to those weak with greed" (Truschke 2017: 57). Other letters of Aurangzeb show his will not to take exception to this idea of discipline and work ethic, where he portrayed himself as the first man in the state and as a model for his officials and officers: "So long as a single breath of this mortal life remains, there is no release from labour and work" (Husain 2002: 8). Of course, many Hindus kept waiting in front of locked gates, and not everybody accessed their desired employment in the empire's bureaucracy. However, the emphasis on meritocracy meant that in 1679, the same year as the discriminatory *jizya* tax was levied, the number of Hindus within the Mughal nobility was as high as ever, or, in other words: never before had so many Hindu nobles held so high a position in the Mughal hierarchy as under Aurangzeb's rule (Husain 2002: 87).

Let's look at a few examples that illustrate this tendency: Only shortly after his victory over Dara, Aurangzeb handed over the important Ministry of Finance to Raja Raghunath, who had already served this role under Shah Jahan. Here, he put himself firmly in the tradition not only of his father but also of his great-grandfather Akbar, who had given this important department to the Hindu Toda Mal (d. 1586). During his second accession to the throne, Aurangzeb publicly honoured Raghunath, who quickly became one of the most popular servants of the new ruler (Truschke 2017: 57). The French traveller Bernier even described this minister as often acting as vizier, and Aurangzeb mourned for a long time his early death in 1663. But Aurangzeb not only trusted the finances to a Hindu, he also gave the command of the most difficult military campaigns to his favourite general, Raja Jai Singh, after other Mughal generals had already

failed and given up. This battle-hardened Hindu general played a crucial role in Aurangzeb's numerous campaigns, such as in the years of the fratricidal war or in the successful pursue of Shivaji, and the Hindu historian Ishwar Das Nagar (1655–1749) even describes Jai Singh as "the key to the brain" of Aurangzeb (Chandra 2005: 299).

The career opportunities within the state, however, were by no means reserved for the high nobility, as we witness the development of a (middle) class of secretaries (*munshis*), out of which the intellectual bureaucratic elite of the empire was recruited.[13] More and more Hindus joined this attractive milieu, which formed the backbone of the generally skilfully run Mughal administration (Richards 1993). They realized that as long as they identified with Aurangzeb's notion of empire, there was no limit to their career at the royal court. It is, above all, this egalitarian aspect, which of course presupposed strict subordination to the ideas and loyalty of the Empire, that led numerous Hindus, from the highest scholars to simple infantry, to write hymns to their righteous ruler until his death and beyond, such as "Ishvaradasa, a Hindu astrologer, wrote about Aurangzeb in Sanskrit in 1663 and called the king righteous (dharmya) and even noted that his tax policies were lawful (vidhivat)" (Truschke 2017: 39).

Taking this into account, a short change of perspective towards contemporary Europe is particularly interesting. Here, for example, in Brandenburg-Prussia and especially in the 1670s, strict and discriminatory measures were taken against the Jewish population (Herzfeld 2001: 27). And only two years after Aurangzeb's controversial *jizyah* decree, Louis XIV (1638–1715) in 1681 initiated the terror of the notorious *Dragonades* against the French Protestants. Then, driven by his maxim *Une foi, une loi, un roi*, the latter adopted the discriminatory Edict of Fontainebleau in 1685, whereby the Huguenots were denied the exercise of their religious freedom, initially guaranteed to them in 1598. The result was an escape wave of about a quarter of a million Huguenots in Protestant-dominated areas in Europe and overseas (Lachenicht 2007). In that context, the reading of the following conversation between Aurangzeb and a Muslim from Bukhara who entered the Moghul service that took place in 1680 seems particularly impressive. Here the new official urged the ruler to forbid the Persians any future career opportunities at the court, since they were foreign Shias and not Sunnis. Aurangzeb, however, rejected it immediately and answered:

> What have worldly affairs to do with religion? And why should bigotry intrude into matters of religion? "*For you there is your religion; and for me mine (lakum dinkum wa lidin)*." If the [Islamic] laws were followed it would have been necessary to annihilate all the Rajputs.
>
> (Copland et al. 2012: 114)

Let us finally turn to Aurangzeb's most controversial and discussed decisions, namely those of the temple destructions and his outstanding cruelty.

On Aurangzeb's temple destructions and outstanding cruelty

Aurangzeb's temple destruction deserves our special attention. In recent years, this has been repeatedly brought into political and public discourse under the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government and used purposefully for their interpretation and instrumentalization of the Indian past. In their narrative, Aurangzeb and his wild Muslim entourage are blamed for destroying thousands of Hindu temples and forcibly converting masses of Hindus to Islam. However, recent research has shown that these allegations do not correspond to reality. A decisive turning point in research came from Richard Eaton, who focused on the aspect of temple

destruction in his groundbreaking studies on the history of Islam in India.[14] He could show, for example, that the number of destroyed temples was probably not more than a few dozen. Furthermore, we have to say that these destructions under Aurangzeb were not the result of the pure lust and mood of a fundamentalist Muslim ruler. Rather, and this is crucial, the destructions were always deeply embedded in very concrete political reasons. For Aurangzeb, a temple was an object among many that lay in the state realm and thus was subject to imperial authority, which meant destruction, if necessary, and protection, in general (see Truschke 2017: 79). In that context, it is important to know that contemporary Muslim chroniclers explicitly emphasize the exceptionality of Aurangzeb's orders to demolish a temple or to publicly execute an enemy of the state in their writings. This is particularly striking, for example, in Musta'idd Khan's previously mentioned *Ma'asiri Alamgiri*. By using a sophisticated narrative strategy, the author embedded all temple destructions and executions into the concrete political context and successfully managed to relativize and legitimize them posthumously (Kulke 2016).

Such a sober, real–political interpretation should not gloss over anything, but it serves, above all, to reduce the religious factor and helps one understand Aurangzeb as a ruler of his time. In this way, we are removing the destruction of a temple from the dangerous breeding ground for later instrumentalization and politicization. This argument does not make the fact of destruction any better, and the demolition of a sacred monument must undoubtedly have been a humiliation and a shock to the affected population. But this shock and warning effect was exactly what the Empire wanted, as much as the deliberate destruction of a sacred building from our point of view looks disturbing. Moreover, we must bear in mind that Aurangzeb oriented himself to his opponents and vassals, such as Hindu kings and local rulers, who also had destroyed the temples of their opponents and rebellious leaders. And here, too, the destruction was subject to clear conditions and must also be seen in a politico-strategic context, serving as targeted punitive measures and not as a rule; however, this fact does not play any role within the constructed Hindu nationalist historical narrative on premodern India, as Romila Thapar convincingly argues:

> The amnesia regarding Hindu kings destroying Hindu temples is of a different order since such attacks are recorded and commented upon in 'Hindu' sources. Kalhana for one, does not suppress the fact or the memory of Hindu kings of Kashmir destroying Hindu temples. But this information has been the subject of amnesia among modern historians. The necessity for both the constructed memory in the one case, of Muslims alone destroying temples, and the amnesia in the other, was to give cohesion to a presumed Hindu community in modern times. And further, that the politics of modern times did not require that the amnesia be revoked, thus maintaining that only Muslims destroy temples. This precluded discussion of why in the past, temples were destroyed for reasons other than religious bigotry.
>
> (Thapar 2008: 217)

The same goes with the argument that Aurangzeb had strictly forbidden the construction of new temples during his reign throughout the entire empire. To be sure, within the controversial Benares Declaration of 1659, shortly after assuming power, he indeed expressed his fear that his empire would become overgrown with temples through the growing prosperity of the local lords, who wanted to make sacrosanct and legitimize their rule through new sacred buildings, and forbade their construction in the future. But, importantly, the Benares Declaration referred only to that precise region, while throughout the empire, new and numerous Hindu temples were built and remained protected. This might surprise at first sight and does not fit at all into

any classical representation, but the king saw himself indeed as a ruler of all of his subjects and thus as the overseer of their holy cities, as he explicitly emphasized:

> Because the persons of great kings are shadows of God, the attention of this elevated class, who are the pillars of God's court, is devoted to this: that men of various dispositions and different religions (mazahib) should live in the vale of peace and pass their days in prosperity, and no one should meddle in the affairs of another.
>
> (Truschke 2017: 79–80)

Finally, let's look at the argument that Aurangzeb was by far the cruellest Mughal ruler of all time, as described in the beginning by Jürgen Osterhammel—but here, too, there is a lot to consider. Of course, there were public executions that, from today's point of view, cannot be overlooked. However, we must remember that this particular form of public execution, such as dismemberment and subsequent attachment to the city's four main gates, was a worldwide form of criminal justice. In his important studies, Richard von Dülmen summed up judicial and ritual rites with the term "theater of terror" (1995). The main purpose of this theatre was to restore justice to the victims, and thus the empire, through the agonizing torture of the convicted in public. We must also note that such executions are by far the exception and therefore described in detail within the sources precisely because they did not belong to the daily routine of the dynasty. Rather, Aurangzeb "was often happy to use diplomacy to extend and solidify Mughal power, especially in the first half of his reign (1658–81)" (Truschke 2017: 37).

In addition to the punishing and warning measures of a temple destruction and the restoration of the victim's honour through a public execution, yet another important aspect must be added in order to better understand the actions of Aurangzeb: namely that of *reputation*, which was the most important currency of the international political system of the early modern period (Münkler 2017; Schilling 2008: 70). The preservation of the same, both internally and externally, was a crucial political maxim of every early modern ruler and dynasty. From this point of view, we can at least understand Aurangzeb's never-ending campaigns in the Deccan a bit better. For each year, effort, costs and the destruction of human and material resources increased in gigantic proportions, without being able to bring all of India under his control. A retreat into the empire's northern core areas became with each passing year more impossible, since this would have amounted to a defeat, and Aurangzeb's reputation as ruler and army leader would have suffered considerably.

Aurangzeb ruled at a time of global wars, plagues, natural disasters, perennial insecurity and social disruption, as Geoffrey Parker has recently shown in his masterpiece (2013). Aurangzeb's ongoing imperialist foreign policy was no exception, costing tens of thousands of lives and affecting entire regions, but we must understand his political actions and decisions behind these overarching global power structures (Conrad 2016: 101–110). In these turbulent and often chaotic times, when Europe had just recovered from its Thirty Year War (1618–1648), the German early modern 'Urkatastrophe', Aurangzeb sought without ceasing to centralize India, but in vain, under the Mughal dynasty. His vision was the *Pax Aurangzebia*, which should have guaranteed all its subjects, Muslims and non-Muslims, security and justice.

Conclusion

Under the reign of Aurangzeb Alamgir (1658–1707), the ideal of an Indian empire, which was to encompass all areas of the Indian subcontinent and which had been the dream of all ambitious Indian rulers, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims alike, was almost fully achieved: Shortly

before Aurangzeb's death, almost the entire subcontinent, with the exception of the southern tip of India, had become the dominion of the gigantic Mughal Empire.

Aurangzeb pursued his own way from the beginning of his reign, seeking to put his own mark on the glorious dynasty of the Mughals. He was economical, disciplined, strictly religious, just and tolerant towards other religions, as long as they submitted to the idea of empire. For this, he renounced the royal pomp of his predecessors and preferred simplicity instead. He did so without drastically parting from his prominent predecessors but rather referred on many occasions, directly and indirectly, to their legitimacy of rule. It indeed makes sense to speak of Aurangzeb's very own Realpolitik, as his rule underwent numerous course changes and adjustments in order to adapt his imperial apparatus to the highly complex Indian societies, politics, religions and cultures.

He was a devout believer, demanded much of himself and others and believed in a meritocratically recruited and run administration that gave Hindus and Muslims alike the chance for successful careers; he valued discipline and renunciation; fiercely defied rebels and traitors and displayed gentleness, humour and forgiveness. While he ordered the destruction of a dozen Hindu temples during his nearly 50 years of reign for political and punitive measures, Aurangzeb engaged in Hindu literature, consulted Hindu intellectuals and physicians, paid tribute to highly religious fakīrs, offered several stipends to prominent Hindu spirituals, venerated the Ellora Temple and gave important political posts to influential Hindus.

All this should not be surprising anymore, as the Mughal dynasty of the second half of the seventeenth century has finally turned into a fixture of India's *composite culture* (Alam and Subrahmanyam 2012: 337), into which Aurangzeb was born and in which he spoke, since his childhood, in everyday life in Hindi. It is against this background that we understand why Aurangzeb and his closest entourage regarded the destruction of a temple as an ultima ratio and not as self-perpetuity and religious satisfaction. Instead, Aurangzeb and his inner circle of advisers preferred diplomacy, as they were well aware of the importance of a temple destruction, which is why they left the thousands of the empire's temples untouched, gave protection and granted new temple buildings. Whilst entire libraries about Europe's smallest regions are available to us, we are still at the very beginning of analyzing Mughal governmental practices and politics in India, in particular during Aurangzeb's rule, which is still primarily analyzed and reiterated in terms of religious issues. Only the important Andhra Pradesh State Archives, for example, lists around 150,000 untouched documents on Aurangzeb's rule in the Deccan.[15] However, even though there is still plenty to do, this does not mean that we can continue to summarize 50 years of Indian history in such simple narratives as we have seen in our three Princeton University Press excerpts at the beginning. The consequence of this simplified Aurangzeb narrative is that not only the governmental practice of a single ruler is summarized too crudely; rather, and this is the actual danger, the entire 50 years of Muslim rule and thus the history of the entire Mughal dynasty appear as consistently aggressive, Asiatic-despotic and solely motivated to introduce *Shar'ia* in India, to convert all Hindus to Islam and to destroy their temples.

But in this way, we play into both hands of the extremist camps: ultra-orthodox and conservative Muslims perceive this ahistorical image, which still dominates the scientific and public discourse of Aurangzeb, as that of the ideal Muslim ruler and praise his allegedly constant aggressive attitude against all non-Muslims, overlooking all aspects of Mughal cosmopolitanism and tolerance that also characterized his reign. On the other hand, Islamophobic intellectuals and supporters of the BJP are benefiting and are encouraged by this traditional narrative of Islamic history in India, which in their opinion was characterized only by violence against Hindus and the destruction of their temples. This particular narrative is the foundation of a decades-long discursive victim role, which has a high political value and represents a very serious threat to

social peace in today's India. The BJP's associated victim status guarantees public resonance, the moral legitimacy of elevated material and immaterial claims and, importantly, a clear conscience in the exercise of physical violence. And, as we know since the Gujarat massacres in 2002 and the BJP's increase in power ever since, attacks against Muslims happen on a daily basis in India, as seen in the so-called cruel cow slaughters (see e.g. Roy 2016: 15).

Any author writing on Aurangzeb must, therefore, be aware that his or her work participates in and contributes to the explosively charged social and political discourse of today's India. So, to end in the words of the great Romila Thapar, who spent her entire life working on a constant critical approach to the (Indian) past and only recently had to experience the drastic influence of the BJP government on higher education policy,[16] this realization means that we have to work towards "understanding the past, with an eye to the present. That is, being aware of the politics of history".[17]

Notes

1 His three brothers were Dara Shukoh (1615–1659), Shah Shuja (1616–1660) and his younger brother Murad (1624–1681). For a detailed biography on Aurangzeb, see Truschke (2017).
2 Faruqui and Truschke present excellent surveys on the war of succession; see Faruqui (2012: 168–180) and Truschke (2017: 22–32).
3 A detailed comparative study on Aurangzeb that places his reign into a more global perspective is still missing. In this context, the Current DFG-Collaborative Research Centre, "Macht and Herrschaft – Premodern Configurations in a Transcultural Perspective" and their multiple pioneering and detailed comparative studies such as Becher et al. 2018 deserve our special attention.
4 For a detailed biography on Sarkar, see Chakrabarty (2015).
5 Chandra Jnan was essentially the first to focus on the emperor's pragmatism; see Jnan (1957); see also Husain (2002).
6 In this context, it is actually interesting to see that Islamic history did not 'need' a middle age, see Bauer (2018).
7 In this chapter the author has not used diacritical marks except in titles of Sanskrit texts.
8 For this argument, see Kinra (2009: 167).
9 See in detail Faruqui (2012).
10 See in detail Copland et al. (2012: 104–123).
11 See Subrahmanyam (2019: 503).
12 Next to her previously mentioned pioneering biography on Aurangzeb, Audrey Truschke delivered another must read; see Truschke (2016). On Shaysta Khan, see Truschke (2016: 236–237).
13 See the important works from Pernau (2013) and Pernau (2007).
14 See in detail Eaton (2000).
15 Fortunately, there are promising initiatives on the way that seek to discover the 'treasure troves' of Indian archives; see "Hyd Treasure of Persian Archives, Says Scholar," http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/70744646.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst, accessed November 18, 2019.
16 See "Romila Thapar Refuses to Send CV to JNU, Explains Position of Professor Emerita," https://thewire.in/education/romila-thapar-cv-jnu, accessed October 6, 2019.
17 See "Romila Thapar on Whether There Is a Pattern in History," https://thewire.in/books/romila-thapar-talking-history-book-excerpt, accessed October 6, 2019.

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13

THE TERRITORIALISATION OF SIKH PASTS

Anne Murphy

Introduction

The group Sikhs for Justice proposed a non-binding referendum in 2020 to "liberate Punjab, currently occupied by India," as a precursor to the effort to initiate a binding referendum in the United Nations on the question; voting is underway as the final edits are being made on this essay.[1] Although the language on the website for this initiative speaks of Punjab, it is clear that this is about the question of Khalistan: as stated in the FAQ on the site, this referendum will help "to resolve the question of Khalistan," and the organizers note that their target of getting five million votes for an independent Punjab is "set to show the UN the will amongst the Sikh community for independence of Punjab justifying UN intervention."[2] The emergence of this referendum is not a surprise: while the movement for Khalistan was thought by many observers to be forgotten after the late 1990s, it never faded from memory, particularly within Sikh communities in the diaspora outside of India. Its expansion and greater visibility in the last decade demonstrate this. The voting form, available on the referendum website, states clearly who can participate: people of any religion living in the Indian Punjab (or, the occupied Punjab, as the form describes it) and Sikhs living outside of the state: the form clearly states that: "*pūrī dunīāṅ 'c vassde sikkh voṭ pā sakaṇge* Sikhs living anywhere in the world can vote."[3] The referendum is thus framed to give the Sikh diaspora community outside of India a say in the question—not the Punjabi diaspora as a whole. This is striking; residence in Punjab does not seem to be a requirement for "Punjabi self-determination"—but it is a requirement for those who are not Sikh.[4] The framing of the 2020 referendum initiative in terms of the Indian Punjab as a whole, as well as in relation to Khalistan, and with specific additional voting rights given to members of the Sikh community, is notable, since Sikhs hold only a 57% majority in the Indian state of Punjab and therefore cannot be said to constitute the population as a whole.[5] While the goal of the referendum is to gain international support for a binding referendum, it is clear at the time of the writing of this chapter, however, that at least so far the referendum has not garnered the international support hoped for, with a reported declaration from Global Affairs Canada, the country's Foreign Ministry, that "Canada respects the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of India, and the Government of Canada will not recognize the referendum" (Bhattacharyya 2020).

To understand this referendum, it is necessary to understand the larger struggle between the federal centre and state autonomy in the postcolonial state of India and the politics of both majoritarianism and minoritization within political culture in the country since the 1970s. These issues have only become more urgent since the Bharata Janata Party came to power in 2014. The claim to Punjab that lies at the foundation of the idea of Khalistan—and the referendum itself—however, is often framed not as a contemporary political question but as a question of history: it is undergirded by a connection between the Sikhs and the Punjab that is framed in historical terms. For Harjot Oberoi, writing in 1987, that correlation is wholly modern and new: he argued then that "it was only in the 1940s, when the demand for Pakistan was articulated by the Muslim League, and when the cold truth dawned that the Punjab might after all be divided that the Sikhs with a tragic desperation began to visualize the Punjab as their homeland" (Oberoi 1987: 27). As such, he argued, the "affective attachment with the Punjab among the Sikhs is fairly recent, and it does not date back to the early annals of the Sikh community" (Ibid.). Yet, while it is true that the notion of Punjab in *national-territorial* terms is new, since the idea of the nation–state itself is modern, such a position does not take into account the long history of the affective attachment to Punjab among Sikhs, as well as other Punjabis. This existing abiding attachment to Punjab (and a larger landscape of the Sikh community) was, at the same time, fundamentally reconfigured in the colonial period and thus cannot be seen as a "natural" or unbroken continuation of what came before.

The aim of the present chapter is to address the historical underpinnings of the Sikh connection to Punjab through a broad set of questions: What are the historical foundations of this connection and of more terrorialized understandings of the Sikh community? Is this perceived connection a purely modern phenomenon, or does it draw on longer affinities and loyalties? And, perhaps most importantly, how has it changed over time? This chapter addresses these questions through exploration of the historical production of the representation of the past in Sikh contexts, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. It does so, however, with full awareness of the enduring relevance of these issues in the present. The chapter ends, therefore, with consideration of what the answers to these questions can, and cannot, tell us about our political present. The referendum and associated political mobilization with which the chapter opened demonstrate the ongoing importance of these issues.

This chapter will show that the past and its representation were a particular concern for the Sikh community prior to the nineteenth century, when the British established control of the region in mid-century, and that the representation of the Sikh past in the precolonial period was both connected to the landscape of Punjab and also exceeded it. The imagination of the physical landscape of the community was never strictly coterminous with Punjab, and the landscape of the Gurus was far larger. At the same time, transformations in the imagination of the past and its relationship to the articulation of the "community" in the agonistic religious environment of colonial rule engaged a set of transformations of this existing historical imaginary and its physical landscape. This led to the territorialization of Sikh pasts in new ways in the colonial period that have had an enduring impact, shaping postcolonial developments even as they have operated as only one way of imagining that landscape in the diverse thought and practice of Sikh tradition. This discussion represents in abbreviated form the core arguments of my monograph (Murphy 2012), augmented by more recent research, as cited.

Imagining a Sikh landscape

We know that Punjab as a place was imagined in powerful ways by its diverse residents— Muslim, Hindu, and others—long before the language of the region and its political and cultural

centre at Lahore was recognized by the Delhi-based poet and disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, Amir Khusrau, who refers to "Lahauri" as the language of the people around Lahore in 1317–18 (Faruqi 2003: 819). As I highlighted in my 2012 monograph, the Punjabi landscape is marked by sites that claim a historical link to the Sikh Gurus, and the Sikh Gurus themselves founded sites as they built their community of followers ("Sikh" is derived from the Punjabi verb "*sikhnā*," to learn) over the course of the sixteenth and to early eighteenth centuries (Murphy 2012). The sacred geography of the Sikh tradition as a whole is comprised of the congregational sites associated with the Guru, known as *gurdwārā*s, established among the dispersed communities that constitute the tradition, often located along trade routes and in small as well as large urban centres. The gurd-wara took central stage in the early formation of the Sikh community in direct reference to its name—the doorway (*dwārā* or *duārā*) to the Guru (or under the related designation *dharamshāla*). Early mentions of the "doorway to the Guru" do not necessarily reflect the institutional sense of the term as it later develops: Guru Nānak spoke of "*sacu sālāhī dhaṅnu gurduāru*": "That blessed doorway to the Guru, where there is praise of Truth," and the Third Guru, Amardas, spoke of coming before the Guru—"*devaṇ vāle kai hathi dāti hai gurū duārai pāī*": "The gift is in the hands of the giver. It is received at the doorway to the Guru."[6] The site of access to the Guru was founda-tional to the community forming around him, in a spiritual as well as institutional sense, and the reverence for the site of the Guru came to be extended to those that were related to the Guru in the past—and were remembered in early histories and other texts. These sites grew in their insti-tutional formality during the period of the Sikh Gurus and after, particularly with the acquisition of political power by Sikhs in the late eighteenth century, and they were located along important intersections and trade routes and within communities gathered around the Gurus. A gurdwara in general terms is now any site that provides access to the Guru (now, the Guru-as-text, after the tradition of embodied human Guruship ended in the beginning of the eighteenth century), at which the community gathers in worship and memory. But many of these early gurdwaras were linked directly to the history of the Gurus in the region. The landscape of Punjab (both Indian and Pakistani and beyond) today remains populated by such *itihāsik* or "historical" gurdwaras asso-ciated with the Sikh Gurus. In my earliest work on this subject, I utilized the term "territory" to describe this mapping of Sikh pasts and presents onto the landscape; now, I would eschew such a term, with its too-easy associations with state formation and particularly the nation-state form, and would instead call this Sikh "place-making" (Murphy 2007)[7] It is crucial to remember that the revered Sikh landscape was broad and did not map to the Punjab as a region: it encompassed the landscape traversed by Guru Nānak in his period of *udāsī* (where the term refers to a period of renunciation during which the Guru travelled widely), for example, before he settled in a newly founded location for his community, called *kartārpūr*, or "city of God." As such, the landscape of the Guru stretched from Baghdad, to Benares, and beyond.[8] Sikh place-making encompasses all the locations touched by the Gurus, some of whom travelled widely, such as Guru Tegh Bahadur; Nander, one of the five *takhat* or centres of authority within the administrative structure of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (discussed subsequently), is in Maharashtra, com-memorating the location of the death of the tenth Guru.

The historical gurdwara landscape structures memory in relation to place and, in so doing, helps to constitute Sikh religious experience and its ongoing engagement with the past in the present. Through the gurdwara, visual culture, architecture and material culture come together with the history of the tradition. We see this vividly today in the sculpture park at Mehdiana in Ludhiana District (in the Indian Punjab), where the historical paintings so commonly dis-played in museums associated with gurdwaras come to life in three dimensions, displaying the sacrifices of members of the Sikh community through history (and particularly in the turbulent eighteenth century). The marking of memory on a sacred landscape in relation to a specifically

Sikh historical imaginary, however, is not singular: it accompanies a history being marked out through object and described in text, interlinked representations that make up the landscape in different ways. And this set of representations is not modern, even though much of its current structure is defined by modern administrative forms.

Early forms of representation of the Sikh past

Early forms of representations of the Sikh past are found in the *janam-sākhī* literature, literally the "witnessings of the birth/life" of the first and founding Guru, Guru Nānak, although the historicity of these texts is open to question due to their inclusion of miraculous elements (McLeod 2000: 38). This set of texts provides is evidence of the importance of the narration of the life of the Guru in relation to the formation of the Sikh community. This type of orientation towards the past blossoms in the eighteenth century, when the period of living human-embodied Guruship ends with the death of the Tenth and final human-embodied Guru in 1708, and the *granth* or text takes centre stage as the conceptual leader of the community or *panth*. We see in tandem with this literary florescence a significant expansion in material mnemonic and representational practices oriented towards the telling of the Sikh past. Two related genres of textual production in this period demonstrate this interface between textual historiographical traditions and the material culture of memory. One of these is the genre known as the *gurbilās*, or "the play of the Guru"; the other is known as the *rahit*, a body of texts that, in some cases, feature narrative portions reminiscent of the Gurbilās but otherwise represent ideals and imperatives on behaviour and belief for members of the evolving Sikh community, particularly in the form of the Khalsa, the orthodox form of Sikh practice promulgated by Guru Gobind Singh at the end of the seventeenth century (Dhavan 2011; Murphy 2007, 2012; Vig 2020). The historical orientations that emerged in these and related forms (such as the *bansāvaliān* and *gurpranālıāṅ*) in the eighteenth century drew upon a wide range of antecedents and were influenced by a range of contemporary sources in Persian, Sanskrit, and other vernacular languages (Dhavan 2011; Fenech 2008, 2013; Murphy 2007, 2012; Rinehart 2011; Vig 2020).

There are also objects revered for their connection to history. These can be called "relics," and often are, utilizing the English term.[9] But a Punjabi equivalent is not available to that term; the objects in question are most often described in Punjabi as *itihāsik vastūāṅ* ("historical objects") and *shastar vastar* ("weapons and clothes") in texts from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in which lists of them were compiled. They have been collected, (sometimes) displayed, and revered for their connection to the Sikh Gurus and other important persons in the tradition. There is a wide range of objects that we can call by this name: clothing, shoes, chariots, and weapons. Weapons are the most common example of the type, collected and displayed in gurdwaras across Punjab and beyond: they have been daily displayed and described at the Akal Takhat in Amritsar, for example, as well as at Takhat Sachkhand Sri Hazur Abchalnagar Sahib in Nanded, Maharashtra, the *takhat* associated with the death of Guru Gobind Singh. Other objects are found outside of India; the family that possesses the Ganga Sagar, an urn said to have been gifted by the Tenth Guru to a family loyal to him, is based in Pakistan and the United Kingdom. Some objects are revered because they have been used by the Guru, others for having been gifted by him. At the village of Chakk Fatih Singhwala near Bathinda, Punjab, the family of Jasbir Singh holds objects of both types: a *manjī* or cot that the Tenth Guru was said to have sat upon; a *tawā*, or large cooking surface, which is said to have belonged to a woman in the family, Mai Desaan, and was used by her to make bread for the Guru; a low chair, said to have belonged to Mai Desaan and upon which the Guru's wife, Mata Sahib Devi, sat; and a silk *dastār* of Guru Gobind Singh and other clothing belonging to the Guru and his wife that were

given to the family. The remembrance of the Guru at the site today revolves around the service of Mai Desaan; she served the Guru and is remembered and honoured for this. Objects can thus reveal many things: relationships between the Guru and followers, relationships with members of the Gurus' families (at Manji Sahib in Kiratpur, the embroidery of the Sixth Guru's daughter is kept), and the nature of the *sangat* or community itself and the service that joined and joins them together around the Guru. They are also linked to places and to histories of interaction and presence in them. The Bhais of Bagrian, in another example, have a collection of objects from the Guru that represent the mandate they were given to provide *langar* to the community at Bagrian (Singh, S. and Singh, R. 2012). The objects that were gifted by the Gurus, therefore, speak about the relationship of the family to the Guru. They also further reflect the ongoing status of the family in the community in religious, political, and social terms, as the religious specialists associated with the Phulkian states of eastern Punjab (Murphy 2012: chs. 1, 2, 8)

But what of Punjab in this historical landscape of the Sikh community as articulated through text, object, and site? Even though the landscape of the Guru moved beyond Punjab, we do see an emergent notion of Punjab as a region in the period of the emergence of the Sikh tradition and within Sikh texts. For example, in the Braj seventeenth-century text the *Bachitar Nāṭak*, attributed to the tenth Guru and contained within the *Dasam Graṅth*, "*madara desh*" seems to refer roughly to Punjab, and it is linked to the founding of the Sodhi and Bedi clans, the lineages associated most prominently with the Gurus (Murphy 2018):

> *paṭhe kāgadaṁ madra rājā sudhāraṁ, āpo āpa mo baira bhāvaṁ bisāraṁ /*
>   *nripaṁ mukaliyaṁ dūta so kāsī āyaṁ, sabai bediyaṁ bheda bhākhe sunayaṁ /*
>   *sabai beda pāṭhī cale madra desaṁ, praṇāmaṁ kīyo ān kai kai naresaṁ*

> The Sodhi king of Madra sent letters to them, entreating them to forget past enmities
>   The messengers sent by the king came to Kashi and gave the message to all the Bedis
>   All the reciters of the Vedas came to Madra Desha and made obeisance to the King.[10]

Here we do seem to see a sense of new kinds of "culture boundaries" (in Sheldon Pollock's words) that Pollock has argued are associated with the emergence of the vernacular; this does not rely solely upon the formal designation of the Lahore province in the Mughal administration to describe the region of the Indus and its tributaries mentioned in earlier literature. These boundaries also exceed it; they do not here map to the emergence of a regional polity at that time (Pollock 2006: 383 and elsewhere).[11] This was not, however, only a feature of Sikh cultural production. For example, we can also see the region's emergence in Waris Shah's mid-eighteenth-century rendition of the story of the star-crossed lovers, Hīr and Rāṅjhā, perhaps the most quintessentially Punjabi text one might identify. Waris Shah opens his classic version of the story, *Hīr*, in praise of the Lord, the Prophet, and the Sufi saints who were so important to the cultural landscape of Punjab, creating Punjab as an Islamic landscape (with variations between the Shahmukhi or Perso-Arabic and Gurmukhi printed versions of the text):

> *ma'udūda dā lāḍalā pīra cishatī, shakkara gaṅja māsa'ūda bharapūra hai jī*
>   *khānadāna vicca cishata de kāmalīata, shahira fakkara dā paṭana ma'mūra jī*
>   *bāīṅ kutabāṅ de vicca hai pīra kāmala, jaiṅdī ājazī zuhada manazūra hai jī*
>   *shakkara gaṅja ne āṇi makāna / mukāma kītā, dukkh darada paṅjāba dā dūra hai jī*[12]

> The beloved of Moinuddin (of Ajmer), the Chishti Pir, he is full as a treasury of pure sweetness,

He is the perfection of the Chisht lineage, whose city has become civilized (*ma'mūr*) as a town of mendicants.

He is the perfect saint among the 22 poles (*kutabāṅ*) [that guide the world], whose renunciation and humility is accepted by all,

Shakar-Ganj has come and made this his home (*muqām*), dispelling the sadness and pain of Punjab.

In Waris Shah, the territory or *vilāyat* of the saint is described, locating Punjab as a distinctive region and simultaneously making it a part of a far broader Islamic imaginary.[13] Farina Mir has highlighted how regional imaginaries prevailed within the *qissā* or story of Heer and Ranjha in the colonial period to define a territoriality that "emphasizes the affective attachments people established with the local, and particularly their natal places" (Mir 2010: 123), where Punjab "emerges . . . as an imagined ensemble of natal places within a particular topography (rivers, riverbanks, forests and mountains) and religious geography (Sufi shrines and Hindu monasteries)" (Mir 2010: 134). This is a mapping of Punjab: Jhang, Takhat Hazara, Tilla Jogian, Rangpur; the places that are enlivened by the always repeated story of Hīr–Rāṅjhā, fixed in time and place in this region, alongside the histories and stories associated with the Sikh Gurus and other figures with diverse religious affiliations.[14] We can see in Waris Shah's version of the text that this mapping pre-dates the British arrival. We thus see that Punjab as a place and a cultural sensibility mattered, percolating through texts that were diverse in their linguistic and religious formations—and occasionally but not always reflective of a Punjabi vernacular linguistic form (Murphy 2019b).

At the same time, such localizing and place-making discourses were also multivalent, in the Sikh context and beyond. In Waris Shah's eighteenth-century text *Hīr*, for example, we see both localizing forces—often expressed through political conflicts and attendant relationships between Punjab and adjacent regions and often invoked to denote conflict or tension between men and women—just as we have a capacious embrace of cross-regional narrative traditions and references (Murphy forthcoming). The same was true for the landscape of the Sikh past, where we see the simultaneous appearance of both localizing and broadening discourses for the imagined landscape of the Sikh community, as has been discussed. The Punjab was important, but it was not coterminous with the landscape of the emergent Sikh (or any other religious) tradition; such traditions exceeded boundaries and borders in diverse ways.

Moving from a precolonial to colonial frame

We have seen that the imagination of the Sikh landscapes has been linked to the establishment of congregational sites—the gurdwara—associated with the past of the Gurus and the community and linked to its ongoing life.[15] In the pre-British period, gurdwaras and other religious sites were provided for by the state as a type of property as *dharamarth* ("for the purpose of dharma"); in Islamic legal terms, they were known as "*madad-i-ma'ash*," or *wāqaf*, for charitable donations. They were designated thus as a broad type in relation to the state, a kind of property that operated across religious traditions and vocabularies of governance. The evidence from South Asia demonstrates that the intervention of the precolonial state in the support of religious institutions was not driven by purely religious motivations, such that we can assume Muslim rulers were primarily patrons of Muslim sites, for example, because of devotional or sectarian interests. Such grants were instead a key aspect of state formation. As Irfan Habib notes, in the Mughal period "the state had its own interest in maintaining this class [of religious grantees]. . . . The grantees were . . . [the empire's] natural apologists and propagandists . . . [and] a

bastion of conservatism, because they had nothing except their orthodoxy to justify their claims on the state's bounty" (Habib 1963: 355)[16] The Mughal emperor Jahangir defined these individuals as members of "the army of prayer," and this army contained non-Muslims alongside Muslims (a sensibility that continued under successors to the Mughals).[17]

There was a political nature to land rights in general in the precolonial period, as well as to religious grants.[18] When lands were granted to individuals and or institutions, the rights to occupancy and cultivation of such lands were left intact; the recipient gained access to revenue from the land rather than "ownership."[19] Thus, as Brian Caton has observed, the *sanad*s or documents issued to protect rights to control of land were political rather than legal documents, the former designating political rights and relationships to land and the latter an objective relationship to land as property.[20] As it was for Mughal land tenure, so it was in post-Mughal Punjab, where Andrew Major argues that "under Sikh rule landownership was not simply a question of abstract principles or time-honoured rights and responsibilities. It was, rather, a highly political question involving the strength and fiscal imperatives of the state on the one hand and the resilience or adaptability of the cultivating communities on the other" (Major 1996: 20). Understanding of rights to land changed dramatically under British rule. This shift has been described by Walter Neale as one of being from political control, with land as territory that is ruled, in the Mughal and post-Mughal view, to land as something that can be owned, in the eyes of the British (Neale 1969: 6).[21] Revenue payment within the post-Mughal Lahore state established by Ranjit Singh gave a person the right to control a piece of land in order to continue its productivity, so that the payment of revenue was fundamentally connected to control; failure to perform through payment would compromise one's right to land (Caton 2003: 154ff.; Neale 1985: 955).[22] The ensuing change engaged by the British reflected, in the words of Radha Sharma, a "British inability to free themselves of the notion of an absolute and exclusive form of proprietorship when interests in land were traditionally [in the Lahore state] multiple and inclusive" (Sharma 2000: 177).[23]

More directly relevant to our concerns here was the status of the "religious grant," a category of property that operated across religious communities. A crucial distinction that comes into play in the later management of religious sites under the British concerns the recipients of such grants: Were they individuals or corporate bodies? This was a significant question in the Mughal period as well, as evidenced by the transition under Akbar to the recognition of institutions as recipients over individuals. This ensured the continuance of grants, since institutions in theory persisted far beyond the lifespan of an ordinary person (Mukherjee and Habib 1987). Hindu temples were central to state formation, such that "a donation to Brahmans, monasteries, monks, or temples represented an investment in agrarian territoriality" (Ludden 1999: 80). There is not, however, one single monolithic "law of endowments" in Hindu traditions, Arjun Appadurai notes, because "the activities of Hindu kings in respect to temples were 'administrative' and not 'legislative,' [as later British colonial control would be,] and because their resolutions were context specific and not absorbed into a general body of evolving case law" (Appadurai 1981: 169). According to Gregory Kozlowski, "when the Mughal empire entered its long decline in the first decades of the eighteenth century, most of those striving to become its heirs shared similar attitudes about the nature of property" (Kozlowski 1985: 27). The confirmation of prior religious grants by later Sikh chiefs reflects such a dynamic (Goswamy and Grewal 1967: 38).[24]

The status of historical gurdwaras in the precolonial state system is less clear, reflecting both the complex ways in which precolonial property formations did not map directly to those instituted during British rule and the less established place for Sikh sites within state systems in the earlier period. Land grants were said to have been made to the Sikh community in the

early period of the tradition, when the Gurus established their centres throughout Punjab. These, however, are generally unattested in the Mughal imperial record, and we have little or no independent historical evidence for them.[25] The *dharamarth* records of the Khalsa Darbar, or the court of the Lahore state under Maharaja Ranjit Singh (ruled 1799–1839), do provide, however, a sense of how pre-British logics of management of gurdwaras alongside other religious sites were implemented.[26] The records demonstrate first the political nature of such grants and their need for confirmation. The grants were clearly gathered together in 1849 at the time of annexation and, in their present form in the Punjab State Archives in Chandigarh, constituted not a diachronic and comprehensive record of past practices but a set of claims being made before the new rulers, the East India Company: As political documents, such grants had to be affirmed by the new political order. For both Sikh and non-Sikh sites, religious grants under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, as well as among earlier and contemporary Sikh chiefs, were modelled along the lines of those of the Mughal court. Individuals—or rather lineages of individuals—are named as recipients, so that a grant might become quasi-hereditary (Sachdeva 1993: 122–123).[27] Prominent among them were members of families connected to the Sikh Gurus, who were given sometimes extensive patronage. Alongside these and other Sikh recipients, such as *granthī*s or Sikh textual specialists, Hindu religious specialists and Muslim shrines and saints as well were honoured with grants and past grants confirmed; thus in the Khalsa Darbar records, entire volumes were dedicated to *sādh*s and *udāsī*s (Bundle 5, Volume 2), Brahmins and *purohit*s (Bundle 5, Volumes 5 and 7), *sayyid*s and *faqīr*s (Bundle 5, Volume 11), and "famous Sardars and dependents" (Bundle 5, Volume 12).

The *dharamarth* records of the Khalsa Darbar reveal the logic of such grants as a set of claims made before the colonial state, based in persons and lineages, rather than focused on sites themselves. The overwhelming majority of grants in the corpus are structured the same way, with indication of the recipient or recipients of a grant and their heritage: the father and grandfather of a recipient are named, or, in the case of disciples, the lineage of teachers. Most of the Khalsa Darbar grants then detail the history associated with the grant under consideration, also providing a brief history of associated grants and their confirmation, usually with reference to Maharaja Ranjit Singh or his successors, Kharak Singh, Sher Singh, or Dalip Singh. For all but the first volume in the extant collection, the organizing principle is based on the designation of individuals or groups of people as recipients, under broad categories associated with their lineage (e.g., descendant of the Guru), caste (Brahmin), or role (*sādh, udāsī, purohit, faqīr*). (The first volume of the series declares itself to be about the *granth sāhibān*, or the esteemed texts, but of the 27 grants listed even there, however, the overwhelming majority clearly define an individual or individuals as the recipients.) Two volumes are recorded as "miscellaneous," and these volumes too indicate individual recipients of grants, without much detail on the reasons for the grants or the specific roles associated with grantees.[28]

How, then, was the Darbar Sahib or Harmandir Sahib (known popularly in English as the Golden Temple)—one of the most important of Sikh institutions—treated, and how were grants related to it assigned? This site provides an important case for consideration along these lines. To it was dedicated an entire volume in the Khalsa Darbar records (Bundle 5, Volume 8). The Khalsa Darbar records, however, in their current form, overwhelmingly indicate that individuals were given grants rather than the Darbar Sahib itself. Of the total 115 grants in the corpus (and an additional narrative about a *granthī* who had lost his rights), all but 4—made out to the Akal Bunga, located on the site of the Darbar Sahib, rather than to the Darbar Sahib itself—are made out to individuals.[29]

The Darbar Sahib provides a compelling example of this transition in property and the logic of ownership that impacts the status of the gurdwara under colonial rule. When the Darbar

Sahib came under the control of the British administration of Punjab, it was managed through a committee. The appointed managing committee framed a set of rules and regulations for the Golden Temple's administration, entitled the *Dastur-ul' Amal*, in which ownership was defined as follows: "the sole proprietor of this sacred institution for ever is Guru Ramdass: no person else has any title to proprietorship. The claim to the noviciate or chelaship belongs to the whole 'Khalsa' body. The Pujaris and others receive their wages from the offerings according to their appointed dues for service performed."[30] As we have seen, this does not follow the previously established model for the designation of proprietorship at a site. In the precolonial period, under Ranjit Singh and his successors, individual service providers received grants; only rarely did institutions within the Darbar Sahib (i.e. the Akal Bunga) do so. With the early British period document, which identifies the Guru as the continuing proprietor of the site and the Khalsa as his *chelā* or disciple, we see a transition into the management by the community as a whole, as a defined body, the contours of which can be delineated. This represents a fundamental change, and it is one that resonates through Sikh political and religious mobilization through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, drawing on precolonial antecedents but changing them significantly. This document is not unusual; as the next section of this chapter will show, it reflects a general orientation to the management of religious sites that developed in British administration. It draws on an already existing collective imaginary—the Khalsa—but articulates it with reference to the control of sites in a way that we have not seen in precolonial examples. This is why in the *hukamnāme*, or orders of the Guru, collected and edited by Ganda Singh, the term Khalsa is used to address the community as a whole, in capacious terms—it was clearly an important way of articulating the emerging consciousness of the community, as can be seen in texts like *Gur Sobhā*, from the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards—but orders are not issued in an institutional sense, on behalf of the Khalsa corporate body, until after 1850, when the Golden Temple's administration had been framed in the *Dastur-ul' Amal* with reference to the community of the Khalsa as owner (Ganda Singh 1999: 233–236).[31] The language of the community and its relationship to formal institutional authority—and territory—began to take shape in a new way at this time. This was accelerated by broader transformations in the management of religious sites in British India that contributed further to a territorialized imaginary of the community.[32]

The production of a Sikh understanding of territory

The debate over the administration of religious sites in colonial India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the articulation of this debate with specific reference to the management of Sikh gurdwaras, deeply influenced how territory was framed in relation to Sikh identity and history. Since the mid-nineteenth century, the British Crown had attempted to reconfigure its relationship with religious sites that, according to the various regulations passed in the presidencies in the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was obligated to manage. The divestment of government control in some cases remained more of an ideal than a reality. But it was a powerful ideal, and the government was obligated to define administrative mechanisms for religious sites that would allow it to divest itself of explicit and direct control. This process, at the same time, provided for (and, indeed, enforced) machinery that accorded with colonial formulations of the distinctions between religious and secular institutions and discourses and particular understandings of the relationships between specific religious communities and places.

The British had become deeply involved in the management of religious institutions in India in the eighteenth century, and regulations designed to provide for government support of religious institutions were passed in 1810, 1817, and 1827 in Bengal, Madras, and Bombay, respectively.[33] The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a range of actions meant

to modify this involvement. The Religious Endowments Act of 1863 was passed to allow the Board of Revenue to withdraw from active oversight of religious sites and specifically to undo the precedents set by these earlier regulations,[34] which, according to the 1810 regulation, allowed that "support of mosques, Hindoo temples, colleges, and for other pious and beneficial purposes, and of all public buildings" be vested in the Board of Revenue and Board of Commissioners in the districts subject to the control of each.[35] The 1863 Act therefore provides the context for the Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925, as well as legislation of the same period concerning other religious establishments, such as the Hindu Religious Endowments Board in Madras Presidency, which provided for the management of Hindu temples, and the Mussalman Wakf Validating Act of 1913 (revised in 1923), meant to ensure that Muslims retained the right to establish and administer *waqf* along guidelines in keeping with government interpretation of the philanthropic (Appadurai 1981: 52).

The Legislative Council debates regarding Gurdwara Reform reveal how the case was made for the production of a Sikh governing body for gurdwaras and, in this sense, how colonial governance interacted with Sikh and other interests in the Legislative Council context to produce a particular imagination of the Sikh community, in administrative terms, in relation to larger all-India concerns and definitions of the religious and its place in the public sphere (Murphy 2013). This is reflected in other locations as well: Arjun Appadurai has shown how the evolving conditions of the colonial state's role in managing south Indian Hindu temples, for example, provided a local instance of broader discourse over the management of religious sites, such that "the judges of the High Court of Madras . . . [sought in the period of 1878 to 1916] to legally define a sectarian electorate for the temple and in the process encourage a variety of groups to refine their political self-conceptions and to use legal language and legal categories to pursue their interests" (Appadurai 1981: 181). The impact of these administrative innovations on endowments for religious institutions had a wide range of largely unforeseen consequences. Indeed, as Appadurai has argued regarding the British administration of Hindu temples in the Tamil region:

> British efforts to "manage" conflict in the temple [in question] had the twin effects of forcing the British to act in accordance with the structural and cultural needs of the temple community and of providing natives with a fresh set of categories within which to frame their interests in the redistributive process of the temple.
>
> (Appadurai 1981: 17)

The status of the owner and the rightful managing body of the religious institution becomes central in this legislation and is defined in various ways for different religious communities in British India; this is one of the key, and again largely unintended, political effects of this range of administrative mechanisms. It is the acceptance of these different modes of description of the definition of "community" that re-inscribed differences and conflicts among and within communities. This process in the case Appadurai examines provided for caste and sect as determining factors in the definition of an institution's community (Appadurai 1981: 188 – 89). Although it has been commonly accepted that the designation of Hinduism as a single religious designation is a colonial product, it has been less commonly acknowledged that so, too, was the notion of Hinduism as a *not bounded* religion. This assumption encouraged the articulation of a broad, encompassing notion of Hinduism in contradistinction to the narrower definitions engaged for Sikhism and Islam (Murphy 2012: ch. 6). In the Gurdwara context, historical precedent and the ensuing right of the community were invoked in relation to the codification of the definition of who is a Sikh—a preoccupation of the colonial state in general, of course,

and one that was then formally enacted with the passage of the Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925 (Murphy 2012: ch. 7).

In the end, the distinctions among the different methods implemented for the administration of different religious sites in colonial India had a powerful effect. Whereas in the case of Hindu temples, individual temple-managing committees were defined along sect and caste lines, within a broad definition of Hinduism, the Sikh community was designated as a single *corporate body*, responsible for the management of all historically defined gurdwaras through a single representational governing body, the Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, or SGPC. It is no coincidence then that the Gurdwara Act of 1925 therefore also defined formally who is a Sikh, delineating the limits and core of the community. In debate over Gurdwara reform and the designation of the proper governing individuals/bodies for these institutions, we see the articulation of a tightly bounded religious community, who constitutes it, and how it should act. This body was created to represent the interests of the entire religious community as a whole. This is in contrast to how Hindu temples were managed, as well as how *waqf* were administered. In the former case, temples were seen to be inherently local in their character and in this way expressed the highly decentralized and diverse nature of "Hinduism" as understood by the colonial state; at the same time, this loose definition was upheld as an overarching concept that encompassed others. In the latter case, a homogenized and elite understanding of Islam was followed in the designation of rightful Islamic practice, marginalizing local customs (Kozlowski 1985). Local controls would, however, be maintained for specific endowments (Murphy 2012).

The new set of administrative and legislative systems that emerged in the early twentieth century both brought about and reflected the transformation of the Sikh historical imaginary described in brief earlier—linked to the geographical landscape of the unfolding of the Sikh past but multivalent and capacious, encompassing the broad travels of the Gurus and the locations associated with their presence—to one fundamentally related to a new sense of territoriality that emerges in the colonial period, drawing upon and significantly modifying pre-existing precolonial/early modern formations of territoriality in an agrarian context. David Ludden's discussion of agrarian territoriality is useful in framing this transformation. In the medieval and early modern periods, Ludden has argued, state formation was characterized by "flexible agrarian alliances among farmers, warriors, merchants, ritualists, kings, and literati" that participated in sacred territorialization projects (Ludden 1999: 65). Landholding thus took place alongside a wide range of economic and social practices in the premodern and early modern periods in relation to the granting of honours and emblems to articulate forms of sovereignty. Under the new property provisions instituted with the permanent settlements implemented under British rule, we see an altered form of territory, articulated through ownership and connected to single and exclusive owners. We have seen in the data presented previously that, most commonly, individuals were named within religious grants; only very rarely were other recipients named, such as the Guru Granth Sahib (but through a human caretaker) or in the Jogi establishment at Jakhbar. The body to be designated as the rightful owner/controller of religious property became a highly contentious issue early on in the formation of the East India Company state and even more so under direct Crown rule as the state sought to identify the appropriate "owners" of religious sites. In the solving of this "problem," particular understandings of community and property were institutionalized. Debate and conflict over the administration of religious sites was not unique to the Sikh community and the Gurdwara Reform Movement—religious institutions and their management were contested all over India in response to an inconsistent and sometimes contradictory state orientation towards them. The community associated with/designated for a religious site had to be determined: this was the basic premise of the legislation that sought to decouple the state from religious sites. In so doing, a religious body was determined,

and for the Sikh community, a body was sought to represent the interests of Sikhs as a whole. This corporate representative body for *all Sikhs* was defined and administered through the Act in relation to places that were seen to represent and embody, in a unique way, Sikh history: the *itihāsik* or historical Gurdwara. The fight for Sikh control of gurdwaras expressed in the Gurdwara Reform Movement thus represented the culmination of a transition in the making of the historicality of place in Sikh contexts in relation to a new kind of territoriality and a new logic of ownership by and for the community.

Conclusions

The overall debate over the management of Sikh religious sites culminated in the Gurdwara Reform or Akali Movement of the 1920s. This movement has been the subject of considerable study, particularly since it proved to be the first significant and widespread mobilization of Sikhs in opposition to colonial rule, as other forms of resistance coalesced in the period. The 1919 unrest (and the infamous Jallianwala Bagh incident), and then at the same time the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movements, expressed growing anti-colonial sentiment, as South Asians and particularly Punjabis returned in significant numbers from the fighting in World War I. In 1922, V.W. Smith, superintendent of police in the Criminal Investigation Department of Punjab, declared the Akali or Gurdwara Reform Movement a "cause of much greater concern and anxiety than [the] civil disobedience campaign instituted by Mr. Gandhi." He identified specific reasons for this:

> A spirit of fanaticism which cannot be exorcised has permeated the ranks . . . of the Akalis. Gandhi's propaganda makes its appeal mainly to the urban classes, which lack both the stamina and physical courage to oppose successfully even small bodies of police; the Akali campaign is essentially a rural movement, and its followers are men of fine physique with a national history of which the martial characteristics have been purposely kept alive both by Government and the Sikhs themselves. Finally, the national volunteer is unarmed, whereas the Akali has acquired the right to arm himself with an obsolete, but none the less formidable, offensive weapon.[36]

Mr. Smith's statement is rife with stereotypes that are well known to any observer of the colonial period: the "effeminate" urban classes and the "fanaticism" (and dangerous physical power) of the Sikhs. What is perhaps most striking, however, is the opposition posited here between what is deemed an urban movement—the civil disobedience movement—and the Gurdwara Reform Movement, for there were in fact close ties between the Akali movement and the Non-Cooperation movement on both leadership levels and in overall approach. Ruchi Ram Sahni (1863–1948), Punjabi intellectual, witness to the Gurdwara Reform Movement, and member of the Punjabi Legislative Council, thus described the Gurdwara movement as "the best and most inspiring instance of Mahatma Gandhi's teachings of non-violence in thought, word and deed" (Sahni [1940s?] 1960–69[?]): i) and said that "Mahatma Gandhi himself could not have expected more faithful followers to carry out his non-violent non-cooperative struggle in the face of the gravest provocation" (Ibid: iv). Indeed, in response to an Akali victory in 1922, Gandhi sent a congratulatory telegram to Sardar Kharak Singh, President of the not yet legally sanctioned SGPC, which had been formed by members of the Sikh community as a counter to then-current government administrative mechanisms for gurdwaras, until it was eventually accepted by the government as the sole representative administrative body to govern Sikh shrines in 1925 in Punjab; Gandhi's telegram in 1922 read: "first decisive battle for India's

freedom won, congratulations" (Singh 1965: xi). Through the subsequent Gurdwara Reform Act of 1925, a Sikh historical landscape was defined in place and in relation to a definition of Sikh identity (Murphy 2012: Chapter 6–7).

Historical sites became a particularly charged arena for the articulation of Sikh positions within a range of evolving colonial realms of signification, as the "historical gurdwara" came to be fixed as property in direct relation to polemics over who is a Sikh. "Sikhness" thus came to be constituted as a singular and unchanging category in relation to property, which provided objectivized evidence of the Sikh past alongside the movement toward the objectification of Sikhness as a set of beliefs (Murphy 2012: ch. 4). It has been shown that history and the past mattered a great deal in precolonial Sikh discourses. But in the colonial regime of meaning and power, Sikhness was wedded to history in relation to place as possession in relation to a particular politicized notion of identity. This produced a new kind of territoriality (Murphy 2012: chs. 5–8). David Ludden has argued that "many social movements that moderns might call 'religious' might be better understood as formations of agrarian territorialism": tied to the articulation of a king's sovereignty through the granting of honours and rights (Ludden 1999: 85). The movement for gurdwara management, and the formation of the SGPC, can be seen as a transformation of an early modern form of agrarian territorialism, altered and inflected within the territorial logic of the East India Company and later Crown rule of property, to create a new Sikh territorialism with shifting relations to state sovereignty and animated by a communitarian imagination of the past that was inherited, but also transformed, from earlier times.

As I noted in my 2012 monograph, cultural history is not the place to determine the needs and requirements of the present. The quest for an independent Punjab for the Sikhs is not therefore a thing of the past: it is grounded in the now and in a future that some aspire to. It reflects today the political realities of postcolonial India, and the genesis of the movement for Sikh territory must be seen as a product of complex historical developments that emerge out of the colonial period and move into the postcolonial period. They do not simply reflect a fixed and ahistorical understanding of Sikh territory. The point made here is also a larger one: it addresses a line of questioning pursued in different ways by Partha Chatterjee and Christopher Bayly, examining the loyalties and affinities that came to be mapped in partial terms at times, and overdetermined terms at others, with the idea of the nation in South Asia. While important, Bayly's attempt to map prior patriotisms to the formations of nationalism did not take fully into account the ways in which those precursors to nationalism were *changed* through interaction with the colonial state; he posits continuity as a means of accounting for that which persists from the past, paying insufficient attention to how such continuities are fundamentally formed by the context they are found within.[37] There is no simple continuity between any pre-modern loyalty and the modern notion of the nation, as the "national" itself has been (and, indeed, must be) configured in diverse ways in modernity. Questioning the assumption of continuity is important: it can allow us to reconsider the historical justifications made in claims to the nation and discover what other options may exist within it.

Notes

1 Quote from https://referendum2020.org/faq, accessed August 13, 2019. This information is still avail-able as of August 2, 2020, under the question "What is Punjab referendum 2020?" The material on the site has been significantly reorganized since 2019; it changes relatively frequently. Voting is now tak-ing place utilizing a form available on the website: https://referendum2020.org/downloads, accessed August 2, 2020.

2 Quote from: https://referendum2020.org/faq, accessed August 13, 2019. The language of the site is changed quite frequently. The same message was not present on August 2, 2020.

3 See form dated July 4, 2020, available at: https://referendum2020.org/downloads, accessed August 2, 2020.

4 Kalvapalle Rahul, "Sikh Group Plans to hold Khalistan Referendum Polling in Canadian Cities in 2020." October 3, 2018. https://globalnews.ca/news/4439381/khalistan-referendum-2020-sikhs-for-justice-canada/, accessed August 13, 2019.

5 This is according to the 2011 Census of India. See: www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/C-01.html, accessed September 28, 2019. Sikhs are a 70% majority in rural areas of the state.

6 See Adi Granth/Guru Granth Sahib, p. 153 (first quotation); p. 33 (second quotation). The term *duāra* is commonly used to indicate the means to an end or a goal, such as *mokh duāra*, the doorway to *mokṣa* or liberation. See discussion, Murphy (2012).

7 For useful discussion of territory in relation to the language of place-making, see Casey, *Getting Back into Place,* xxvi.

8 https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Sikh-community-to-renovate-damaged-Baghdad-gurdwara/articleshow/8510130.cms, accessed August 13, 2019. Guru Nānak's visit to Benares is commemorated today by Gurdwara Sri Guru Ka Bagh Varanasi.

9 For use of the term, see Mohinder Singh (2002a, 2002b), Mohinder Singh and Rishi Singh (2002), and Bhayee Sikandar Singh and Roopinder Singh (2012).

10 *Bachitar Natak*, ch. 4, v. 1–2.

11 It was in the reign of Akbar that the province of Lahore was reorganized to encompass the five doabs and the term Punjab was in use at that time. The first history of "the Punjab" was written by Ganesh Das at the beginning of the colonial period, the *Char Bagh-i-Punjab* (Grewal 2004: 9).

12 The second and third lines are transposed in the Gurmukhi version published by Padam (Padam, ed. 1998 [1977]: 61). I give the order of the the Shahmukhi (Urdu/Perso-Arabic script) text by Sabir (Sabir, ed. 1986: 2–3). Although Waris Shah's text is not available in a critical edition, the Sabir version is regarded as the strongest published version. There are substantial variants in published editions, particularly when comparing Shahmukhi and Gurmukhi versions; we can see this clearly when comparing Sabir (1986) with Ghumman, ed. (2007: 1), as well as Padam, ed. 1998 [1977]. For example, in this verse, famous (*mashhūr*) replaces *ma'mūra* and *makān* replaces *muqām* in Padam's version. For a discussion of versions, see Deol 2002.

13 There are many similar articulations of the region in Shah's text; see also verses 56, 141, 311, 364, et al. in Sabir, ed. (1986).

14 On the imagination of place and region in Waris Shah's text, see Anne Murphy (forthcoming).

15 This section of the essay draws heavily on Murphy 2012: ch. 5.

16 See also Mohammed (2002: 47–48). This is notably similar to the role local religious elites played under colonial rule in Punjab, as discussed at length by David Gilmartin (1988).

17 On the army of prayer, see Mohammed (2002: 32). For the example of non-Muslim supporters of the Mughals, see Goswamy and Grewal (1967: 36, 164). On the army of prayer for a Sikh leader, see Goswamy and Grewal (1968: 247–249). See also Banga (1978: Chapter 7).

18 For parallels in South India, see discussion in Dirks (1987).

19 Compare Habib (1999); Banga (1978). Interestingly, Banga's 1978 study of the agrarian system of the Sikhs assumes property ownership, but given its reliance upon British records, this is not surprising.

20 See Caton (2003: 161ff.) for a discussion of the problem in relation to evolving British notions of property. Changes in the leadership of religious institutions also required confirmation of grants. Also see Goswamy and Grewal (1967: 31). This was in keeping with Mughal administrative policies: each subsequent ruler confirmed the revenue-free grants given by prior rulers, because these grants were fundamentally political in nature; even when Aurangzeb designated such rights as heritable, he emphasized their status as loans. Thus the example Goswamy and Grewal present from Pindori, which indicates the sale of *madad-i-ma'āsh* property (Goswamy and Grewal 1968: 35, 185–188). See Major (1996: 25ff).

21 For discussion of how the larger transition in property rights impacted the imagination of the ownership of Gurdwaras, see Murphy (2012: ch. 5).

22 See Banga (1978: 171–172); Major (1996: 24–25). Banga contends that Sikh rulers "encouraged the actual cultivators as against the holders of superior ownership" (1978: 171); her sources in this section, however, are primarily British, which leaves room for debate, since the comments so clearly reflect the debates that ensued regarding who the holders of ownership were (the cultivators or hereditary village leaders). Major describes the Lahore state as "proto-modern," in that "its territorial sovereignty, especially along the western and southern boundaries, was frequently but a ritualistic hegemony backed

23 Elsewhere Radha Sharma argues that "agricultural land was heritable and alienable through sale, gift or mortgage" (2005: 144).

24 Mughal grants were confirmed by Sikh leaders who preceded the rise of Ranjit Singh's centralized administration, as well as by Ranjit Singh himself; see the examples in Goswamy and Grewal (1968: 227–229, 235–237, 251–254, 271–273).

25 See discussion, Murphy, *Materiality of the Past,* 162–163.

26 For full discussion of this corpus of documents, see Murphy (2012: ch. 5); for consideration of the evidence in this body of texts for identity-formation in pre-British Punjab, see Murphy (2019a).

27 See also Banga and Grewal (1987: 73; document 383).

28 Khalsa Darbar Records vol.13 and 14. See more extensive discussion in Murphy, *Materiality of the Past,* ch. 5.

29 Khalsa Darbar Records B. 5, V. 8, records 141, 143, 145, 159.

30 See reference in Kaur (1983: 62 and Appendix IV [199–203]). See Kerr (1976: 316–319). Kerr includes the Administration Paper for the Sikh Temple, dated September 15, 1859, as an appendix (317–319).

31 On *Gur Sobhā* and the imagination of the Khalsa, see Murphy (2012: ch. 3).

32 Broader transformations in the notion of property itself also contributed to this change; see Murphy (2012: 177–183).

33 Regulations XIX of Bengal Code and VII of 1817 of the Madras Code and XVII of 1827 in Bombay Presidency.

34 Act No. XX, Section 1, of 1863, IOL v/8/39. IOR L/P&J/5/3 for proposed bills, statements of objects and reason, and final published bill.

35 Regulation XIX, Bengal Code 1810, 1804–1814 Regulations pages 411–414, IOR v/8/18; 412.

36 Home Department, Political. File No. 459 of 1922, Serial Nos. 1–10: 27. National Archives of India, New Delhi.

37 See Bayly (1998): Chs. 1–4, on nationalism and its precolonial antecedents.

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Contemporary South Asian religions

Religious pluralism

14

DALITS AND RELIGION

Anti-caste movements in India

Debi Chatterjee

Introduction

Dalits in India are among the most marginalized sections of India's population. They are the lowest in terms of the caste hierarchy. They have systematically suffered caste oppression through generations, imposed upon them by rigid social–religious norms. The Hindu Brahmanical order of society relegated the Dalits or low castes to the bottom of the hierarchic caste structure, stigmatizing them as impure and polluting. Across time and across the country, they have been referred to by different names. Religion has permeated their existence, determined their lived experiences and provided them the vision for the future and their guide to action.

The use of the term 'subaltern' has also been invoked to refer to the Dalits. Between 1982 and 1996, a group of scholars referred to as the Subaltern Studies Collective brought the term to the centre of critical scholarship, publishing nine substantial volumes on south Asian history and society from a 'subaltern perspective'. In the preface to the first volume of *Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha proposed the following definition of the term 'subaltern':

> The word 'subaltern' . . . [s]tands for the meaning as given in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, that is, of 'inferior rank'. It will be used . . . as a name for the general attitude of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way.
>
> (Guha 1982: vii)

Needless to say, the subordination and subjection that mark the life of Dalits bring them into the frame of subalternity. The Dalits are cumulatively and comprehensively disadvantaged and subordinated through the caste system that operates to the advantage of the dominant caste groups. To put it in the words of Partha Chatterjee, "no matter how we chose to characterize it, subaltern consciousness in the specific cultural context of India cannot but contain caste as a central element in its constitution" (1989: 169).

As noted by Sathianathan Clarke, we need to move away from a homogenization of the subaltern by clubbing together all categories of differentiation such as 'class', 'caste', 'age', 'gender' 'office' and so on and be cautious so as to not construct subaltern as a unitary 'negative

consciousness' which is either mainly passive or merely oppositional. It is important to recognize the active and creatively constructive aspects of subalternity revealed through a collective consciousness that actualizes its subjectivity through a process of creative and calculating engagements with the material and symbolic order of the dominant communities within the restrictions of severe subjection (Clarke 1998: 7). The resistance conducted in a religious idiom has engaged with as well as subverted—but has been also contained by—hegemonic limits, as noted by Saurabh Dube in his study (1993:121–158).

Religion as oppression

Orientalists and colonial administrators attempted to trace the roots of the caste system in India, and many searched for possible explanations of the caste system in Hinduism. The classical Hindu scriptures, rooted in the ancient Vedas, were seen as providing the underlying ideological structure of the caste system. At the core of that ideology was the notion of 'pure' and 'impure' in terms of castes. The peculiar nature of Indian society in contrast to the foundational values of the West was highlighted by scholars such as Weber, Bougle and Dumont (Jodhka 2014: 18).

Embedded in the Hindu religion, caste has been central to the Indian social tradition. Hindu society, over the years, made minute rules of social interaction, entrenching the hierarchy providing for social precedence of one caste over the other, making for the different endogamous caste groups, imposing social and religious privileges of the castes and restricting choice of occupation and marriage (Ghurye 1932).

Power, domination and socioreligious tradition remain inextricably linked to one another in the making and continuance of the caste system. Even as the economic and social aspects of the caste system appear to be more powerful than the religious, religion continues to preside over a host of disabilities in the economic, political, social and cultural arenas of Dalit life.

The materiality of caste is as important, if not more important, as its ideology (Jodhka 2014: 4). The structures of caste are closely linked to other aspects of the social system—social, economic and political, such as kinship relations, power regimes and labour relations (Jodhka 2014: 4). Caste thus remains both a subjective and objective reality. On the one hand, caste appears as a cultural concept projecting a set of values and beliefs, while, on the other hand, it remains a structural concept involving a set of stable social relationships. The low castes at the bottom of the hierarchic caste structure have been variously referred to as *avaṇas*, *cāṇḍālas, achūts, ādidravidas*, untouchables, ex-untouchables and so on. In British India, they were for administrative purposes referred to as the Depressed Classes. Mohandas K. Gandhi termed them *harijans*. With the emergence of the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra in the 1970s, these sections of the population came to be referred to as Dalits.

Those higher and lower in the social hierarchy were thus differentiated. Within the parameters of the Brahmanical cultural perspective, the culture of the upper castes was projected as superior, or, to put it in a different way, upper caste people were said to be 'cultured', whilst others were the 'uncultured' folk. A wide-ranging variety of tools, ranging from religious jargon and educational formulations to overt exercises of violence, were systematically used for the purpose of propagation and sustenance of the Brahmanical notion.

Hundreds of rules continue to regulate intercaste and intracaste functioning. Beyond a basic core area, they are not only varied in nature but, in the absence of a comprehensive codification, they present a thoroughly confusing picture. Interactional norms vary from caste to caste. Moreover, even for members of the same caste, variations of locale spell differences. Additionally, there are constant adjustments made necessary by techno-economic changes in society.

Traditionally the maintenance of the system has largely rested on a combined effort of the secular and religious authorities. The legendary Hindu law-giver Manu enjoined that taking into account the laws of castes, districts, guilds and families, it is the king who should establish the particular law of each. Ever since, state authorities are found to have colluded with the perpetrators of the system to ensure its smooth continuance (Chatterjee 2010: 15).

For centuries, powerful caste *pañcāyats*, also referred to as *khāp pañcāyats*, acting as the repositories of caste norms, have functioned at the local level to regulate the activities of caste groups. They have sought to rectify what they believe to be deviant behaviour by using a variety of sanctions ranging from the imposition of fines to complete social ostracism and torture.

The various mechanisms adopted over the years to keep the caste system intact have involved both overt and covert violence. Within the wider frame of a religious narrative, caste violence at various levels and in various forms has been carefully nurtured. This has been done within the context of the family, society and the state. It may be noted that the more effective covert violence has been, the less has been the need to resort to overt violence. The built-in mechanisms of concealed structural violence, as long as they hold ground, render the use of crude violence superfluous. As and when the former is challenged, the latter becomes conspicuous (Chatterjee 2010:16).

Sanskritization attempts

Not unexpectedly, many low-caste persons, individually as well as collectively, have for years attempted to adjust within the religio-cultural milieu of the Brahmanical order but have at the same time sought to win for themselves an elevated position in the Hindu social hierarchy on different grounds.

In 1952, M.N. Srinivas had provided a theoretical framework for this process in terms of what he called 'Sanskritisation'. The term was used by Srinivas in his study of the Coorgs in south India. He saw Sanskritization as a process by which lower-caste groups seek to emulate the behaviours of higher castes, claiming a rise in position in the caste hierarchy over a few generations. During his study period in Mysore, Srinivas observed that lower-caste people were following upper-caste rituals. Like the Brahmans, who wore a sacred thread across the upper part of their bodies, lower-caste people also started wearing those threads. Likewise, some of their rituals that were strongly opposed by the higher castes, for example, drinking alcohol or eating meat, were abandoned by the lower castes in emulation of the upper-caste practices.

While the process of emulation of upper-caste ways by the low castes has been underway for a long time, since the colonial period, various factors, including economic changes and periodic census operations, provided stimuli, and as a result, several marginal caste groups attempted their upward journey with enthusiastic vigour, marking an effort of social relocation that is visible todate.

However, having conceded this, it is pertinent to note that the Sanskritization process has not been universal over time, space and categories of Dalits and can hardly be used to explain the functioning patterns of the Dalits on a wide scale. As a matter of fact, several low-caste groups have resisted the pressures of Sanskritization and proceeded to turn to their perceived roots, asserting their non-Sanskritic heritage with challenging pride.

Temple entry movements

The protest against the exclusion that Dalits suffered in the religious arena has periodically been translated into action in the form of temple entry movements where the temples have become

the sites of struggle. In pre-independence India, in the 1920s and 1930s, prominent temple entry movements were found to be taking place. Famous amongst them were the Vaikkom Satyagraha (1924–5) (Jeffrey 1976: 3–27), the Kalaram Temple entry movement (1930) (Jadhav 2005: 93) and the Guruvayur temple entry movement (1931–2) (Jaffrelot 2006: 49–51; Zelliot 1998: 160–163). On the one hand, these movements were reflective of the increasing assertiveness of the marginal castes, and, on the other hand, they revealed the growing discomfiture of the upper castes and Congress-led nationalist political forces.

Today, however, the fact remains that despite all those historic struggles in favour of ending restrictions on Dalits' entry into temples, caste discrimination still holds sway in many temples in India, and Dalit entry into those temples is still restricted.

Religion for liberation: countering religion with religion

Seeking to counter the religion of oppression, Dalits since ancient times have resorted to the use of various tools. These tools have ranged from the religious to the social, economic and political. Amongst them, religion has not only been one of the most important tools but perhaps one of the earliest and most prominent of the tools to have been invoked. From ancient times to date, Dalits have used 'religion' to counter 'religion'. It has been the struggle of what is perceived as the religion of liberation against the religion of oppression. On a more comprehensive scale, it has in fact encompassed within its frame the efforts of projecting, however imperfectly it may be, an alternative to the Hindu Brahmanical culture per se—a counterculture.

The materialist tradition in India

From ancient times, distinct from India's Vedic cultural heritage, there has existed a stream of thought clearly antithetical to the Vedic values. It was India's materialist culture—the philosophy of the people—which, in its more sophisticated and systematized form, gave rise to what is popularly referred to as the Cārvāka philosophy or the Lokāyata doctrine. Unfortunately, texts of this philosophy, which may have been in existence in the past, are lost to us today. There are only stray references to lost treatises, and much of it comes as bitter criticism (Chattopadhyaya 1992: 7). This materialism did, nevertheless, play a historical role in "repudiating the old religion of custom and magic" and declaring "the spiritual independence of the individual" and rejecting the principle of authority (Chattopadhyaya 1992: 11–12).

The fundamental feature of Lokāyata materialism was *dehavāda*, the view that the self was nothing but the body (Chattopadhyaya 1992:5). In essence, the Cārvāka philosophy was a conscious effort to rid the age of the weight of the past that was oppressing it (Chattopadhyaya 1992: 11–12). Later, as the attacks of the Lokāyatas and other heretics became more focused and the authority of the sacred books were not just tacitly set aside but openly discarded and the institutions founded on them abandoned, the alarmed orthodox set forth to consolidate its traditional authority, putting an end to the age-old atmosphere of freedom of speculation, argues the internationally reputed philosopher, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (1992: 13).

It appears evident from diverse sources of information available about the Cārvākas that the latter did not have faith in the authority of the Vedas or, for that matter, any other religious scripture. They did not believe in the existence of indestructible souls. Rather, they perceived life and consciousness as combinations of matter. To them, there was no life beyond death, no virtue or vice and no reward for actions done (Dasgupta 1975:79).

The theory of *dehavāda* is carried ahead by the Tāntrikas through *kāyasādhana*, placing supreme emphasis on the material human body. They concentrate on ways and means of preserving and developing the body. And, as pointed out by Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya in his work on Lokāyata, in its essence is the age-old fertility cult (Chattopadhyaya 1992; Chatterjee 2010: 26–30).

A wide range of literature in Bengal seems to reveal the Tāntrik influence. It ranges from the Buddhist *Caryāpada*s to the songs of Rāmprasād and the Kaviwalas. The imprint of the Tāntrika ideas of the Vaiṣṇava Sahajiyā variety has also been identified in many of the Baul songs of Bengal.

It is interesting to note that in the Gajan and Gambhira celebrations found to take place to this day in different parts of rural Bengal, Tantra ideas provide the backbone. The followers of the Tantra philosophy conceive of spiritual liberation in terms of the development and culture of the body. Even as there exists a rich fund of written treatises on Tantra today, it is difficult to ascertain the real tenets of Tantrism from the written treatises as, in its original form, Tantra was a religious undercurrent independent of any abstruse metaphysical speculation, flowing from an obscure point of time in the religious history of India (Dasgupta 1969: 368–369). While the Gambhira celebrations are confined to the region of Malda in North Bengal, Gajan is widely celebrated in different parts of south Bengal, including Midnapur, Howrah and Hooghly. The Saṃnyāsins of the Gajan and Gambhira are drawn from different castes and, as long as they go through the rounds of the festivities, no caste rules are observed, giving the impression that they belong to a single social group. They sit and walk together and, at the end of the festivities, forgetting all caste distinctions, they dine together (Sarkar 1972: 133).

The village gods: deities of the marginal folk

In almost every village or town in India, we come across shrines and symbols of village gods. These village gods, or *grāmadevatā*s, as they are called, are deities worshipped by the poor, low-caste, unlettered folk. Most of these gods do not have permanent temples constructed for their worship, nor are their images to be found. These gods stand at a distance from the Vedic and Puranic gods of the Sanskritic tradition and are often represented by some or other symbol like a tree, tree trunk, terracotta animal such as a horse or elephant or maybe even just a mound of earth. These deities are perceived as the guardians of the village, who are expected to protect the village and villagers from natural calamities and the like. They are believed to protect the villagers from cyclones, floods, famines, diseases, snakes and wild animals and so on. The main legitimacy of these deities rests in the popular customs of the folk, and they have little or no scriptural legitimacy.

In a dual sense, these gods are low-caste gods. First, they are worshipped predominantly by people belonging to the low castes, such as Bauris, Bagdis, Mazhis, Bagals, Bhumij and others. Second, in most cases, the priests conducting the rituals also hail from the low castes. In front of these village gods, at least, there is equality, as no caste discrimination or untouchability is practiced amongst the worshippers. However, this equality is limited to the arena of religious worship and does not extend to cover interpersonal relations in society at large. In other words, equality exists before the gods, not in the society of men, as there they fall back into their own caste-assigned social slots.

While, by and large, the priests of the village gods hail from low-caste categories, in extremely rare cases, Brahman priests are called in. But then, as the office of the *pujārī* of the village gods is hardly deemed honourable, Brahmans who act as the priests there are looked down upon

by their own community. This has been found in studies conducted in Bengal as well as in the Tamil region (Kamilya 1992: 3, 13; Whitehead 1921).

The worship of deities like *Dharam/Dharma Rāj* or *Mansā Devī*, the goddess of snakes widely revered in rural Bengal, often takes place alongside the worship of the gods of the Great Tradition. But, not infrequently, the worship of the former overshadows the latter, as the worship of the lesser deities is more closely connected to the secular realities of day-to-day existence.

Bhakti and India's mystic Gurus

Bhakti initially flourished in south India through Vaiṣṇava saints—the 12 Ālvārs between the sixth and ninth centuries. Śaivism, too, had its Bhakti tradition. Sixty-three Bhakti poets or *Nāyaṉārs* wrote songs that now form 12 books of *Tirumuṟai*. The Bhakti saints rejected hereditary caste rituals and pilgrimage and emphasized the purity of the heart, morality and selfless service. They expressed their Bhakti through songs, poetry and music.

From the twelfth century onwards, several movements expressing the ancient tradition of equality arose in Indian society. These included the Liṅgāyat movement in northern Karnataka led by Basavaṇṇa, who was himself a Brahman and a minister in the kingdom of Kalyana and rejected the Brahmanical symbols, the holy thread, the priestly rituals and caste distinctions. Hundreds of hymns called *vacana*s are attributed to this Liṅgāyat tradition, which was found to be popular amongst primary producers and manufacturers and those who were in menial occupations by caste. Elsewhere, equally significant was the Tamil radical *Siddha* movement, where there were strong expressions of resistance to caste and conventions evident in the songs of the Bhaktas. Further, the twelfth–thirteenth centuries saw the rise of the *Vārkarī* movement in Maharashtra, led by the tailor Nāmdev and the outcaste Brahman Dnandev (Jñāndev). In North India, the tradition of protest was carried ahead by Kabīr and Ravidās (Omvedt 2011: 16–22). In the Kabīr *Panth* and the *dohās* of Kabīr, a total rejection of caste was evident, and allegiance was confined only to a *nirguṇa* god.

A younger contemporary of Kabīr was Nānak. By the time of his advent in the Punjab region, the Bhakti movement had already made itself felt in the religious and literary fields. Further, the institution of Guruship had come into existence in the south as well as in the north. In the eyes of Nānak, all were equal, whether they were Hindus or Muslims, low caste or high caste. Introducing the legitimacy of Guruship in the Sikh tradition, he prescribed the chanting of the Name, or Nām Japa. He spoke of God as the one Absolute (*Ik oaṅkār*), whose name is Truth (*Satnām*) and who can be realized only through the grace of the Guru. The *Laṅgar* or the community kitchen initiated by Nānak where all categories of Sikhs and non-Sikhs could eat was a firm step in the direction of removal of commensal restrictions that were observed by the caste Hindus. Many people converted to Sikhism in an attempt to escape the discriminatory Hindu caste system. The mission and the empowering messages of Guru Nānak were continued in the persons of his nine successors. Unfortunately, however, despite the continuous denunciation of caste by successive Gurus in the Sikh tradition, caste remained a recognized social force amongst the Sikhs. As Sikh society expanded with a large influx of Jats (Jaṭṭs), who belonged to the category of Śūdras (as described by Al-Bīrūnī) or the lowest category of the Vaiśyas (in *Dabistān-i Mazāhib*), they claimed for themselves the status of Kṣatriyas (see Habib 2017). It is possible that as Hindu orthodox society was unwilling to recognize the Jat claim, the latter moved into the Sikh arena. However, it may be noted that on conversion to Sikhism, they did not give up their caste-based customs and lifestyle altogether. This was true not only for the Jats but even people of other castes who converted to Sikhism. Further, there is ample evidence to suggest that caste and caste-based customs are widely prevalent in today's Sikh society in one or

the other form. Broadly speaking, the Sikhs today remain divided into two groups, the Sardars and the Mazhbis. The former makes up the upper castes, the latter the scavengers (Chatterjee 2010: 140–142). As such, not surprisingly, despite being relatively liberal, Sikhism has increasingly failed to provide support to the Dalit castes, who, as a result, have been turning towards different alternatives.

In this context, the rise of the Ad Dharm movement is significant. Though the idea had already begun to take shape during the early 1920s, it took off only with the arrival of Mangoo Ram, the son of an enterprising Chamar of the village Muggowal of the Hoshiarpur district of the Doaba subregion of Punjab, on the scene. The Ad Dharam movement succeeded in mobilizing the Chamars of the Doaba region and in instilling a new sense of confidence in them. The Ad Dharmis are today among the most prosperous and educated of the Dalit communities of the country.[1] The Ad Dharm movement was instrumental in providing a distinct identity for the followers of Guru Ravidās.

Among Punjabi Dalits, the Ravidāsī movement is powerful. It has a sizeable following amongst Dalits both within India and abroad. The Ravidāsīs do not see themselves as Sikhs or Hindus but just as Dalits. Hinduism had caste discrimination. But even in Sikhism, they saw this discrimination and therefore carved out an alternative identity for themselves starting in the early twentieth century. Today there are Ravidāsī Gurdwaras (*gurdvārā*s) across the world. To the Ravidāsīs, Ravidās is the one and only Guru.

In eastern India, in the sixteenth century, the Bhakti cult was advanced by Śrī Caitanya, who was born in a Vaiṣṇava family setting in Navadwipa in Bengal and introduced a new atmosphere in Bengal through his preaching of the message of universal love and brotherhood (Chatterjee 2010: 147–149).

Amongst the low-caste people of West Bengal, including the Namasudras, Poundras, Goalas, Malos and Muchis, the Motua movement has been extremely popular since around the middle of the nineteenth century. Initially launched by Harichand Thakur, who was born in a Namasudra family of Faridpur (now Bangladesh) in 1812, the movement was expanded and popularized by his son Guruchand Thakur, who, after the death of his father in 1878, became the leader of the movement. Today the movement has a large number of followers in both Bangladesh and India.

Apparently, the movement is of a religious nature, as it is organized around the name of 'Hari', with an emphasis on collective singing and dancing of the devotees in demonstration of spiritual ecstasy. However, beyond that religiosity, the thrust of the movement has been considered secular, with its primary targets being to (i) establish ways and means of attaining perfect peace of mind within the parameters of family life and (ii) challenge the Brahmanical norms, eradicate social inequality and ensure uplift of the downtrodden.

The most visible, though not an exclusive organization of the Matuas, is the Matua Mahasangha, which continues to claim a legitimacy of sorts derived from the family lineage of Harichand-Guruchand Thakur. The organization is not only a socioreligious body but also plays a rather decisive role in political articulation of interests. Political parties, particularly since the 2011 Assembly elections in the state, have shown keen interest in reaching out to the Matuas via the different factions of the Mahasangha. Outside the Mahasangha, hundreds of autonomous Matua *Dal*s (small groups of devotees), owing allegiance to the Hari-Guruchand legacy, are still to be found.

Somewhat around the same time as the rise of the Matua movement in Bengal, Ghasidas, who was occupationally a farm servant, launched the *Satnam Panth*, mainly amongst the Chamars of the Chhatisgarh region (Dube and Banerjee Dube 2007: 232–233). Guru Ghasidas, as he came to be known, hit out at caste-based atrocities, untouchability and the varṇa system. Those who

joined the *Panth* were called the *Satnamis*; they believed in one formless god; rejected Hindu deities, rituals and caste; gave up the consumption of meat, liquor, tobacco and the like and considered the Guru the most important reality in their lives.

In certain parts of central India, particularly Odisha and adjoining areas, *Mahima Dharma*, with its beginnings in the nineteenth century, is practiced by many people amongst the lower categories of the social strata. *Mahima Dharma* is also referred to as *Alekh Dharma* and *Kumbhipatia Dharma*. It was initiated by one Mahima Swami based on the belief that an all-powerful absolute authority (*alekh*) created the universe out of his *Mahima* (glory) and is accessible to all alike through *Bhakti*. Worship of *mūrti*s and the role of the Brahman and caste were all discarded (Dube and Banerjee Dube 2007: 230–231).

In Kerala, social emancipation efforts were undertaken in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Sri Narayana Guru on behalf of the low castes, primarily the toddy tapping community of Ezhavas, but also the Pulayas and the Parayas. Narayana Guru's works were broadly mystical, metaphysical, socioethical and aesthetic in nature. His writings were in the form of verses. He concentrated on setting up temples for the low-caste Ezhavas. In 1898–9 CE, he registered a *Yogam* (association) to manage the affairs of the temples, and in 1903, it was decided to transform the Yogam into the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam to develop spiritual and secular education and help in the economic advancement of the Ezhavas (Chatterjee 2010: 204–208). He organized a team of monks around himself under the organizational nomenclature Narayana Dharma Sangham, which was registered in Trichur in 1926. Thereafter all *āśram*s, *maṭh*s and temples set up by him were placed under the Sangham. In course of time, several organizations were born out of the movement. The movement generated amongst the low-caste Ezhavas a sense of their own worth so that in the course of time, they succeeded in leading different radical movements for the advancement of the downtrodden. Whatever may have been the initial aims, in the course of time, the movement increasingly reflected the Sanskritization efforts of a backward caste within the frame of Hinduism, which, despite all his radicalism, Narayana Guru had not cared to challenge; over time, the Ezhavas tried to win for themselves a new status position and the SNDP Yogam became a caste association of sorts (Chatterjee 2010: 210–211).

Despite their many and diverse limitations, the presence of the many mystic leaders and Gurus through time, from the ancient to the present days, and over the territorial expanse of the whole of India, has indeed been fascinating. The presence of such leaders has revealed the importance of the search for an alternative space outside the Brahmanical paradigm launched by the subaltern castes. The ideas propagated, the mode of worship, the depiction of the godhead and the mundane nature of the prayers all speak of the 'difference' and the challenge. Yet it is pertinent to note that whatever impact is made on the minds and activities of the followers of each sect separately has a limited effect vis-à-vis the wider society. Further, it may be noted that despite their professed opposition to caste-based stratification, untouchability and the discriminatory social system, many of the sects have remained entrapped within the Brahmanical frame and unable to reject caste practices.

Liberation through conversion

Conversion has long been a language of protest of the socially marginalized caste groups in India. It has been seen as an expression of resistance, dissent and rebellion. Sometimes it has taken on the form of conversion to Buddhism and Jainism, as in ancient times; sometimes, as a later entrant, has come the conversion to religions like Sikhism, Islam or Christianity; or, as under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar in modern times, it has come as conversion to a

reinvented form of Buddhism. Some of the conversions have been conversions of individuals, while some others have been group conversions, with entire villages or castes in a locale moving to the new faith, having rejected the Hindu connection with a hope of finding emancipation from an oppressive existence. The history of conversion movements clearly shows that Dalits have not been converting to other religions simply because they prefer to adhere to a different belief system. Most of them go for conversion because they actively 'reject' Hinduism and see conversion as a potent tool for challenging the hierarchies of caste.

In search of a Buddhist panacea: Navayāna Buddhism

The noted historian Romila Thapar has characterized Indian historicity by the Brahman-Śramaṇa contestation. In it, Buddhism has been of central importance (1989). Exact periodization is difficult, but according to the estimate of noted Indologist A.L. Basham, the Buddhist texts seem to reflect a period at least a century later than the Brāhmaṇa texts and, in all probability, much more than a century (1980: 13–4). The societies depicted in the Buddhist and Vedic literatures were markedly different from one another. In the latter, depiction was of a tribal society with rudimentary governmental institutions. Law was based on customary practices, and relationships and social controls were regarded as good as law. In the societies depicted in Buddhist literature, tribal loyalties were being replaced by territorial loyalties (Kosambi 1981). By the time of the Buddha, in the cities, "men of many tribes rubbed shoulders, together uprooted from their lands and separated from their clansmen. Their values were not those of the Vedic priesthood and aristocracy and hence inevitably they demanded innovations in the field of religion" (Basham 1980: 13–4). Even though the Vedic literature established itself as the dominant line of philosophical thought, agnostic thinking had already made its debut. The Śramaṇa tradition had developed counter to, and at times even parallel to, the Brahmans. Buddhism emerged as part of that tradition.

Early conversions to the Buddhist Sangha that have been singled out for mention were the conversions of the richer Seṭṭhis and Brahmans. However, the main body of the monks hailed from the lower social orders, such as artisans, fishermen, hunters and basket weavers. Early Buddhism was also popular amongst the emergent commercial classes, for whom, in the days of expanding trade, the individual was becoming increasingly a social unit, and contractual arrangements, minus divine glossing, were becoming common (Thapar 1989: 29).

With Ambedkar's conversion movement in 1956, the Buddhist conversion movement reached new heights. Ambedkar's rejection of Hinduism and search for a viable alternative went side by side with his activism in the social and political spheres. Even as he developed a strong theoretical critique of Hinduism, challenging its religious precepts from a social perspective, his search for the alternative was neither solely a religious nor a social choice. It went far deeper, as would be evident on careful scrutiny.

On 14 October 1956, Dr Ambedkar had renounced Hinduism, along with an estimated half a million other Dalits, to embrace Buddhism. The ceremony was undertaken under the auspices of a Buddhist monk, Sri Chandramani, at Nagpur. There were three stages to the ceremony. In the first stage, Chandramani initiated Ambedkar to the Buddhist faith: the *pañcasīla* (Pali; Sanskrit: *pañcaśīla*), that is, the five Precepts, namely abstention from killing, stealing, illicit sex, lying and taking intoxicants. This was followed by the *trisaraṇa*—taking refuge in the Buddha, the Sangha (Brotherhood of Monks) and the Dharma. The recitations were done in Pali, the language of the ancient Theravāda literature. In the second stage, Ambedkar spoke in Marathi before the vast assembled crowd and committed himself to 22 oaths which he had formulated. Of these, the last dozen represented his dedication to Buddhism, including his own rendering of

the *pañcasīla*. The first ten, by contrast, were devoted to a careful set of rejections of Brahmanical Hinduism. In the third part of the ceremony, Ambedkar led the masses through the conversion process through a repetition of his 22 oaths. Here, too, the proceedings were in Marathi (Tartakov 2007: 192–193).

By the time Ambedkar undertook the conversion, he was thoroughly conversant with the Buddhist philosophy. According to his biographer, Dhananjay Keer, Ambedkar had started working on his magnum opus, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* in 1951 (Tartakov 2007: 192–193). In it, he spelt out the details of his path. That path was not the path of ancient or medieval Buddhism; it was neither Theravāda, Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna Buddhism. It was referred to as a fourth path—Navayāna. The path of Navayāna Buddhism represented a revolutionary transformation of the Buddhist traditions in which it was rooted. It was more in the social, egalitarian aspect of Buddhism, rather than its spiritual aspect, that Ambedkar was interested.

The effects of the conversion movement initiated by Ambedkar have been variedly evident. Its greatest impact was on Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. Whilst scholars like Wilkinson and Thomas (1972) tend to suggest that conversion has not made any major difference in the social and occupational life of the converts to Buddhism, according to others, certain advantages have definitely accrued to the Dalits who converted to Buddhism. According to the latter, these neo-Buddhists, or Navayāna Buddhists, as they are called, appear to have improved significantly over the Hindu Dalits in terms of several parameters such as sex ratio, literacy and work participation (Darapuri 2008: 12).

Economic and educational considerations apart, most importantly, conversion to Buddhism has emerged as a rallying call for identity formation of the Dalits, particularly in western and northern India. A survey conducted in 1964–65 among 16-to 22-year-old college students in Poona revealed that through conversions, the ex-untouchables not only acquired a high evaluation of themselves but raised themselves in the esteem of others, including local Brahmans and non-Buddhist Mahars. Another survey 30 years later conducted in the same city showed that Buddhist Mahars achieved a remarkable leap forward in terms of social mobility (Jaffrelot 2006: 138). Today, special occasions for celebration of events have been identified in terms of the Buddhist conversion tradition. The *dikṣābhūmi* or conversion ground has virtually emerged as a place of regular pilgrimage of Dalits, and the *Vihāra*s have come up as gathering grounds for the community. Eva-Maria Hardtmann notes in her work (2011) the minute details of the contemporary functioning of the *Vihāra*s in Uttar Pradesh, observing that "taking part in the Buddhist ceremonies in the viharas seemed to be a way for the Dalit Buddhists to learn more about Buddhist rituals and about Ambedkar. It was also a way to introduce Ambedkar and Buddhism to their children" (Darapuri 2008: 151). As was rightly pointed out by the reputed Ambedkarite scholar Eleanor Zelliot, "The psychological impact of Buddhism, the matter of changed identity, cannot be judged by visible signs" (1998: 218). As the same author notes, "psychological freedom from the sense of being a polluting person is a major achievement of the Buddhist conversion" (1998: 219).

Not that all, or even a majority of Dalits, have chosen to accept the Buddhist option. In fact, a sizeable section of Ambedkarites have stayed outside the Buddhist fold. Nonetheless, the impact made on the Dalit political movement by those who chose to become Buddhists is noteworthy. It undoubtedly contributed to the rise of a new awareness and a new elite that extended well beyond the confines of the Navayāna Buddhist community. In the rise of the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra in the 1970s, for example, the impact of Buddhism was clearly evident. Leaders like Namdeo Dhasal and Raja Dhale, belonging to different factions of the movement, recognized the liberating significance of Buddhism (Hardtmann 2011: 188–190). In mainstream Dalit politics of the Bahujan Samaj Party, Kanshiram spoke of Buddhism and his

proposed conversion. It is reported that Kanshiram's last rites were done according to Buddhist rituals.[2] Further, in 1996, in the meetings aimed at reviving the Republican Party of India in U.P., many of the speakers spoke about Buddhism as the philosophy that should guide the party and quoted Ambedkar's *Buddha and His Dhamma* (Hardtmann 2011: 134–135).

Islam as liberation

For some of the marginalized Dalits, Islam appeared to be the religion of liberation. From the doctrinal point of view, Islam rested on the doctrine of Islamic brotherhood, where there was no rationale for hierarchical stratification. For the believer, the Islamic theory presenting a semblance of equality was a sharp contrast to what Hindu society offered to its members. This was no doubt most acutely felt by those members of the Hindu community who were low in the hierarchy. In addition, Pīrs helped to place Islamic traditions in a Hinduized framework, thus making it more readily acceptable to the folk (Roy 1983). In the medieval period, numerous Sufi establishments sprung up throughout India and in the course of time emerged as major vehicles for the spread of Islam in India. As they sang their songs in the regional languages and used concepts and expression styles that were close to the hearts of the laity, Islam remained less of an alien religion, permitting itself to be adapted to the indigenous cultural traditions.

By the time of the 1911 Census, Bengal had accounted for 36% of India's Muslim population, most being concentrated in the eastern and northern districts of eastern Bengal. As noted by Jafar Sharif, an able analyst of the nineteenth century, regarding the identity of the early converts, they were persons who had followed a debased form of Buddhism prior to conversion and "were spurned by the high class Hindus as unclean, and so listened readily of the preachings of the Mullas, who proclaimed the doctrine that all men were equal in the sight of Allah"(1921: 3).

Dalits, even after they converted to the new religion, were, however, still looked upon as *Dalits* and continued to be subject to humiliation and discrimination. Thus, life for Dalit Muslims remained largely unchanged even after conversion. Conversion did not affect the traditional caste-linked occupations of most of the converts, nor the social customs that had been in operation prior to their conversion. This was the scenario across the country and was extensively recorded during Census operations in the context of Bengal and Punjab in the late nineteenth century (Chatterjee 2010: 90–93). Years later, in a study of the Muslim community of Calcutta in 1970 undertaken by M.K.A. Siddiqui, the author noted that amongst the community members living in the city, notwithstanding the urban situation, the basic structural elements of caste could be seen to exist (1974: 124–125), yet, to make matters worse for them, despite their marginalized position, the law refuses to recognize them as 'Scheduled Castes'.

Turning to Christianity

In their search for liberation, a section of Dalits have turned to Christianity, as they have hoped that Christianity would liberate them from caste oppression. In southern India, mass conversion to Christianity had, in fact, come as a social movement. Many from the untouchable and *śūdra* communities were seen turning to Christianity in order to flee from their caste oppressions and towards the vision of a liberated future. As Dalit Christians, they saw the birth of the divine in the womb of suffering. Their point of focus was that Christ, the central figure in the Christian ethos, was himself born of suffering. As such, it was with him that Indian Dalits sought to find a natural bond.

Dalit Christian theology has come up as a relatively new phenomenon, going back to the late 1970s. It is a reflection of the Dalit Christians, who form the vast majority of the Indian

Christian population, becoming increasingly conscious of their Dalit roots, their Dalit condition and being oppressed both within as well as outside the church. As a result of the growing consciousness of the Dalit Christians, they are beginning to ask how much of what they have been taught Biblically and theologically is actually relevant to their own social conditions. Groups of Christian theologians have proceeded to challenge the orthodox missionary theology through links with religious and political movements of the subalterns in India. A radical and innovative address titled "Towards a Sudra Theology," delivered by Arvind P. Nirmal at the United Theological College in Bangalore in March 1981, significantly contributed to the development of this movement (Clarke 1998: 45). Reverend James Massey, who was the General Secretary of the Indian Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge and a member of the National Minorities Commission and who died on 3 March 2015, was one of the leading Dalit Christian theologians in the field espousing the cause of Dalit Christian theology. He wrote several books on Dalit Christian theology.

As in the case of several other religions, here, too, conversion has, however, not brought about any radical break with the past as far as many of the converted are concerned. It has been found that in many villages, Christians continue in their traditional style of operations and carry on their social relations in ways which are, after all, very similar, if not identical, to those of their non-Christian neighbours, even participating in the local social order as *jāti* groups (Webster 1976: 148). To make matters worse, even as caste stigma persists for many of those converted to Christianity, the law still refuses to recognize them as Scheduled Castes.

In addition, as Christian groups have become increasingly associated with the liberation struggles of the oppressed, they are today facing increasing attacks from the side of the right-wing Hindu community reflecting the ideology of Hindutva.

Concluding remarks

With the ascent of right-wing politics following the 2014 national elections in India and the ruling party's declared commitment to the Hindutva ideology, caste-based atrocities against the Dalits have witnessed a sharp rise across the country. Progressively, there has been a visible increase in what are described as 'hate crimes' where minority Muslims, Christians and Dalits are at the receiving end. National Crime Records Bureau data shows that cases of atrocities against Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities increased by around 5 percent in 2016 over 2015. Conviction rates remained at a low 2–3 percent. As attacks against Dalits worsened, in July 2016, nationwide protests were triggered following the barbaric flogging of four Dalit youths in Una town of the Gir Somnath district in Gujarat. The alleged 'crime' of the tortured Dalit youths was the skinning of a dead cow. Following the episode, there was a spurt in mass conversions and threats of conversions by Dalits in the region and beyond. The four Dalits who were flogged in 2016, along with 300 others, converted to Buddhism in 2018 as a sign of protest. The conversion ceremony was attended by people from all over the state of Gujarat and Maharashtra.[3] It is evident that the religious tool for countering caste-based oppression is still considered by many Dalits one of the most potent tools for dealing with their repression. As such, alongside their other forms of struggles, social, economic and political, and often in linkage with them, scores of repressed Dalits attempt to withstand the religious roots of their caste-based repression by clutching onto what they see as a religion of liberation. Many others, without opting for a complete break with Hinduism, attempt to work out ways and means of improving their status position within the broad Hindu societal frame; thus, we come across temple entry movements and Sanskritization efforts as further endeavours to carve out their very own spaces through the help of village gods, mystic Gurus and the like, contributing in

their own ways towards building up the many obscure sects holding sway amongst the marginalized sections of India's population, seen through the length and breadth of the country.

Notes

1 Jodhka, S. "Making Sense of Ravidasis: The Caste System in Punjab." www.insafbulletin.net/archives/604, accessed November 7, 2019.
2 "Kanshi Ram cremated as per Buddhist rituals." *The Hindu*, October 10, 2006. https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/kanshi-ram-cremated-as-per-buddhist-rituals/article18485729.ece, accessed September 1, 2020.
3 "Una's Dalit Flogging Victims, Along with 300 Others, Quit Hinduism." http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/63961490.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/unas-dalit-flogging-victims-along-with-300-others-embrace-buddhism/articleshow/63961490.cms, accessed November 7, 2019.

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15

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE

The betwixt and between religious imaginary of Lāldās

Mukesh Kumar[1]

Lāldās, a north Indian *bhakti* saint born in 1540 to a middle-caste Meo–Muslim peasant family of Mewat—located on the borders of Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh—is a type of religious figure who traversed the boundaries of caste, class, and religion advocating a unique form of religious synthesis. Unlike his guru, Kabīr, who outright rejected social identities (Lorenzen 1987), Lāldās engendered a blend of religious lifeways that earned him a dual identity, a title of a *sant* or *bābā* among Hindus and of a *pīr* among Muslims. In recent years, Hindu followers of Lāldās have begun to celebrate him as an incarnation of famous Hindu characters such as Pāṇḍava king Yudhiṣṭhira, another king Harīścandra, and Prahalād, who all, according to Hindu mythology, lived in different epochs following the final birth of the same soul as Lāldās in Kalyug (*kali yuga*).[2] On the other hand, Muslims remember him as Lālkhān Pīr, a common denomination for an Islamic mystic. The emergence of this binary imaginary (*Sant/Bābā* versus *Pīr*[3]) of Lāldās was rooted in his teachings that addressed both Hindu and Muslim followers with the same religious vocabulary.

The purpose in this chapter is to show how a religious figure survived a dual identity marked by shared religious practice for almost four centuries (since his birth in 1540 AD to the present). Through analysis of his teachings and life stories collected during field work—specifically devotees' ritual and behavioural practices—and examined *vis-à-vis* archival materials and a narratorial biography—compiled and preserved by his followers in a rhyming textual form—the main aim here is to complicate the modern standard definition of Hindu and Muslim as bounded religious identities. A shared plurality of meaning goes into the making of religion and religious identities, whose contours often change with the progression of time. That is to say, a fixed notion of religion and religious practice runs contrary to the fluid understanding of religious phenomenon, since religion may quickly change its meaning and practice. Contrariwise, changing religious practices may also have the power to define when and what is counted as a part of a particular religion.

Lāldās lived a life that is hard to classify as either Hindu or Muslim. He blurred the religious distinctions by advocating values such as vegetarianism for his all followers, including Muslims. Despite being a Muslim himself, his advocation of vegetarianism had a huge influence, particularly over Muslim devotees, who still do not consume meat in order to follow the saint's religious dictates. This kind of Indic practice indicates the malleability of the definitive characterisation of religious groups' behaviour. Furthermore, the endurance of such practice to the present also shows people continue to look to their religious others for religious and

spiritual inspirations despite there being moments of heightened religious tensions and conflicts (Frøystad 2012). In the folk world, religious boundaries are ephemeral, sacred symbols are often shared, and some religious behaviour often stands in stark contrast to normative religious expectations of established religions.

Lāldās' background

Oral narratives, handwritten verses, and cheap pamphlets in multiple locations in the Alwar and Bharatpur districts in eastern Rajasthan recount the life of Lāldās. Born in Dholidoob in Alwar, Lāldās spent his childhood with his maternal grandparents. Later, he moved to his parental home in Bamniya Bas village. His parents were very poor, and he collected and sold firewood every day for subsistence.

The study of Lāldās' background indicates a plural but shared nature of religious doctrines he followed and propounded for his followers, which was greatly influenced by a social critique of caste and the institutional religions. This orientation was developed by discarding customary institutional practices and symbolically uniting Hinduism and Islam at the same time. For instance, Lāldās recited and invoked *nirguṇ* Rām sitting at the Mecca mosque, not at a temple. At all contemporary locations and various shrines traditionally associated with the life of Lāldās, there is at least one mosque in the vicinity (fieldwork).[4] The hagiography of the saint mentions an interesting incident in which his liminal aspect is evidently illustrated. On an account of a complaint against the saint in which he was accused of heresy, the local official ordered to fetch him on the back of an unruly horse. This whole story is narrated in the following words:

> *śilvant santan sukhdaī, satjug kī sī rāh calāī*
> *daurī khabar tijāre gaī, sāhab khān sū jā kahī*
> *zāt mev arū musalmān, hindū rāh calāī ān*
> *rozā bang nivāz na pathe, īd-bakrīd kū man nahī dhare*
> *rozā rakhe na kalmā kahe, hindū turak sū nyārā rahe*
> *navī-rasūl kahe na kahāve, rām-rām mukh setī gāve*
> *ketā hindū musalmān, ek hi rāh calāī ān.*
> *itnī bāt jab asur ne sunī, turant buddhī jab apnī dharī*
> *kete sangī āo pyāre, chalo pyādā aur asvāre*
> *śurū karo cal apnā dīn, ghorā beg karā vo jībh*
> *vah ghorā hai kahar svabhāv, vāpe kaun dhar sake pāv*
> *jo koī pāv-pāvde dhare, tod khāy arū ghāyal kare*
> *us fakar kū dekho jaī, is ghorā pe lāo caḍhāy*
> *dehāde jab nagle āye, makkā mahjad baiṭhe pāye*[5]

<div align="right">(Duṅgarṣi Unknown: 23)</div>

Benevolent gratifying to saints, commenced conduct like *satyug*
Scampering news reached Tijāra, notified Sāhab Khān
Meo by caste and Muslim he is, preaching the ways of Hindu
Neither keeps *rozā* nor recites the *kalma*, remains aloof from Hindus and Turks
He does not utter *nabi-rasul* nor promotes them, only chants Rām-Rām from the mouth
Whether a Hindu or a Muslim, bringing them on the same path.
When the demon (Mughal officer) heard this, immediately used his brain
Beloved you have to come here, he ordered soldiers and cavalry
Let's begun our duty, to the horse Beg he indicated

That horse is of dangerous nature, no one can touch him,
If one dares to put his leg on the horse, breaks him and devours, and injures badly
Go and see that fakīr (mendicant), bring him on this horse
footsloggers when reached Nagla, saw sitting him at the Mecca Mosque

In this text, Lāldās is seen as a figure who does not follow Islamic practices such as keeping *rozā* or reciting the *Qur'ān* despite being a Muslim. However, when officials arrived in Nagla, a village where Lāldās spent a household life after his marriage, Lāldās was seen sitting at the Mecca mosque. Lāldās went to the Hajj three times and each time brought a brick back to be used in the construction of a mosque. Another mosque called Medina still exists at a distance of 5 kilometres from the Mecca mosque. This kind of symbolic relationship with Islam is also the negation of a particular kind of Islam without discarding the cardinal reality of the existence of one but formless god, call it Allah or Rām. Lāldās is more concerned with indifference of truth represented variously by institutional religions.

In the early years, Lāldās took his family's cows to graze on a nearby hillock in the Aravalli mountain range. There, he is said to have engaged in *tapasyā* (meditation) of *nirguṇ* (formless) Rām while surrounded by the grazing cows. A very old ruined building marks the spot of his meditation (Figure 15.1). A mosque is also attached to the ruined building, where Lāldās is supposed to have prayed to Rām. Another mosque from the same period exists at a small distance. These architectural remains are evidence of undeferential religious attitude and his faith in both religions and are expressed in numerous couplets attributed to him which make direct or indirect references to his proximity to both religions.

Lāldās met one of his future wives, Bhogari, at this place. Bhogari's father was a shepherd who spent time with Lāldās. One day, in the absence of her father, Bhogari took their cows to

Figure 15.1 One of the meditation places of Lāldās on the Aravalli hills

the grazing fields in the mountains and there met Lāldās for the first time. She told Lāldās that her father had been arrested by Mughal state revenue officials. My informants and bards referred to the crime of Bhogari's father as non-payment of *jamā* (rent), which indicates the Meo peasants' experience in relation to the Mughal state (Kumar 2019).

By this time, Lāldās was famous for his miracles, especially in the service of poor and needy people. He produced a gold coin and gave it to Bhogari so that she could pay her father's debt and free him from prison, but he swore her to secrecy. Bhogari was flattered by the saint's action and decided to marry him. She told her father of her decision when he returned home, and Bhogari and Lāldās got married. Thus, Lāldās took on the second stage of the Hindu life cycle, that of a householder.

Lāldās' marriage is important, as it provided Meo peasants with an example of householder asceticism, which did not advocate a complete detachment from the material world. The saint's model of married householder asceticism was more in tune with the peasant ideals of the Meos. Moreover, Lāldās' beliefs in the *nirguṇ bhakti* of Rām complemented the Islamic conception of Allah, a formless entity. For instance, the Sufi concept of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* (unity of being) finds a closer structural parallel with the interpretations of non-dualism provided by Indian philosophers like Śaṅkara, Caitanya, and Nimbārka. *Waḥdat al-Wujūd* finds its ultimate expression in the doctrines of *nirguṇ* saints such as Kabīr (Alam 2004: 91–98). Alam writes that this idea of the oneness of God:

> was expressed in the *nirguṇ* Bhakti assertation of the fundamental unity of Hindus and Turks. Kabir, for instance, saw no difference between Ram and Rahman. Notable in his poetry is the coalescence of Hari and Hazrat, Krishna and Karama, Muhammed and Mahadev, Ram and Rahim.
>
> (91–92)

A conversation with a Sufi saint, Chishti Gadan of Tijara, who is supposed to have inspired Lāldās to work for the cause of *dīn* (religion), expresses the same concern of *Waḥdat al-Wujūd*:

> *gadan kahe tum dar mat māno, dīn durast kar durmat bhāno*
> *durmat kutiyā dūr udāo, hindū-turak kū rāh gavāho*
> *hindū-turak kā aisā hait, jaise dharā bijūrā khet*
> *pail vidū kā yah jaśley, sāī kahe sohī kah de.*
>
> (Duṅgarṣi Unknown: 7)

> Gadan says don't be afraid, strengthen your religion and eradicate evil thought
> Banish the evil of bad thought, show the path to Hindus and Turks
> Such is the manner of Hindu-Turks, like a man of straw in a field
> First take this vow, whatever *sāi* (God) says is so.

Gadan Chisthi, a Sufi, advises Lāldās to show both Hindus and (Turks) Muslims the right path of religion. This Sufi and *nirguṇ bhakti* conception of religion inevitably depends on and shares the imagination of one formless entity or God. Here, both traditions complement each other.

Additionally, the ethnic label 'Turk' is synonymous with Muslims and shows the multifarious nature of defining Islamic religious identity, in which the institutional versions of religions were associated with the political representatives of the state, such as Turks and Mughals, or religious elites like the Brahmans and Mullahs. The concern of the institutional form of Islam is represented by Mughal elites and powerholders. Often in the text, the ethnic label 'Turk' is

repeatedly used to depict the Islam of the political rulers. In the folk world, religious categories were often replaced by such ethnic labels (Turks, Mughals) or sect names (*bhakti*, Sufi, and Nāgā traditions), prioritising the latter over the former.

Complexity in the Lāldās *Panth*

As mentioned earlier, Duṅgarṣi Sādh was a Hindu devotee of Lāldās who compiled popular life stories, accounts of worship methods, and the various hymns related to the saint in a handwritten manuscript.[6] The first part of the text, the *Nuktāvali*[7] (a collection of *nuktās*), describes the whole of the saint's life in verse form, including tales of incarnations, miracles, and other major events. The text is in five sections, including *Śrīmad Lāldās Gītā*, *Samvād Sār* (a dialogue between the saint and a disciple), and *Sākhis* and *Rāgs* (tales and songs sung in Hindustani classical music style). The text narrates in couplets popular oral stories and sayings, adopting a poetic style similar to that of the great epics in Sanskrit and Hindi. For instance, the opening stanza of the text says:

> *sādh sant kī āgyā pāū, śrī lāl bhakt kī kathā sunāū*
> *pur-pattan śerpur vās sthān, jahān duṅgarṣi sādh ne kiyā bakhān*
> *san pandrah sau sattānave mein lāl liyo avatār*
> *hindū-turak bīc baith kar kīnhā bhakti pracār.*
>
> (Duṅgarṣi Unknown: 1–5)

If the saints and sages permit, I will tell the story of Śrī Lāldās.
I was born in Pur-Pattan and reside at Sherpur; Duṅgarṣi Sādh's (my) narration begins there.
In the year of 1597, Lāl was incarnated
He spread the messages of *bhakti* sitting among Hindus and Turks.[8]

Not only does the text include Urdu words to convey specific meanings within a Hindi verse, but it also occasionally uses the local Mewati dialect. For example, one story of a childhood miracle—that of the saint of controlling an insane elephant—is presented in the text through 'linguistic duopoly'[9] (Bakshi 2012) involving the Hindi and Urdu languages. The Mewati dialect and the vernacular languages are influential in the text but have a secondary status to Hindi and Urdu:

> *ek din mārag lāge jāyī, bhay mantā gaj nād nacāī*
> *main mantā gaj bahut alām, karī sūnd sū tīn salām*
>
> (Duṅgarṣi Unknown: 6)

A fearless elephant trumpeted loudly, walking on a street one day,
That elephant was very angry (*alām*) and bowed (*salām*) three times with its trunk.

In the couplet previously, the Urdu word *alām* refers to the disturbed status of an insane elephant. As soon as the saint confronts the elephant, the animal bows to him. The Islamic greeting *salām* is used here to refer to the elephant's submissiveness to the saint. The narrative style of the text loaded with vernacular terms blends terms from the Mewati dialect, infrequent Urdu usages and numerous references to the mode of oral use of Hindu epics and religious texts. The verses thus depict a 'linguistic duopoly' (Bakshi 2012) in which the Mewati dialect, the Urdu and Hindi languages, and the epic prose style converge to serve the narrator's purpose of describing a saint who transcended conventional boundaries. The text also displays the intimate connection between the familiar and the known 'religious other' in a world conscious of religious

differences but connected in multiple ways through shared ideals of public life. Similar examples throughout the text indicate not only linguistic duopoly but also the complex nature of a closely knit interlingual world often reflected in the literary 'web of intertextuality' (Ramanujan 1989: 190). Such examples point to the intimately related literary and oral traditions of Hinduism and Islam and institutional and vernacular/folk cultures.

Ramanujan's (1989) 'intertextuality' incorporates different forms of 'reflexivity', a key for understanding the relations between various Indian literary traditions of myths and folktales. For instance, motifs, words, symbols, and narrative frameworks produced in Sanskrit, Hindi, and Urdu were extensively used in Mewati in a reflexive manner in producing the Mewati folk versions of the Hindu epics, the Rāmāyaṇa, the Mahābhārata, and other tales. Similarly, another stanza of the text uses the Arabic/Urdu word *mustaqīm*, meaning 'a straight path' or 'the right path' in Islam. The text uses the term to talk about the path of *nirguṇ bhakti* taken by Lāldās. For instance, after realising that he has mistreated the saint, the *faujdār* calls his soldiers to approach Lāldās again. This time, a couplet addresses the saint as a true *pīr*:

> *sunte hī cākar daude āye, pīr-murīd dhyān me pāye*
> *unkā aesā sāncā dīn, sāī nām sū hai mustaqīm*
> *lāldās tum sacce pīr, ab bakhśo merī taqsīr.*

> (Duṅgarṣi: 14)

> The soldiers came running as they heard the order, *pīr-murīd* were in meditation
> His religion is so true, his path is linked to the name of *sāī* (God)
> Lāldās you are a true *pīr*, now please forgive my crime.

In many other verses of the *Nuktāvali*, the *bhakti* and Sufi modes of piety are seen as true paths that are different from the ways of both institutionalised religions.[10] The conversation between the Chishti saint Gadan and Lāldās also resonates on two levels. First, the *nirguṇ bhakti* and the Islamic conception of Allah do not differ much in their imagination of the Almighty. Second, their critiques of hegemonic religions are predicated on common Hindu and Muslim practice as distinguished by ignorance and the absence of a true love of God. The unanimity of the two figures in the narratives thus illuminates the critique of both Islamic ways of life and Hindu modes of worship. These two traditions enhanced and complemented each other.

Lāldās thus presented a unique form of religious liminality and a betwixt-and-between zone which unsettled fixed notions of religion. The linguistic complexities in the text previously display this liminal status and challenge the edifices of both Hinduism and Islam. Here I borrow from Victor Turner's (1969) theory of liminality and its development by scholars such as Shail Mayaram and Dominique Sila Khan (Khan 2004a, 2004b; Mayaram 1997, 2004). Liminal entities straddle thresholds; they are betwixt and between, representing margins and ambiguity. For instance, according to Turner, 'death, being in the womb, invisibility, darkness, bisexuality, an eclipse of the sun or moon depict liminal situations' (1969: 94–130) and are stages of separation from fixed points in society. This concept of liminality breaks from social structures, challenges established norms, and creates ambiguous situations. It can be permanent or move into new phases (post-liminality) accompanied by transformed identities.

Saint Lāldās' liminal status is visible in his non-observance of the Islamic practices of *rozā* and *namāz*, despite being born a Muslim. But the text shows that Lāldās also opposes Hindu religious customs. For example, he does not condone idol worship, although it is one of the central aspects of Hinduism, but instead encourages the *nirguṇ bhakti* of Rām. This works against

Brahmanical Hinduism and the *saguṇ* mode of devotion that was widely prevalent at the time. Lāldās thus separates himself from both the Muslim identity of his birth and from orthodox Hindu forms of religious practice. He stood for *nirguṇ bhakti* ideas that were compatible with his Islamic faith.

The hagiography's goal of detaching Lāldās from Islamic aspects, although successful, could not hide the saint's distinctiveness. The text stressed that Lāldās was a *bhakti* saint and adherent of Rām, but, as indicated previously, this was not the only story. There are occasional references in the text that give some indication of Lāldās' equal proximity to the Islamic religion, such as praying at a mosque. Lāldās foreswore some Islamic and Hindu rituals and borrowed concepts from both religions to create an alternative set of practices in a liminal space where the participants' preceding identities, groups, or solidarities could be transformed into new identities, behaviours, and rituals. This interstructural liminal period was also a period of creativity.

It is from this perspective of liminality that the ambiguity about Lāldās' identity as a Hindu *sant* and/or a Muslim *pīr* should be seen. As stated before, Lāldās is said to have gone on the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca three times during his life. On each of his journeys, he brought back a brick and used it in building mosques. Two mosques, the Mecca and Medina, still exist in the vicinity of his shrines at Nagla and Rasgan villages where he spent his married life. As an incipient Indic cultural tradition, this kind of religious interaction is necessarily an indication of the co-subsistence of opposite religious values alongside the desired ones. In this process, religious synthesis and the negation of values take place simultaneously. For instance, when a person follows mixed religious practices, he or she can simultaneously be both Hindu and Muslim, or neither, representing a break from already established categorical societal norms. For instance, when state forces came to take Lāldās to Sahab Khan, Lāldās was sitting at the Mecca mosque he had built, despite the fact that he was an adherent of Rām:

> *us fakar kū dekho jāy, is ghorā pe lāo caḍhāy*
> *dehāde jab nagle āye, makkā mahjad baiṭhe pāye*

<div align="right">(Duṅgarṣi: 12)</div>

Go and see that *fakīr* (mendicant), bring him on this horse
When they reached Nagla, they saw sitting him at the Mecca Mosque.

Lāldās was reciting *saī* (God) Rām's name at the Mecca mosque. For the saint, religion and its symbols were to be used to invoke the one formless entity. Other similar verses in the text also make it clear that, although the text is oriented towards Hinduism, it clearly signposts the saint's proximity to as well as distance from both Islamic and Hindu religious symbols and practices.[11]

Later, as he consolidated himself in his religious beliefs, Lāldās advocated not only *nirguṇ bhakti* (formless devotion) but also preached the values of cow herding and vegetarianism. Vegetarianism was central to the formation of his *panth*. He taught five rules: abstaining from the killing of animals and eating meat (especially beef), abstaining from alcohol consumption, not partaking of any food in a daughter's house, not growing tobacco and sugar cane, and not stealing. The chanting of Rām's name was his main mantra. His teachings continue to be followed by people of both religions.

Muslims in this area believe that, as long as these five tenets are followed, the people there will continue to receive the saint's blessings and protection. His love for cows was so well known that, until recent times, Meo Muslims would donate a young yellow heifer to his tomb in times of distress. For example, Meo Muslims still believe that, if the rain fails, a yellow cow should be offered to the saint and there will be a downpour before the supplicants arrive home.[12]

This yellow heifer will turn into a cow living in the vicinity and receive the protection of the saint (Kumar 2019).

Beliefs of a *sādh*

The practices of Lāldās's Muslim followers provide examples of the saint's equidistance from both religions and the unique religious synthesis that he preached. The priests at almost all Lāldāsī shrines are Meo Muslims, known as *lāldās kā sādh*. The term *sādh* originates from *siddh*, meaning 'perfect' in meditation. A devotee of Lāldās may be called a *sādh* in Mewat, but the term more commonly refers to the Meo Muslim priests who sit at Lāldās' shrines, although in recent times, some of the priests have also been Hindus. The Hindu *sādhs* belong to diverse communities (Brahmans, Gujars, and Badhai) and are currently performing priestly rites only at two traditional Lāldāsī shrines among many. It is not clear when they began this role or replaced Meo *sādhs*. Mostly, Muslim *sādhs* traditionally performed this duty, which has brought upon them the disapproval of non-Lāldāsī Muslims. In one famous popular saying, the *sādhs'* lifestyle is the object of sarcasm and disapproval:

> *dāḍhī-mūnch katā ke raho risāy*
> *dono dīn sū jāyego lāldās ko sādh.*

> They are pleased to shave off their moustaches and beards
> They will fail both religions, these *sādhs* of Lāldās.

Any tradition that potentially surpasses the tenets of Hinduism and Islam encounters criticism because it destabilises the very edifice supporting these beliefs. My interviews with many *sādhs* of Hindu and Muslim backgrounds revealed that in many aspects of their personal lives, their behaviours frequently crossed over religious boundaries. Muslim *sādhs*, especially the old generation, do not grow moustaches or beards, nor do they pray in mosques or fast during the holy month of Ramzan, as Lāldās himself did in his lifetime.

Nasimuddin—a *sādh* of Lāldās—has never physically touched meat in his life. He believes that if any *sādh* did so, the saint would penalize that person, so no one in his family breaches this regulation. He recollects that his nephew once breached this code and ate meat and had severe stomach pain.[13] He was then bathed and taken to the shrine to ask for forgiveness. Generations of Nasimuddin's family have been custodians of the main Sherpur Shrine and have followed the Lāldāsī path.[14]

Meo Muslim *sādhs* face numerous social issues in their communities as a result of their beliefs and practices. The marriage of their children can be complicated, as prospective in-laws expect adherence to purist Islamic conducts, especially after the success of the Tablighi Jamaat, an Islamic reform movement in the area. On the day of the Nasimuddin's daughter's marriage, Muslim relatives of the groom who were of Tablighi background insisted on serving meat at the wedding occasion, which led to a confrontation and eventually the cancellation of the marriage.[15]

Newly arrived brides in Lāldāsī families go to the shrine first in order to develop a connection with the saint and the *panth* and leave behind the practices of their families of origin. Ruksana, the wife of Nisamuddin, recollects that for her, it was a smooth transition from her previous family values. She believes that the saint fortified her at every step, as at that time no one questioned the Lāldāsī religious practices. According to her, now life is harder, as other Muslims want the Muslim Lāldāsīs to espouse pure Islamic ideals. Her husband has compromised by attending the village mosque and celebrating the major festivals of Eid and

Bakr–e–Eid. This pressure to conform to Islamic rules has not made the Lāldāsī Meo Muslims deviate from the core values of the *panth*; rather, it has led to the invention of new traditions, such as making adjustments for reformist teachings within the Lāldās traditional belief system. For instance, since Bakr–e–Eid is an Islamic festival of a sacrifice, Lāldāsī Muslims buy goats and give them to somebody else to sacrifice on their behalf so that they do not contradict Lāldās' teachings.[16] Every Muslim *sādh* thus tries to balance the two faiths.

Hindus, too, in some cases, have started using the term *sādh* as a second denomination of their names. However, the rule for Hindu devotees of Lāldās is that they cannot worship any goddesses, as Hindu goddesses accept meat in ritual offerings. I found out that many young Hindus from Punahana who used to worship Kālī had to stop praying to her when they embraced Lāldās. The saint has appeared to people in dreams, exhorting them to have faith in Sufi saints instead of worshipping a goddess, thus showing the connection of the Lāldāsī *panth* (path) with Sufism.

The case of mixed rituals at the Lāldās shrines

The main shrine, apart from numerous other shrines, of Lāldās is located in Sherpur in Alwar. Every day, it is the duty of the *sādh* to bathe and open the shrine and perform *ārti* in front of Lāldās' grave. A group of Hindu devotees, including the members of the Sherpur temple committee, join the *sādh* for morning and evening prayers. The Muslim priest's austere lifestyle, and his performance of Hindu rituals at the saint's shrine, which resembles an Islamic *dargāh*, signifies the border crossings in Indic lives. The rituals include Hindu-style *ārtī* and *bhajans* (Hindu religious songs) sung by Hindu devotees, while Muslims, if present, recite *fatihā* (Qur'ānic hymns for the deceased).

Another example of mixed practice is the offering of cloth to the saint and the protectors of his grave. These protectors are called *fakīrs* or *sayyeds*. There are four of them located at each corner of the Sherpur shrine. The grave of these *sayyeds* symbolically indicated the protection of the shrine and the saint's grave, a traditional job of a Muslim Fakir in Mewat. These four *sayyeds* (*fakīrs*) receive a *chadar/galeb*, a green piece of cloth designed to cover graves and an Islamic symbol offered to other Sufi saints. While offering the cloth to Lāldās and the four *sayyeds*, Hindus as well as Muslims adopt the Islamic manner of obeisance, but the cloth for Lāldās is not green as at Sufi *dargāhs* but white. Most Hindus do not see any conflict in these practices, since they worship a diverse range of gods by divergent methods—what is referred to as 'polytropy' by Carrithers (2000).

Sallu, an elderly *sādh* who claims to be a hundred years old person, claimed that the practice of offering a white *chadar* was 'a perpetual tradition at least in my life span and probably in my father's too', not a recent change.[17] The symbolism of offering white cloth to Lāldās, a customary apparel for Hindu ascetics, along with the green cloth to *sayyeds* (traditional for the Islamic dead) synthesizes differing religious symbolism and practices in the *panth*. Both Hindu and Muslim devotees buy both white and green *chadars* to offer to the saint and the *sayyeds* respectively.

Unlike many other Sufi saints, who are typically worshipped on Thursdays, Lāldās is customarily worshipped on Sundays, his birth day, although visitors pray at the shrine every day, most prostrating themselves in front of the grave. They then circumnavigate the grave, walking on the path between the main *sanctum* and the outer walls, Muslims reciting verses from the *Qur'ān* and Hindus singing the *bhajans* of Lāldās.

Conclusions

It appears, then, that, like other *bhakti* figures such as Kabīr, Ravidās, and Dādū, through his teachings, Lāldās rejected the prevalent social-religious hierarchy. Many saints from lower

socio-economic backgrounds questioned the idea of caste and religious identities (Friedlander 1996).[18] Lāldās' teachings reflected the peculiar Meo caste attitude towards both religions and the peasant background of his family and community. His major concern was the transcendence of both Hindu and Islamic institutional religiosity (i.e. Hindu Sanskritic culture and political forms of Islam) by imbricating Meo relationships with vernacular Hinduism and popular Islam, thus rendering fluid the boundaries between his *panth* and both religions. Sects or *panth*s (paths) like Lāldās' both defined one's religious status and also made the religious categories of Hindu and Muslim less crucial.

The study of the Lāldās *sampradāy/panth* (tradition/path) indicates that religious identities and practices are malleable to the extent that categorisation of popular beliefs into Hindu and Muslim seems a futile exercise. Lāldās comes from a line of medieval *bhakti* and Sufi saints whose teachings, still widely followed by people, advocated rising above social and religious distinctions. Many saints such as Kabīr and Lāldās chose a path of humanity, which all religious groups, castes, and creeds could share with common objectives, that is, to believe in one attribute-less God.

Lāldās through his teachings combined some practices of two religions to send a message of religious synthesis. The kind of life Lāldās supposedly lived and his followers still follow after him today does not belong to either religion. The overall purpose of this liminal attitude has been to stand against institutional beliefs. In doing so, Lāldās and his *panth* delineated a form of religiosity far from being either a Hindu or a Muslim.

Notes

1 The field and archival research upon which this chapter is based was part of my doctoral research funded by the Research Council of Norway. I also wish to acknowledge the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for the post-doctoral research support during the period on which the chapter was written.

2 All these figures are believed to have taken birth in four different Hindu epochs, *Satyug*, *Tretā*, *Dvāpar*, and *Kalyug*, respectively.

3 The term *sant* refers to a Hindu saint, while *pīr* stands for an Islamic mystic.

4 There are various shrines of Lāldās in Mewat and other parts of north India. However, those associated with him and his family members, which are primary burial sites, are considered the main centres. Lāldās' main shrine is in Sherpur Village in Alwar.

5 These verses are taken from the part of the saint's hagiography known as *Duṅgarṣi Sādh Krat Śrī Lāldās Nuktāvali*, pp. 23–24. The translation is mine.

6 I am very grateful particularly to Anand Sādh, Ramnaresh Sādh, and Sonu Aggrawal, among others, for providing me with a copy of the text *Lāldās Nuktāvali*. Though the date of compilation of the text is not known, I assume it to be from the 1940s and 50s on the basis of the written style of Hindi. However, the verses were already in circulation prior to the 19th century when Powlett (1878) recorded them during his fieldwork in the 1850s in Alwar.

7 The term '*Nuktāvali*' is made of the words *nuktā*+*avali*, whereby '*nuktā*' stands for 'couplet' and '*avali*' for 'collection', meaning 'the collection of couplets'. The *Nuktāvali* is the first part of the 600-page-long handwritten text. Although the first part is compiled by Dunagarisi Sadh as the text mentions it, it is equally difficult to date the text and the circulation of hymns.

8 The English translation of the couplet completely loses its rhyming characteristics. Readers of the Hindi language would be able to grasp this nuance in the verse.

9 Linguistic duopoly refers to the dual connection of the Mewati dialect, a spoken Indo-Aryan dialect, with the Hindi and Urdu languages. In the text *Nuktāvali*, words in Mewati are used with Hindi, Sanskrit, and Urdu words. The style in the text is similar to rhyming scriptures. Bakshi (2012) argues that 'Mewati is possibly undergoing a shift towards Hindi-Urdu with Urdu playing a key part due to its associations with Islamic identity' (p. 234). The large presence of the Tablighi Jamaat–run *madrassās* is also pushing this shift towards Urdu.

10 I am not able to cite all the verses here. They repeatedly appeal to Hindus and Muslims to follow *nirguṇ bhakti*.

11 While there is little explicit representation of Islamic aspects in the text, a careful reading of the couplets indirectly points to this aspect.
12 Fieldnotes.
13 Without telling anyone in the family, the nephew tested meat in the company of friends.
14 Interview with Nasimuddin, 5 August 2016.
15 Nasimuddin suggested they can eat meat outside the wall of the Lāldās shrine but not in the premises where they live.
16 Interview with Ruksana, 7 September 2016.
17 Interview with Salamuddin, 10 August 2016.
18 See Callewaert and Friedlander (1992) and Friedlander (1996: 106–123), especially for saint Ravidās' concerns for salvation in the social context of the struggle between bhakti saints and the orthodox Brahmanical tradition.

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16

CONVERSION AND CHRISTIAN RELATIONS WITH NON-CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH ASIA

Chad Bauman

This chapter appears in a section that foregrounds "religious pluralism" in its title ("Contemporary South Asian religions: Religious pluralism") and appropriately so, since the relationship of Christians and adherents of other religions in South Asia has been characterized predominantly by mutual tolerance and respect in both historical and contemporary times. That this chapter focuses on a topic—conversion—about which there is some significant disagreement, and which has at times caused even violent conflict, should not be taken to suggest that conflict in everyday relations is inherent to Christians' interactions with their religious others in the region. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Nevertheless, on the issue of conversion, the second element of the section title (religious "identity") does periodically come to the fore, due to the gradual politicization of religious identities over the last few centuries of South Asian history.

While at the end I provide some comparative comment about Buddhist-Christian relations in Sri Lanka, the chapter focuses on India, as the most populous country in the region, and therefore on Hindu-Christian relations. It begins with a brief historical overview of Christianity in India, which is intended to help situate the discussion that follows while underscoring the point that something we might call "Hindu-Christian" conflict over the issue of conversion emerged only slowly and only after a millennium of Christian existence in South Asia. After this historical overview, the chapter surveys the twentieth-century development, among certain Hindus, of a pointed critique of proselytization, the term I use to refer to evangelism that has as its aim a change in the religious affiliation of another. In its third part, the chapter focuses on contemporary manifestations of the conflict over conversion in India, among which violence has been an occasional feature. In the final part of the chapter, then, I turn to Sri Lanka.

History of Indian Christianity

The history of Christianity in India dates back to the origins of the St. Thomas Christians of southwestern India (in contemporary Kerala). These Christians are called "St. Thomas" Christians because of their claim to have been converted by the apostle Thomas ("Doubting Thomas") himself in 52 CE. While historians find little evidence beyond the community's own oral history to support this claim, evidence for the existence of a Christian community in southern India becomes much stronger by the third or fourth century, and it is well established

that this early Christian community had strong ties to Syrian Christianity, following the East Syriac Rite, so much so that India was designated a Metropolitanate of the Church of the East in the seventh century. Because of this, the St. Thomas Christians are also often called "Syrian Christians."

St. Thomas Christians claim upper-caste origins, and by the sixth century, they were recognized as a higher-status community, having established themselves as a powerful traders and valued soldiers. As Susan Bayly (1989) has shown, the St. Thomas Christians were well integrated within southern India's religious and cultural landscape. Their religious practices, which focused on rituals performed and petitions given at the shrines of powerful, deceased, boongranting thaumaturges, would have resembled that of other religious people in the region. Moreover, the St. Thomas Christians were integrated within the local Hindu ritual landscape by contesting for and being granted honours, privileges, and responsibilities indicative of their high status during Hindu festivals.

During this pre-modern period, the St. Thomas Christianity community periodically came into conflict with non-Christian communities. However, these conflicts generally originated in status disputes, sometimes related to the Hindu temple festival honors described just previously—not in what we would today call "religion"—and demonstrate that the St. Thomas Christians were effectively functioning as an integrated community among other communities in the region. Their adherence to certain forms of Christian piety did not function to set them apart from others. Each community was expected to have its own distinctive customs and practices. There is evidence that local non-Christians would pray at Christian shrines as readily as Christians might pray at theirs. Meanwhile, significantly, there is little evidence the St. Thomas Christians attempted to spread the influence of their particular forms of piety beyond their own community.

While it is important not to overstate the point—among other reasons, we are now skipping over nearly a millennium of history—the arrival of European Christians at the end of the fifteenth century inaugurated a number of changes that were to have a significant impact on the perception and status of India's Christians. While the primary interests that brought Vasco da Gama to India's shores in 1498 were mercantile, the hulls of subsequent Portuguese ships arriving there were laden not only with trading goods but also with Catholic priests and missionaries. The Portuguese quickly identified the St. Thomas Christian community as a natural ally. Not satisfied merely to ally with a powerful local community, however, they set about trying to reform St. Thomas Christian practices to align more fully with orthodox Latin Catholic Christianity. European Protestants who arrived later would likewise attempt to Protestantize the St. Thomas Christians.

Those seeking to reform St. Thomas Christians frequently demanded that they discontinue their participation in Hindu festivals, in a sense beginning to impose an emerging modern European understanding of religions as clearly distinct and non-overlapping (and Christianity as the sole religion capable of effecting salvation) upon a community that did not fully share it. To the extent that such reformers—there were many among even British East India Company's (BEIC's) official ranks—were successful in demanding that the St. Thomas Christians disentangle themselves from Hindu festival practices, they began to undermine the high status of the St. Thomas Christian community, since contesting and receiving temple festival honours was a means both to press for and perform one's high status.

The status of Christianity in India declined somewhat more once the missionaries that followed in da Gama's wake began having significant evangelistic success among lower-caste communities in southern India, which often converted *en masse* in a strategic bid to seek the patronage of Portuguese or other European powers as they negotiated their local political

terrain. The St. Thomas Christians' European interlocutors often insisted that they should interact freely with these new, lower-caste Christians (against the social instincts of the St. Thomas community). While the St. Thomas Christians would eventually regain their high status—in part by distancing themselves from these new Christians, Christianity came to be increasingly regarded in India as a low-caste, foreign religion.

Once the BEIC solidified and entrenched European sovereignty over most of the subcontinent in the eighteenth century, other issues emerged. In its earliest years, Company officials were loath to interfere unnecessarily in local social and religious affairs, since to do so was to risk disrupting their valuable trading relations. As the eighteenth century merged into the nineteenth, however, pressure mounted on the BEIC from British social and political leaders (and Company officials) under the spell of evangelicalism of the era to act more like a *Christian* Company. As a result, the BEIC loosened restrictions on missionary work and Christian educational institutions and began to prohibit practices that offended Evangelical sensibilities, such as *sati* and restrictions on the remarriage of widows. This, along with memories of the Portuguese Inquisition in India, began to suggest to many Indians that Christianity was not merely a foreign religion but one that their colonial rulers were willing to impose upon them in various ways.

Anxieties about Christianity and the possibility of Hindu decline were therefore already on the rise in the late nineteenth century, when, in part related to a series of devastating famines in India, there were a number of mass movements of conversion to Christianity. These movements, which occurred primarily among lower-caste communities, continued into the early decades of the twentieth century, substantially increasing the Christian population (though never to levels much higher than the 2.3% of the population they currently constitute, according to the 2011 Census of India; Hindus constitute nearly 80%). Making matters worse was that the British Raj (which had replaced the BEIC as rulers of India in 1858) had begun conducting decennial censuses of India in 1881. These censuses not only tracked religious affiliation (and thus documented shifting demographics) but also laid the groundwork for proportional religious representation in colonial India's legislatures. Together, these shifts in British practice and policy substantially increased the degree to which religious identities and numbers mattered *politically*. Accordingly, the issue of conversion became further politicized as well. (For a more detailed and thorough history of Hindu-Christian relations in India, see Bauman 2020: ch. 2).

The critique of proselytization

As Richard Fox Young (forthcoming) has shown, Hindu criticisms of Christianity in India were common throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and high-profile or controversial conversions often provoked them. But conversion had not yet during those centuries become politicized in the way it did in the twentieth century, for reasons explained in the previous paragraph. Not surprisingly, then, in the early decades of the twentieth century, those criticisms received new impetus, in part as a result of their being tied to a particular Hindu-centric vision of India that emerged as part of the independence movement.

That vision was called *Hindutva* (Hinduness), a term coined by V. D. Savarkar (1883–1966) in 1923. A fuller articulation of the history and development of this vision has been given in many studies. Here it will suffice to focus on the aspects of *Hindutva* (and Hindu nationalism more generally) that impinge upon Christians' relations with Hindus in India. For Savarkar, the genius and strength of India—genius and strength that would allow Indians to overthrow the British—lay in its noble history of an advanced, distinctive, and all-encompassing civilization. This civilization was "Hindu" in a broad cultural sense, thus the importance of promoting and protecting its cultural "Hinduness." It was also important, however, to preserve the distinctly

religious aspects of Hinduism for Indians, since each nation properly followed its own cultural and religious habits, and citizens of one nation could never be properly served by those of another. Proper citizens of India, Savarkar argued, should consider it both their fatherland and holy land. His was therefore a vision that excluded the so-called "foreign" religions of Islam and Christianity. The problem with conversion, according to Savarkar, was that once Indians converted to Christianity (or Islam), "they . . . ceased to own Hindu civilization (Sanskriti) as a whole" (1969 [1923]: 100–101).

Savarkar's ideas flourished in part because of their institutionalization by K. B. Hedgewar (1889–1940), who founded the first and most powerful of all *Hindutva*-inspired nationalist organizations in India: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Both Hedgewar and his successor as head of the RSS, M. S. Golwalkar (1906–73), chose to follow a relatively apolitical strategy, yet both actively promoted Savarkar's ideals. Golwalkar went even a step further, criticizing "territorial nationalisms" (what we might today call "secular nationalisms") for naively thinking the dominant religion and culture of a nation could be so easily set aside. In addition to promoting a vision of the nation that promised no real role for Christians and Muslims, Golwalkar, throughout his career, articulated a range of criticisms of Christianity, and of proselytization, that have since become quite common. He accused Christians of engaging in social service only for the sake of promoting conversion, for example, and suggested that they regularly deployed underhanded and fraudulent means to lure Hindus to their fold. "The way they are behaving towards other people forces us to conclude that the modern proselytising religions have very little of true religion in them," Golwalkar argued, adding, in an accusation that critics of Christian proselytization have since regularly echoed, "In the name of God, Prophet and religion, they are only *trying to further their political ambitions*" (Golwalkar 2000 [1966]: 189, italics added).

While the critique of proselytization is rightly associated with those whose vision of an independent India was more Hindu-centric, even pious and somewhat more pluralistic Hindus as irenic as Gandhi found the Christian obsession with conversion distasteful. True religion, for Gandhi, was about pursuing spiritual transformation *within* one's religion. Better to encourage an adherent of another religion to become a better adherent of that religion than to presume that your religion would work better. "I have absolutely no faith in the proselytizing activity that is being carried on today," Gandhi said in a speech to women missionaries in 1925, "[T]he benefit is of little account when compared with the harm which has followed . . . [M]y humble intelligence refuses to believe that a man becomes good when he renounces one religion and embraces another" (Gandhi 1999, vol. 31: 443). In fact, given the powerful influence of family and heritage, one's birth religion was in almost every case more likely to provide the necessary resources for spiritual advance.

Like Savarkar, after the 1920s, Gandhi became increasingly concerned about Christian proselytizing and increasingly vocal in his opposition to it. He accused missionaries of having the ulterior motive of conversion when offering social services (undermining the value of the service itself) and faulted them for focusing on lower-caste communities, since he feared their conversions were more likely prompted by hopes of social and economic advance than more purely spiritual factors, though he also, controversially, demeaned the agency and intellect of lower-caste communities, suggesting they had "no mind, no intelligence, no sense of difference between God and no-God" (Kim 2003: 33). Because of the high regard in which he was held, it was Gandhi, more than any other, who mainstreamed the accusation that most conversions to Christianity were the result of "allurement."

After independence in 1947, during the Constituent Assembly debates aimed at forging India's Constitution, those whose concerns about proselytization compelled them to advocate legally prohibiting it debated those whose vision of secularism necessarily required the right to

engage in it. Most (but not all) Muslim and Christian delegates, along with their Hindu and other allies, were found in the latter camp, which eventually prevailed, such that India's Constitution includes the right "freely to profess, practice and propagate religion."

As Claerhout and de Roover (2019) have insightfully argued, the debate about whether religious freedom must include the right to proselytize proceeds between parties deploying disparate definitions of religion itself, which is why it is often mystifying to western and especially Christian observers who approach the debate from a generally western, Christian perspective. Savarkar, Golwalkar, Gandhi, and others like them understood religion as something ultimately tied to culture and ethnicity. Judaism was the religion of Jews, Hinduism was the religion of Indians, and Christianity was the religion of Europeans. Moreover, the goal of religion was spiritual transformation and growth in spiritual knowledge. Such knowledge was available in every religious tradition, so it made no sense to switch from one to another. Because religion was inherently tied to ethnicity and culture, and because no religion's resources were better than another's in the pursuit of spiritual transformation, proselytization was simply unnecessary. Worse still, it was culturally disruptive.

It is easy to see how people thinking of religion along these lines might speak past those, like many Christians, who understand religion to be about salvation and who believe that their own religion is uniquely effective (soteriologically speaking), universally valid, and thus unhitched from any particular culture or ethnicity. For those in the first group, proselytization is a rudeness, an imposition, an insensitivity, a kind of cultural imperialism. For those in the second group, proselytization is an obligation for anyone who truly cares about the ultimate fate of their fellow humans.

By the time the Constitution of India came into effect in 1950, the general outline of Indian debates about conversion had been set. However, the allegation that conversions to Christianity (and other religions) proceeded primarily by "force, fraud, and allurement" (or "force, fraud, and inducement"), a key rhetorical element of contemporary criticism of proselytization, became popular only a few years later, with the publication of the *Report of the Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee, Madhya Pradesh*, *1956*, better known as the Niyogi Report, after the name of the Committee's chair, Dr. Bhawani Shankar Niyogi. Commissioned by the state of Madhya Pradesh at the behest of officials and citizens concerned about what they perceived to be the rapid growth and underhanded strategies of Christian missionaries in the region, the Committee proceeded, along largely biased lines, and with the support of *Hindutva* ideologues like Golwalkar, to interview hundreds of people in the region. In the end, they produced a long and detailed report (Christian Missionary Activities Enquiry Committee 1956) concluding that Christianity was growing by leaps and bounds, that its growth was largely the result of "force, fraud, and allurement" (e.g., offers of jobs, education, healthcare, or money), and that Christians in the region harboured sectarian tendencies (wishing, like some Muslims had with Pakistan, to establish a Christian land of their own). Because of this, the *Report* recommended that the work of foreign missionaries be circumscribed and certain restrictions or perhaps even a complete ban be placed on proselytization and conversion (Bauman 2008).

In 1967, the state of Orissa (now Odisha) took up the *Report's* recommendation, passing the "Orissa Freedom of Religion Act" stipulating that no person shall "convert or attempt to convert, either indirectly or otherwise, any person from one religious faith to another by the use of force or by inducement or by any fraudulent means." The state of Madhya Pradesh followed with a similar law passed in 1968, and then Arunachal Pradesh followed in 1978. Today, such laws are in force in 8 of India's 29 states.

Most of the laws include language similar to Orissa's version, though they differ in terms of the penalties they recommend, the definitions they provide, whether they apply to conversion

to Hinduism, and so on. All of them, however, include provision for more severe penalties in cases where the converts in question are women, minors, or members of a Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe. Such provisions, of course, controversially presume the greater vulnerability and gullibility of such classes, perpetuating, in the case of the inclusion of the Scheduled Castes (the Indian government's official term for the lowest castes), Gandhi's prejudiced assessment of their ability to make reasoned religious choices. (For a full historical assessment of these laws, see Richards 2016.) When the constitutionality of Orissa's and Madhya Pradesh's laws was tested, the lower courts returned contradictory decisions, and for this reason, the Supreme Court took up the case in 1977. In its ruling, the Court declared laws circumscribing conversion constitutional and did so by defining the Constitutional right to "propagate" as the right to transmit knowledge about one's religion, but *not the right to intentionally seek the conversion of another*. Because of this ruling, the extent to which it is actually legal to proselytize in India remains very much unsettled.

Christians in India object not to the letter of these laws—who, after all, would defend the use of "force, fraud, and inducement," in proselytization?—but to the murkiness of their terms and their capricious application. Few, if any, convictions have actually occurred under the laws. Rather, they serve as an opportunity for opponents of Christianity to enter spurious complaints against them and haul them (sometimes forcibly) before the police, who periodically imprison them. Christians are then forced to work through the slow and frustrating Indian court system to prove their innocence. One of the primary reasons the laws are available for this kind of abuse is that their terms are so ill-defined. Is a strong exhortation full of arguments intended to be persuasive "force"? Is it "fraud" to promise that low-caste Hindu converts to Christianity might expect to encounter less caste prejudice within their new religion if that isn't always consistently the case? Is it "inducement" to offer education or healthcare at a lower cost to members of one's own community? Moreover, in cases where these terms *have* been explicitly defined, such as in Himachal Pradesh, where the law stipulates that threats of divine displeasure constitute "force," Christians fear their ability to share what they consider the repercussions of unbelief have been radically curtailed.

Though the general framework of the anti-proselytization critique in India had been established by the 1950s, and has remained largely stable until this very day, different critics have added their own particular nuances. Elsewhere (Bauman forthcoming), I have surveyed those nuances with more depth. In what follows, however, I discuss key developments in the anti-conversion argument since the final decades of the twentieth century, with particular attention to Ram Swarup, Sita Ram Goel, Arun Shourie, Ashok Chowgule, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Radha Rajan, Rajiv Malhotra, and the Hindu American Foundation.

In 1982, Ram Swarup (1920–1998) established Voice of India, a publishing house that over the next decades published a great deal of literature critical of Christianity in India. Though he shared Gandhi's conception of religion and repeated many of Gandhi's general criticisms of Christian proselytization, Swarup did so with more bombast and sarcasm than the frank but generally civil Mahatma. In addition, while Gandhi regularly criticized Christians' obsession with conversion, he frequently spoke admirably of Christ and of Christian ethics. Swarup would have none of it. Christians' obsession with conversion was, for Swarup, inherent in the structure of the religion itself. Christians' belief in exclusive access to soteriological truth made them inherently intolerant of others. "The fact is that intolerance is inbuilt into the basic Semitic approach and cursing comes naturally to it. The Bible is full of curses invoked on rival-gods, prophets, apostles, doctrines. For example, Paul told his Galatian followers that 'should anyone preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed'" (1992 [1982]: 10).

Among Swarup's associates and admirers at Voice of India was Sita Ram Goel (1921–2003). One of Goel's primary contributions to the developing critique of Christian proselytization was the claim that Christian proselytization was merely a logical manifestation of western neo-colonial ambitions. Tracing the history of Christianity from Constantine to the Inquisition, and from there to late twentieth-century Christian evangelical campaigns, Goel proclaims, "Christianity has never been a religion; it has always been a predatory imperialism par excellence" (2010 [1986]: 5). Like Swarup, Goel believed the predatory, imperialistic nature of Christianity was built into its very historical and theological foundations. He also shared with Swarup a rather bombastic style of writing and the belief that Gandhi's courteous approach to such matters was insufficient to the task of addressing the grave threat of Christian proselytization. Gandhi had praised Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount. In contrast, Goel includes a chapter in his *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters* entitled "Plea for Rejecting Jesus as Junk" (Ibid.) Like many that would come after him, Goel (2009 [1988]) also criticized Indian Christian attempts to "indigenize" the gospel, that is, to express and practice it borrowing Indian religious terminology and rituals. Christians who engage in indigenization efforts generally do so in an effort to make Christianity appealing by appearing more Indian (and less western) and to prove that Christians need not be denationalized. For Goel, however, indigenization efforts were merely strategic. Their intent was to lure gullible Hindus to the fold by suggesting that Christianity was really quite similar to Hinduism and not the radically different kind of religion Goel considered it.

Though both had loyal followings, neither Swarup nor Goel achieved the kind of national prominence of Arun Shourie (1941–), controversial former editor of two widely read and reputable Indian newspapers, member of the Indian parliament and minister in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) government from 1998 to 2004. (The BJP is allied with the RSS and other Hindu nationalist organizations, and its current prime minister, Narendra Modi, has a long history of working for and with the RSS.) Like Swarup, Shourie objected to what he perceived to be the cynically strategic nature of Christian evangelistic campaigns, which in his view inappropriate mimicked "the objectives characteristic of most secular organisations—numbers, market shares, the debates over one marketing strategy over another . . . even of which aspect of the doctrine is to be emphasised and which is to [be] underplayed in the light of what effect either is liable to have on the market share. The sacred secularised, from St. Francis of Assisi to a marketing agency" (Shourie 1994: 19). For Shourie, the very integrity and viability of India was under threat from divisive forces within and without. Christianity, and particularly Christian proselytization, was among those divisive forces. He borrowed his solution from Gandhi, "whose advice was always the same: stop conversions altogether as it is 'the deadliest poison that ever sapped the fountain of truth'" (Ibid.: 37).

The anti-Christian writings of industrialist Ashok Chowgule (1948–) borrow much from these other authors. Perhaps his most distinctive contribution was to frame proselytization as an act of intolerance. In this sense, he contrasts Christians with Hindus, who, correctly perceiving religion to be something tied to ethnicity and culture, are eminently tolerant of the religions of other nations. Chowgule is also somewhat distinctive in the way he suggests that Hindus should not be expected to tolerate those who do not show them a corresponding level of regard. "In a pluralistic Hinduism," he writes, "religious minorities need not have any fear. At the same time, there has to be responsibility of these other religions to respect the Hindu civilisation, and not to provoke it" (Chowgule 1999: 13). In this view, then, Christian proselytization is a provocation, and *Christians* are responsible for any reaction it might engender.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930–2015), cofounder and former convenor of the influential Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha (an association of the heads, or *acharyas*, of various prominent Hindu lineages), went even a step further. For him, Christian proselytization was not merely a

provocation; it was a violent act. Because religion was intimately tied to culture and ethnicity, "[C]onversion implies destruction of . . . culture" (Dayananda 1999). Like Chowgule, Swami Dayananda suggests that proselytization forces generally tolerant Hindus to become intolerant in response. "In converting," he averred, "you are also converting the non-violent to violence" (Dayananda 1999), and here he is not speaking merely metaphorically: When the hurt of conversion "becomes acute, it explodes into violence. Conversion is violence. It generates violence. Conversion is, therefore, a rank, one-sided aggression" (Dayananda 1999).

To the critique of proselytization articulated by figures before her, Radha Rajan (1956–), a widely read Tamil writer and blogger, adds an element of resistance to globalization, to which, for her, Christian proselytization is intimately related. To make this point, Rajan speaks of a menacing, neo-colonial global "Church," which is broader than merely the aggregate of Christian churches but also includes

> Christian NGOs, Christian funding agencies, White Christian governments and countries which legitimize and use evangelization and militant Christian missionary objectives as instruments of foreign policy in countries of Asia . . . [T]he generic Church also includes the United Nations with a charter that enforces Christian 'liberal' political principles as the universal sociopolitical ideal which will be enforced coercively by any one of the arms of the generic Church, including military intervention.
>
> (Rajan 2011)

Rajan also takes aim more than these other critics at what she deems the propensity of Christians in India to engender enmity among lower-caste communities for their upper-caste fellow citizens. This, she writes, "is vintage Christian war strategy—de-link the target community from its parent, give it a sense of separateness resulting in alienation, render it defenseless, alone and vulnerable and then step in for the kill" (Rajan 2011).

Such criticisms of Christian proselytization have now gone global. Rajan's assertion of a vast and coordinated western plot by the "generic Church" to undermine the sovereignty and integrity of nonwestern nations is echoed by the American, Rajiv Malhotra (and his co-author, Aravindan Neelakandan), who document these synchronized forces intent on "breaking India" (Malhotra and Neelakandan 2011). Similarly, combining Goel's use of the term "predatory" with Swami Dayananda's assertion that proselytization is a violent act, the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), which was founded in 2003 to advocate for Hindus living in America and abroad, argues, "Conversion, when born from genuine faith, belief, study, or religious experience, can be beautiful . . . But, conversion begot by aggressive or predatory proselytization is a form of violence" (Hindu American Foundation n.d.). "Predatory proselytization" is defined by the HAF as "the conditioning of humanitarian aid or economic, educational, medical, and social assistance on conversion; denigrating other religions to sell the 'primacy' of another religion; or knowingly and intentionally promoting religious hatred, bigotry, and even violence" (Ibid.). Like Rajan and others profiled here, the HAF contends that notions of religious freedom enshrined and perpetuated by organizations like the United Nations favour proselytizing religions over non-proselytizing religions and will lead ultimately to the "annihilation of more pluralistic peoples, cultures, and traditions" (Ibid.).

There is clearly a connective tissue running from Savarkar, Golwalkar, and Gandhi to the HAF and other contemporary critics of Christian proselytization in India. Each of these figures contributed certain distinctive elements to the developing critique, and in more recent decades, that critique has become allied to a broader critique of globalization in India and has also gained a somewhat broader hearing due to the rising political and economic capital of Indians on the

global stage. Nevertheless, these figures all share much in common in terms of how they conceive of religion—what it is and should be—and in many ways, their censure of proselytization is rooted in the distinctiveness of that conception vis-à-vis that of those who feel obligated to proselytize.

Contemporary conflict over conversion in India

Since the late 1990s, the debate about conversion in India has become progressively more contentious and violent. The reasons for this timing are too complicated to adequately cover in this short chapter, but they include 1) the denationalization of India's economy in the 1990s, which increased anxiety over foreign influence; 2) the rise of Italian- and Christian-born Sonia Gandhi to chief of the more secularist Congress Party, which encouraged those allied with the BJP, already prone toward anti-minority rhetoric, to increase their criticism of Christianity; 3) the declining returns of, and public backlash against, a variety of anti-Muslim campaigns (e.g., the Ramjanmabhoomi Movement, on which see Alder's chapter in this volume), which likewise encouraged a shift towards anti-Christian activities; 4) an increase in the scope and visibility of assertively proselytizing evangelical and Pentecostal Christians in India; and 5) the emergence of the BJP and its allies, with their Hindu-inflected nationalism, from the margins of Indian political life to the centre, over which they have held power roughly half of the time since 1998.

I have covered these factors in the growth of anti-Christian rhetoric and activity since the 1990s in more depth elsewhere (see, for example, Bauman 2015: 53 ff.). Here it will need to suffice to further discuss only the fourth and fifth. The fourth: Though during the colonial period, it was not uncommon to find aggressively evangelistic missionaries who were openly critical and demeaning of Hindus and their religious beliefs and practices, such tendencies began to fade somewhat with the rise of the social gospel movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. The emphases of the social gospel movement altered the balance of Christian missionary energies toward social service (and away from direct evangelism) globally. Independence encouraged further movement in that direction, since at independence, the predominant religion of India's rulers shifted from Christianity to Hinduism, leaving India's Christians feeling somewhat more obligated to avoid provoking their Hindu neighbours. Pentecostals and Evangelicals of the modern variety existed in India from the early twentieth century onward but were substantially outnumbered by mainline Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic Christians who generally focused on social service and confined their evangelistic witness, such as it was, to within the boundaries of their church grounds and friend/family networks.

In the last few decades of the twentieth century, however, the strength of evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity rose substantially in India, as it did elsewhere in the developing worlds of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Simultaneously, evangelistically inclined Christians embarked on several highly visible global evangelistic campaigns, such as AD 2000 and the Joshua Project. The projects set challenging goals and employed advanced data, statistics, and strategies to identify and evangelize "unreached" people groups. India was home to many of the unreached people groups identified by these movements and therefore the target of much evangelistic rhetoric and activity. Due to their visibility, and to the kinds of strategizing they employed, these evangelistic campaigns caught the critical notice of many opponents of Christianity and raised the hackles of those concerned about preserving a Hindu majority in India, which brings us to the fifth factor listed previously.

It is difficult to say whether the rise of the BJP in the late 1990s, after playing second fiddle to the Congress Party for nearly all of independent Indian history, was the cause or an effect of rising anti-minority sentiment in India. Both could, of course, be true. In any case, it is

certainly the case that the "production" (as Brass 2003, puts it) of anti-minority concern and conflict serves the purposes of the BJP. Though the BJP's constituency has shifted somewhat in recent elections, the party has traditionally drawn strength especially from middling and upper-caste Hindu communities. These communities, however, do not constitute a majority, and it is only if one includes both lower-caste and tribal communities within the Hindu fold that Hindus constitute a decisive electoral force. To unify lower-caste and tribal communities around an upper-caste vision of Hinduism that does not always serve them well, the BJP does what majoritarian nationalists everywhere do: stoke concerns about and provoke conflict with minority communities. Together, in a mutually reinforcing way, stoking concerns about and provoking conflict with religious minorities has the effect of creating a threatening other and encouraging competing communities within the majority to overlook their differences and unify against the "outsider."

The BJP has followed this script scrupulously. Both when campaigning and while in power, BJP politicians quite frequently criticize Christians and Muslims and call their patriotism into question. Periodically, though less frequently, they even lead protests or violent mobs against them. Politicians associated with the BJP and affiliated parties also generally look the other way when their allies in *Hindutva*-inspired social and religious organizations (like the RSS, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and Bajrang Dal) do likewise. Moreover, when there have been violent majoritarian outbursts against India's Muslims and Christians, BJP politicians and their allies have tended to blame them on the "provocative" activities of minority communities.

These tendencies were on display already in one of the first significant incidents of anti-Christian violence in the modern period. At Christmastime in 1998, there was a series of riots in the Dangs, a region of Gujarat known for its high population of tribal peoples, many of whom had become Christian over the previous decades. No deaths were reported during the Dangs riots, but over the course of several days, rioters destroyed dozens of Christian houses and churches. The BJP had only earlier in the year come to power, and after the Dangs riots (on January 10), the party's prime minister, Atal Vehari Vajpayee, visited the area and called for a "national debate on conversion." By doing so, he of course framed the riots as a natural response to the provocation of proselytization.

Just 13 days later, in an incident that received international attention, Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two young sons were burned to death in their Jeep by a mob angered at their purported evangelization and conversion of the leper patients with whom they worked. Eventually, Dara Singh was convicted of having led the mob. In upholding a lower court's decision to commute the death sentence he had originally been given, the Supreme Court of India declared, "It is undisputed that there is no justification for interfering in someone's belief by way of 'use of force', provocation, conversion, incitement *or upon a flawed premise that one religion is better than the other*" (emphasis added). After public uproar over the court's apparent espousal of a religious belief—that no religion is better than another—to which not all Indian citizens could assent, the Court took the extraordinary step of expunging its own comment from the decision. Nevertheless, the original text exposes the pervasiveness, in India, of the view that all religions have equal potential to facilitate spiritual growth and that proselytization is a provocative act that invites and justifies (or at least partially excuses) a violent response.

In the years since 1998, the frequency of incidents like these has risen considerably. By my own estimates (Bauman and Leech 2011), there were already well over 250 such incidents annually, on average, by 2007. According to data gathered by the Evangelical Fellowship of India (Religious Liberty Commission of the Evangelical Fellowship of India 2018) for 2018, the number now exceeds 300, making smaller-scale incidents of anti-Christian violence a nearly daily affair. In addition to these smaller-scale, near-daily incidents, there have also periodically

been more severe outbursts of violence in India. The worst of these, and the one that received the most international attention, took place in Kandhamal, Odisha, primarily in August of 2008. As I have described elsewhere (Bauman 2010), the violence was sparked by the assassination of a famous and controversial anti-Christian activist, Swami Lakshmanananda Saraswati, and resulted in around 50 deaths, the destruction of 6000 homes and 300 churches, and the displacement of 50,000, in addition to numerous non-lethal physical attacks, sexual assaults, thefts, and so on. The vast majority (but not all) of the victims were Christian.

As the chapter so far has demonstrated, the ambiguous legal status of proselytization in India has far-reaching consequences. This ambiguity causes confusion about what is allowed and how the law should be applied. This confusion, in turn, provides an opening for the harassment of Christians while encouraging vigilantes to take matters into their own hands when they believe that officials are not enforcing the law as they understand or wish it to be. Of course, even when the terms of such laws are perfectly clear, unscrupulous officials and those with majoritarian tendencies may still find it in their interest to harry or provoke conflict with minorities.

Sri Lanka

Western audiences tend to know much more about India than they do its small island neighbour, Sri Lanka. In the past few decades, the nation has come to international attention primarily for its long civil war (1983–2009); for the 2004 tsunami that devastated its shorelines, killing more than 30,000; and (more recently) for the Easter 2019 bombings of churches and tourist hotels by terrorists claimed by ISIS. Despite what one might infer from the terror attack, historically, conflict between Muslims and Christians has not been a significant feature of Sri Lanka's interreligious relations. In fact, Muslims and Christians have tended to feel some modicum of camaraderie as small minorities mutually targeted by the country's Buddhist nationalists.

The population of Sri Lanka is divided primarily into three ethnic groups. The Sinhalese constitute 75% of the population and are mostly Buddhist. Tamils make up 15% of the population and are mostly Hindu. Moors (mostly descendants of Arab traders) are another 10% of the population and are nearly exclusively Muslim. In terms of religious identity, about 70% of Sri Lankans are Buddhist, while 13% are Hindu, 10% Muslim, and 8% Christian. Sri Lanka's civil war pitted the Sinhalese, who predominate and control many of the island's most important levers of power, against the Tamils. One of the key features of the Christian population in Sri Lanka is that it transcends that ethnic divide; Christians have therefore been able to play a prominent role in national reconciliation.

There are hints that a Christian community related to India's St. Thomas Christians may have existed in Sri Lanka from the first centuries of the first millennium. As in India, however, the Sri Lankan Christian community grew far more dramatically after the arrival of Portuguese, Dutch, and British explorers beginning in the sixteenth century. As in India with Hinduism, the emergence of more assertive forms of Christian evangelism under British rule in the nineteenth century encouraged Buddhist revivalism. At independence, a combination of rising Sinhalese Buddhism and the strength of the Buddhist majority in electoral politics contributed to the displacement of Christians from political posts, in which, because of British favouritism, they had been disproportionately represented.

Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism continued to grow in strength after independence and expressed itself in concrete political changes after the 1950s. First, Sinhala replaced English as the national language, then private Christian schools were nationalized, and then, in the 1970s, Buddhism was written into a new Constitution as the nation's "foremost religion." Ever since, Sri Lankans have struggled to work out the fundamental legal tension between the privileged

place of Buddhism and the Constitution's guarantees of religious freedom for all (Arasaratnam 1977; Johnson 2012; Matthews 2007; Schonthal 2016).

Some of the very same geopolitical forces that gave rise, in the 1990s, to Hindu nationalist politics in India—privatization of the economy, globalization's challenge to national sovereignty, an increasing population of more assertively proselytizing evangelicals and Pentecostals, accusations of unscrupulous forms of evangelism (particularly in the literal and metaphorical wake of the 2004 tsunami)—provoked a nativist reaction in Sri Lanka. Unlike in India and with Hinduism, however, Buddhist monks have themselves played a prominent role in leadership of Buddhist nationalist politics. In the early 2000s, many of them formed a political party composed entirely of monks: the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU). The JHU managed to win several seats in the 2004 parliamentary elections and immediately proposed a law, based on those in India, banning "unethical conversions" (Deegalle 2004; Devotta and Stone 2008). The law was never passed. Nevertheless, as in India, a good portion of non-Christian (and even some Christian) Sri Lankans find proselytization distasteful. This may help account for why, after the end of the civil war reduced Buddhist-Hindu tensions, the nationalistic President Mahinda Rajapaksha, perhaps searching for another "other" against which to unify Buddhists, began to encourage or at least condone attacks on Christians by Buddhist nationalist organizations such as the Bodu Bala Sena ("Buddhist Power Force/Army"). Related to all of these developments, there has been an increase in acts of harassment, discrimination, and violence against Sri Lanka's Christians over the last two decades. The frequency of these incidents has oscillated more erratically than in India, from several dozen to more than a hundred a year, according to the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka and other organizations that track them.

Many of Sri Lanka's Buddhists conceive of religion along the lines described previously for India's Hindus (that is, as something intimately tied with culture and ethnicity, etc.) and reject the assertion, common to many Christians, that there might be one religion with exclusive access to the full truth that is therefore uniquely efficacious. As in India, the prevalence of this conception of religion in Sri Lanka dampens criticism of incidents of anti-Christian harassment and violence, which are perceived as a natural reaction to the provocation of proselytization. Also as in India, however, Buddhist nationalist forces in Sri Lanka produce conflict with and stoke concerns about Christians (and other minorities) for the sake of unifying and rallying Buddhists against this threatening other, which, in turn, they hope will bolster their own position and power.

Conclusion

Despite the peculiarities of their national cultures, politics, and histories, the debate about conversion proceeds along very similar lines in both India and Sri Lanka. This similarity is related, no doubt, to the two countries' common experiences of colonization, evangelization, and globalization "from below." It is also certainly related to the similarities of Hinduism and Buddhism, which both emerged from a similar South Asian milieu and which share certain fundamental beliefs about the nature and goals of "true" religion, beliefs which frequently set Hindus and Buddhists at odds with those among their Christian neighbours who have assimilated conceptions of religion frequently associated with Christianity (soteriological exclusivism, for example, or the belief that Christians have exclusive or fuller access to absolute truth). In this way, conflict over conversion in India and Sri Lanka differs from that in other parts of South Asia. While proselytization is taken as a provocative act in Pakistan, for example, the majority Muslim community shares with Christians the view that certain religions are true and others false. The issue in that context, then, is related more to anti-blasphemy laws than it is to a

fundamental disagreement on the *nature of religion itself*. In any case, it must be underscored that religious differences are not inherently conflictual. It was never inevitable that conflict would develop over the issue of conversion between Hindus and Christians in India and Buddhists and Christians in Sri Lanka. Rather, such conflict is the result both of long global and local historical and political processes, on the one hand, and, on the other, the intentional production of conflict by the majoritarian nationalists it serves.

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17

SCIENCE SANSKRITIZED

How modern science became a handmaiden of Hindu nationalism

Meera Nanda

Do not take as true or right what the elders wrote.
There were fools in the olden days, too.
<div align="right">Mirza Ghallib, 1858.</div>

Science in Hindu nationalist imaginary

That Hinduism is "religion of science" has been a central pillar of modern Hindu thought, especially the currents affiliated with Hindu nationalism, for nearly two centuries. From Narendra Dutta (a.k.a. Swami Vivekananda) in the nineteenth century to Narendra Modi in our own times, countless protagonists for Hindu exceptionalism have celebrated the Vedic tradition for its non-dogmatic rationalism and its super-sensory "empiricism," which presumably enabled the ancient "seers" to intuit the laws of nature that modern sciences are only now coming to grasp.

The agenda for viewing the Hindu tradition through the lens of modern science was formally and forcefully articulated by Swami Vivekananda in this famous address to the Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. "The latest conclusions of science," he declared, only "echo the Vedantic philosophy . . . that the Hindu has been cherishing in his bosom for ages." The Swami went further and claimed that "the Hindu," unlike the superstitious Christians and Muslims, did not live "on words and theories alone" but insisted on *verifying* his belief in God and "existences beyond the ordinary sensuous existence." Nothing less than "direct and demonstrative evidence" lay at the foundation of the "accumulated treasury of spiritual laws [that the Vedas teach]." The Hindu tradition, in other words, was not merely affirmed by modern science, it shared its empirical spirit.

Vivekananda's rousing declaration of a consilience between Hinduism and modern science has become axiomatic for contemporary Hinduism. Every world-transforming break-through in modern science to date—Copernicus's heliocentrism, Newton's laws of motion, quantum physics, Darwin's evolutionary theory and advances in medicine and neurosciences—has been interpreted as one more re-statement of what was already known to the ancients. Empirically warranted theories of modern science—Science $_{EMP}$–have been subsumed under the unfalsifiable claims of "spiritual sciences" which trace their lineage to "the Vedas," or Science $_{VED}$ for short.[1] The undeniable charisma that Science $_{EMP}$ has in the modern world—its "magnetic aura of authority, respect and prestige," as James Lewis (2010: 25) has described it—is harnessed for

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Science $_{VED}$, which, in the final analysis, is nothing more than a restatement of Hindu theology in scientific-sounding words. In an ironic twist, this eagerness to Vedicize now extends to *any* scientific-sounding idea or practice—from acupuncture to intelligent design—that may have some prestige, or even notoriety, in the Western world.[2]

This chapter will argue that this encompassment of science into the worldview of Vedas has turned science into a handmaiden of Hindu nationalism. Science $_{EMP}$, dressed up as Science $_{VED}$, has become a prop for Hindu chauvinism which is openly hostile to non-dharmic faiths, Islam and Christianity. What is even more troubling with the mantra-like invocation of science-in-the-Vedas is how it has encouraged a culture of pseudoscience, or its close kin, "bullshit" (so described in Harry Frankfurt's celebrated essay), wherein it becomes a standard practice to "make assertions without paying attention to anything except what it suits one to say" (Frankfurt 2005: 60).[3] The habit of claiming scientific warrant for claims which contradict all available scientific evidence—consciousness as disembodied "intelligent energy," karma and rebirth as explanation for organic evolution, the medical efficacy of Āyurvedic formulations, the smoke from yagnas as purifying and health-giving, God Rāma's birth in Ayodhya as a historical fact, for example—has created a culture where you can get away with anything, especially if you are wearing saffron robes or you hold public office, or both.

This chapter is a saga of how modern science ended up as a handmaiden to the Hindu nationalist project. Rather than offering one more deep dive into colonial history, this chapter will attempt to tease out the modes of argumentation that have entangled modern science with Hinduism so intimately that the boundaries between the two have become fuzzy to the point of becoming invisible (at least in the popular culture, saturated as it is with spiritual gurus and Hindu nationalists mostly working in tandem).

These modes of argumentation, I hope to convince the reader, are modern in their deployment and yet deeply rooted in the long history of Hindu apologetics. Apologetics understood as "deliberate effort to defend tradition and restore its authority" (Halbfass 1988: 281) has a long history in Hinduism. A good deal of Hindu philosophy in classical and medieval eras was aimed at making virtually all Sanskrit learning, other-worldly *and* this-worldly (from astronomy and medicine to dance, the art of making love or constructing temples) appear as "genetically linked to the Vedas" (Pollock 1989: 609). Even such axiomatically "Hindu" ideas as karmic retribution through rebirth were borrowed from the Buddhist and Jains at a time of their ascendency in the Mauryan era (322–150 BCE) and stitched seamlessly into the fabric of Vedic thought (Bronkhorst 2013). In other words, the Great Tradition of Sanskritic Hinduism has a distinctive xenology, inclusive and hierarchical at the same time, through which it absorbs alien people and their ideas into itself.[4]

As a result of India's distinctive xenology, a well-developed stock of philosophical and rhetorical strategies for bringing disparate ideas, practices and people under the umbrella of "the Vedas" were very much a part of the inherited cultural repertoire of colonial-era intellectuals who pioneered the vedicization of modern science. Upon encountering a new conception of nature-knowledge which won their rational consent and even enthusiasm, Indian intellectuals living under colonialism did what their ancestors had done for centuries: they went about establishing genetic links between the new sciences and the Vedas.

This chapter will argue that in order to render Hindu spiritual tradition scientific—and, conversely, to reframe the western scientific tradition in a Vedic vocabulary—Indian intellectuals under colonialism fell back on the inherited strategies of orthodoxy through which alien ideas have traditionally been brought under the gravitational field of "the Vedas." Once these old habits of heart were harnessed for Hindu-national self-assertion against colonial powers, they kept on gaining momentum even after independence from colonial rule. What began as *anti-colonial*

Hindu-national self-assertion has now metastasized into a *Hindu* self-assertion against "Semitic religions" and "the West" more generally.

Postcolonial theorists have laboured hard to show the colonial and Orientalist construction of Hinduism and its knowledge-traditions. Much ink has been spilled to argue that the colonial powers, operating within their own Christian assumptions of what constitutes a religion, and motivated by their need to classify and control the natives, misinterpreted the varied Indic traditions as a unified, pan-Indian Hinduism where none actually existed.[5] While keen to spot discontinuities and distortions caused by the British presence, postcolonial theorists fail to adequately account for the *continuities* that show up in the play of inherited Sanskritic philosophical concepts and styles of arguments in the postcolonial intellectual history. This chapter is a preliminary attempt to fill this lacuna.

The handmaid's tale

I use the rather old-fashioned word—handmaiden—to describe the auxiliary status of modern science in the refurbished, modernized Vedic worldview. The choice of the word is deliberate. The epithet "handmaiden" to designate a subordinate position of nature-knowledge is borrowed from the history of early Christianity's encounter with the classical Greek tradition. Its use in the context of science-Hinduism dialogue is meant to draw attention to the similarities, but also crucial differences, between the Christian and Hindu modes of engagement with culturally alien ideas that are indispensable but also threatening.

The comparison offered here does not presume either mode of engagement as normative for the other and neither as deficient nor aberrant with respect to the other. The idea for a comparison with Christian handmaiden tradition is, rather, to help the Hindu mode of engagement with science stand out in a clearer relief so that its distinctive features can be discerned.[6] It is with this purpose in mind that this section briefly looks at the Christian handmaiden tradition before moving on to the Hindu variant in the next section.

Before the scientific revolution toppled it from its throne in the seventeenth century, theology was understood to be the "queen" of all knowledge, and science (natural philosophy, more appropriately) was its faithful servant, or "handmaiden." In practical terms, it meant that science of nature was acceptable only for "the aid it could provide in the interpretation of Holy Scripture [so that] faith may be strengthened and God may be honoured. . . . The glorification of God was the ultimate goal of the scientific study of nature" (Grant 1986: 50). Even though the sensory knowledge of the material world could not be entirely discounted for pragmatic reasons, the religious utility of such knowledge lay primarily in providing a more reasonable exegesis of the Biblical cosmology.

Science of nature, for the early and medieval Christian church, largely meant the natural philosophy of the Greeks and Romans, notably the writings of philosophers Plato and Aristotle, Stoic and Epicurean philosophical schools that addressed cosmology, astronomy, mathematics, zoology and so on.[7] These sciences were not only products of a pagan, non-Judeo-Christian culture, they (especially Aristotle's more naturalistic and empiricist philosophy) also contradicted Scripture on a number of theologically relevant issues such as the existence of the cosmos without beginning or end, the mortality of the soul and an impersonal and uninvolved deity. Christian theologians, who were well versed in classical thought, thus faced a dilemma: they could neither reject it outright, nor could they embrace it whole without running afoul of their faith.

The handmaiden tradition emerged as a solution to this dilemma. Church fathers, notably St. Augustine (354–430) and, later, Roger Bacon (ca 1220–1292) and Thomas Aquinas

(1225–1274), did indeed make copious use of pagan ideas for a rational defence of the Creation story in the Book of Genesis. Augustine, for example, used Aristotle's theory of four elements and their natural order (earth at the centre, surrounded by water, air and fire in that order) to explain, in rational terms, why the Genesis cosmology of water above the firmament could be true. The handmaiden, Aristotle's natural philosophy, was being pressed into service to the queen, the Bible.

But that is only a part of the story. What was distinctive about the Augustinian tradition, and which are of interest to us for the subject matter of this chapter, were the following two features:

One, when a scriptural passage *conflicted* with a scientifically demonstrated proposition— "proofs that cannot be denied," in Augustine's words—*the scientific proposition was allowed to prevail* and the Biblical text interpreted allegorically.[8] This interpretive flexibility was permitted because it was believed that the authors of Scriptures had adjusted their language to the abilities of the intended audience, and the meaning of words could change as the stock of knowledge and cognitive abilities progressed.[9] There was, thus, enough confidence in human reason to allow it to constrain how God's words would be understood. A good example is how from the very early centuries of Christianity, the flat-earth cosmology of the Bible was *rejected* in favour of earth's sphericity, which had been well-established by the Greeks by the second century BCE when Eratosthenes measured the earth's circumference. Augustine insisted that the claims of the Bible cannot go against the demonstrable claims of reason and went on to interpret the tent-like flat heavens as stretching into a ball-like sphere.[10] The handmaiden could dictate terms to the queen, at least on matters having to do with physical matter.

The other way Christian theologians dealt with contradictions with Greek natural philosophy was by coming up with hypotheses based upon their own doctrinal beliefs in God's omnipotence and his free will. Twelfth-century speculations on the existence of vacuum and impetus (both of which Aristotle had denied) provided the starting point for the later development of laws of motion. If God could have made any kind of world he wanted, empirical methods were considered indispensable for finding out the world that he actually made. As John Hedley Brooke put it (2012: 10), "Christian humility and experimental methods went hand in hand in opposition to the arrogance and practical sterility of scholastic philosophers."

Secondly, the Augustinian tradition operated with what Ernan McMullin (2013: 199) calls "the principle of scriptural limitation," which held that "since the primary concern of Scripture is with human salvation, we should not look to Scripture for knowledge of the natural world." This goes to the heart of the queen–handmaiden relationship: The Bible was the queen because it was the revealed word of God that promised salvation through faith and grace. Too much curiosity about things of this world—the shape of the earth or the motion of the stars and such—would not only distract from the goal of redemption, it could also potentially open the Holy Bible to scorn, and even ridicule, if its literal meaning came into conflict with well-established claims of natural philosophy. In order to preserve the priority of faith, and to immunize it from sceptical attacks, believers are admonished not to treat the Bible as a cosmological text. This was the germ of the idea of God's "two books": the scripture that taught you how to go to heaven and the "book of nature" that taught you how the heavens worked.

This separation of the two spheres—salvation and nature-knowledge—turned out to be enormously consequential for the eventual dethroning of theology through the scientific revolution that picked up pace after Copernicus published his theory of a sun-centred universe in 1543. While this is not the place to delve into this vast subject, it is important to note that Augustine's principle of Biblical exegesis that made room for the Bible to be interpreted metaphorically in the face of contravening evidence was explicitly cited by Galileo in his fateful confrontation with the church.[11]

Returning to the problem we started out with, namely similarities and differences in Christian and Hindu engagement with nature-knowledge, some distinctive features of the Christian handmaid tradition must be noted. To begin with, the Greco-Roman tradition of natural philosophy belonged to a familiar yet non-Judeo-Christian worldview: it was, in a sense, the knowledge system of the "other." Secondly, although treated as lower grade of knowing, pagan sciences were seen as worthy debating partner whose demonstrated claims demanded a reinterpretation of the cosmology of the Bible: even the revealed word of God could not contradict well-founded claims of human reason. Finally, and most crucially, the integrity of the Hellenic "other" was respected. Even at the height of Aristotle's influence in the late Middle Age, Aristotle's Unmoved Mover was not equated with the God of the Bible, nor was his naturalism (that, e.g., earth *had* to be in the centre of the cosmos because it is its natural place) read back into the Bible. Rather, those ideas of pagan philosophy which contradicted the Bible were actively opposed with theological arguments and later with empirical evidence. Even though given a lower status, pagan sciences were allowed to retain their distinctive identity, complete with all the harmonies *and* challenges they posed to the Christian worldview. To paraphrase Halbfass (1988: 187), pagan sciences were "mirrors" in which the Christian thinkers could reflect, defend and assert their own identity.

The Hindu handmaiden formula: strategic inclusivism

Like their early and medieval Christian counterparts who used elements of Greek sciences to provide rational padding for the Bible, modern-day Hindu apologists have recruited modern science as a handmaiden for a rational defence and glorification of "the Vedas," a vast and loosely defined collection of ritual liturgies and philosophical speculations.[12]

Though similar in intent, the Hindu handmaiden formula is far more radical in that it not only selectively *adapts* the threatening "other"—the empirical nature-knowledge brought into India by the British colonizers—for affirmation of the Vedas, but *subsumes* it into a loosely defined "Vedic" worldview. The Hindu handmaiden formula respects neither the integrity of the history, the methods or the worldview of modern science, nor does it recognize the contradictions between science and the Vedic panpsychism and its mystical ways of knowing. Instead, it simply incorporates the former into the latter, or to use Milton Singer's famous words (1972: 385), "metabolizes" modern science into the "cultural protoplasm" of the Sanskritic Great Tradition.[13] The handmaiden is not there simply to serve the theological agenda when needed, but it ceases to exist outside the parameters of what is "Vedic." Indeed, Hindu nationalist intellectuals see their project in exactly these terms, as is evident from a recent exhortation to his fellow-travellers from Rajiv Malhotra (2015), a US-based polemicist, to "digest" modern science into the Vedic framework as a new type of *smṛti* (human construct) that is compatible with the Vedic *śruti*, which he holds to be "eternal . . . and absolute truth unfiltered by the human mind."[14]

Metabolizing or "digesting" what is foreign, novel and potentially threatening into a worldview sanctioned by reference to the Vedas, broadly and loosely defined, is not a form of syncretism, eclecticism, hybridity or any other kind of "negotiation" (a much-used but ill-defined postcolonial trope). It is a different form of xenology altogether, which has been described as "inclusivism." Paul Hacker (1913–1979), a German Indologist who coined the term, described it as:

> the practice of affiliating what is foreign with what is one's own by way of subordination . . . it consists of claiming for, and thus including in, one's own religion what really belongs to an alien sect.

<div align="right">(Halbfass 1988: 405, 404)</div>

This mode of engagement with foreign-origin ideas amounts to telling the outsider, "what you mean when you say x is what we mean when we say y, and y is a better way to understand it" (Kiblinger 2003: 7). The process, in other words, begins with drawing parallels or analogies between x and y; thus, what Brian Smith (1989) calls "resemblance thinking" and Sal Restivo (1978) calls "parallelism" lie at the heart of inclusivism. These analogies (between their science and our Vedas), as we shall see later in this chapter, are mostly based upon nothing more than metaphorical and evocative imagery.[15]

Hindu thinkers go beyond mere parallelism and make another discursive move which puts them in the category of "closed inclusivism": they claim that the relevant alien truths are already known to the home religion; that x is not only saying "the same thing" as y but is contained in it.[16] The other's x ("Western" science, in the present case) is thus submerged in "one's own" y (the Vedic, or "dharmic," cosmology and ways of knowing), as a river in the ocean, and can only be understood through one's own metaphysical and methodological lens.[17]

The inclusivist is obviously not averse to acknowledging some shared ground with the outsiders (your x is our y) and may even express a grudging and often covetous admiration for some aspects of their culture. What better way to emulate those desirable qualities and yet assert superiority than to "discover" those qualities in one's own inherited traditions? This is essentially a *strategic* inclusiveness, to use Jaffrelot's term (1993), that aims to simultaneously emulate the other while asserting superiority of the home tradition against the emulated other.

According to Paul Hacker and his critical but sympathetic exponent, Wilhelm Halbfass, it is the closed character of Hindu inclusivism that sets it apart from familiar varieties of intercultural dialogues. As Hacker, quoted previously, is at pains to point out, inclusivism in the Hindu tradition means *claiming for its own doctrines* what really belongs to the other. The "other," as Halbfass explains (1988: 411), is not seen, or acknowledged, in its otherness that can be added to one's own perspective when it helps to strengthen it, nor is it refuted by better arguments and evidence and set aside in case it contradicts and challenges one's own perspective; rather, the other is treated as something *a priori* contained in one's own doctrine:

> The "other" teaching is not recognized in its otherness, but claimed as an aspect of, approach to, or aberration from the truth contained in one's "own" doctrine.
>
> (Halbfass 1988: 191)

Upon encountering the "other," the traditional Hindu impulse is one of apparent tolerance and avoidance of open confrontation: the heterodox ideas, practices and even the deities of the other are not rejected as false or contrary to native beliefs; there are no attempts at falsification, no inquisitions and no heresy-hunting. What the Hindu inclusivist denies is not the alien and novel idea itself—especially if the idea or practice is deemed prestigious or useful for consolidating the native tradition—but rather those qualities that make it alien and novel to begin with. What Hindu inclusivism seeks is to bring the alien into conformity with the truth contained in the Vedic canon, to rub out the innovative and make it as "eternal" as the Vedas themselves.

Indeed, conformity with "the Vedic" is what underlies the well-known process of Sanskritization through which lower castes and tribes take on the beliefs and customs and lifestyle of the higher, "twice-born castes" (Srinivas 1962). As Radhakrishnan explains in his *Hindu View of Life*, sects, castes and followers of other gods:

> are sometimes regarded as the distorted expressions of the one true canon [namely]
> Vedānta . . . which is not a religion, but religion itself . . . the acceptance of the

authority of Vedānta by different sects helps to purify them. *Those parts of the new faith which are not in conformity with the Vedic canon tend to be subordinated and tend to fall out.*

(1927: 11, emphasis added)

Sanskritization is not limited to incorporating social groups in the caste hierarchy but also operates on assimilation of alien beliefs, including "language, literature, arts, music, drama, religious law, medicine, science and philosophy" (Singer 1972: 386; also Staal 1963). "Science Sanskritized," as I have used this term, is nothing other than modern science forced into a false conformity with the Vedic canon.

Hacker's identification of Hindu inclusivism as a dominant and uniquely Indian xenology evolved out of his distinctly Christian evangelical interests and has been, rightly, subjected to intense criticism.[18] With due care to historicize the concept and not treat it as an essential feature of Hindu thought, inclusivism *does* capture the spirit of how Hindu intellectuals have responded to the challenges of the modern world.

It is the argument of this chapter that nowhere is the concept of inclusivism more applicable than in the Hindu encounters with modern science. Bringing modern science into "conformity with the Vedic canon" and claiming it as part of its own heritage has been the dominant paradigm of the science–Hinduism encounter from its nineteenth-century beginnings to our own times.

Hindu encounters with modern science

The fact that Indian intellectuals had their first taste of modern sciences under the British Raj has left an indelible mark on their response to science. The experience of colonialism set in motion a tussle between rationalism and nationalism, between self-critique and self-assertion and between reform and revival that continues to bedevil the encounter between Hinduism and science. This is an ongoing drama in three acts.

Act One began in the second half of the nineteenth century and reached its fullest expression with Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883), the founder of Arya Samaj in the Punjab, and Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission in Bengal. This was the period when a generation educated in colonial and missionary educational institutions came of age and began to grapple with modern ideas, notably the positivism of August Comte, the empiricism of Francis Bacon, the liberalism of John Stuart Mills and Thomas Paine and the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer. An important, though often neglected, part of their intellectual diet was another modernist movement, namely theosophy, which sought to reconcile the "higher truths" of ancient wisdom traditions with modern science. The Theosophical Society, which moved its headquarters from New York to Adyar in Madras, India, when Olcott and Blavatsky moved to India in 1879, was a strong and active presence in India right through the early part of the twentieth century and has left a distinctive, though often unacknowledged, imprint on all strategies devised for Sanskritization of science (Nanda 2010).

Intellectuals living under colonialism faced an unenviable dilemma: how to defend their own civilization against the condescension and scorn of their colonial overlords and Christian missionaries while simultaneously embracing the sciences and social ideals of Western provenance. The initial response was to anchor their civilizational self-worth in the spiritual superiority of their faith over the "materialist" West. But it did not take long before Hindu spirituality itself began to be rationally defended in the language of post-Newtonian and Darwinian science. Indeed, one can practically see the initial elements of scepticism and rational *self-critique* of inherited traditions transmuting into scientific *defence* of the same traditions in the writings

of the leading lights of the Hindu renaissance, including Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–94), Dayananda Saraswati and Vivekananda.[19]

Almost all reformers of this period grappled with the question of the authority and infallibility of the Vedas, simultaneously invoking and reinterpreting them.[20] Two distinct options emerged—one the fundamentalist option of going "upstream" to the very pristine origin of the tradition and the other conservative option of staying "downstream" and propagating the tradition as it had been handed down.[21] Swami Dayananda Saraswati took the upstream route and defended the inerrancy of the divinely revealed Vedas, while Swami Vivekananda remained downstream, refurbishing the inherited tradition by portraying it as a science-like enterprise rather than insisting upon the inerrancy of the revealed texts.

Act Two began with the Independence, with the socialist-minded Jawaharlal Nehru at the helm of the state and civil society in a deep churn, with secular humanist thinkers like M.N Roy, Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Periyar and others putting Hinduism itself in the dock. Although a romantic attachment to a mythic Hindu Golden Age would surface time and again in Nehru's musings,[22] he did openly embrace scientific rationalism as an ethos fit for the modern nation-in-the-making. He put his enormous prestige behind the idea of a new zeitgeist, a new *yuga-dharma*, that would "discard the . . . the philosophical approach of the ancients, their search for ultimate reality, as well as the devotionalism and mysticism." The new ethos would be the "scientific approach, the adventurous and yet critical temper of science, the search for truth and new knowledge, the refusal to accept anything without testing and trial, the capacity to change previous conclusions in the face of new evidence." (Nehru 1946: 570, 523). Far more radical, and without Nehru's nostalgia for the lost Golden Age, was Ambedkar, the radical leader of India's untouchables and the architect of India's Constitution (Nanda 2016b).

For a brief interregnum, then, rationalism did have an upper hand; the methods and the worldview of modern science were, for once, not invoked for revival and self-assertion but for reform and self-critique.

Nehru's pious invocations of "scientific temper" remained just that. There was no political will to bring about the social conditions—mass literacy, universal schooling, social welfare—that could have made a new way of thinking meaningful to the masses. Moreover, once the nation was fused with religion, any critique of the religious sentiments of "the people" was seen as somehow anti-people and anti-national. Because the Enlightenment zeitgeist of Nehruvian scientific temper was born on European soil and had been put to use by the colonial masters against the natives, it itself became a target of furious attacks by the so-called "postcolonial" intellectuals.

For the postcolonial critics, *anyone* who speaks the Enlightenment language of rationality, objectivity and universalism is equally a prisoner of a colonial, Westernized mind-set. A Nehru or an Ambedkar wielding scientific rationality to question the false beliefs that are deeply entrenched in the popular mind is no different from a Bankim or a Vivekananda scientizing Hinduism, for both share the same "thematic" of Western Enlightenment. This condemnation of scientific rationalism began in the early 1980s, joined forces with postmodernist and social constructivist critiques of science in the West and effectively brought the curtain down on Act Two of the drama.[23]

Postcolonial theory, incidentally, has now become a veritable arm of Hindu nationalism. As exemplified by the project of "swadeshi Indology" (Malhotra 2018) and the so-called "Ghent school" of Balagangadhara (2012), all postcolonial shibboleths—Hinduism as a "colonial construct," science as "cognitive violence" against "Indic ways of knowing," "decolonization of the Indian mind," "reversing the gaze," "provincializing Europe"—have become Hindu nationalist weapons aimed at scholars and critics at home and abroad.

Whatever little remained of the rationalist current is now being erased at gunpoint. In the span of four years (2013–2017), four of India's leading rationalist thinkers—Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare, M.M. Kalburgi and Gauri Lankesh—were gunned down in cold blood.[24] They are not the only ones, for there is a virtual war going on in India today against intellectuals and students who would dare question the majoritarian agenda of the Hindutva nation.[25]

Act Three began in earnest with the demolition of the historic Babri mosque in the city of Ayodhya in 1992. The agitation leading up to this wanton act of destruction brought the organized Hindu Right to political power: in 2014 and again in 2019, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won an absolute majority in the "people's house" (Lok Sabha) of the parliament.[26]

The political ascendency of Hindu nationalism has meant a replay of Act One, this time with the full and unabashed backing of the state and the shadow non-state organizations of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the cultural parent of the BJP.[27] In a way, Act One was never really over: the Sanskritization of science begun by the nineteenth-century pioneers had continued apace during the "scientific temper" decades among the acolytes of Vivekananda and in the new religious movements begun by a new generation of global gurus. But now that it has the blessings of the state itself, the project of "digesting" modern science into the Vedic worldview has taken centre stage again.

The signs of what is to come under the second term of BJP government are already visible in the revisionist history being introduced in school textbooks in the BJP-run states (Traub 2018). In January 2019, in a clear bid to set up a permanent, nation-wide system that would ensure an explicitly Hindu curriculum, the Modi government approved the establishment of Bhartiya Shiksha Board with the yoga-guru Baba Ramdev at the helm and a known RSS affiliate (Shiksha Sanskriti Utthan Nyas) represented on the board. This board is authorized to set up a parallel system of Vedic schools which will offer high-school diplomas (on a par with other central and state boards) based upon a curriculum which, to quote Ramdev, will emphasize "Indian Traditional knowledge like Vedic Education, Sanskrit education, Shastras, Darshanas, Upanishads, The Geeta besides Indian culture and heritage."[28] These schools are expected to be functioning by the next academic year and are supposed to "blend" Bharatiya education with modern subjects. The monstrous hybrid of science and Vedas that we are examining in this chapter is made to order for such a "blended" curriculum. The Hindu nationalist state is clearly laying the institutional foundations for creating a new generation steeped in the Hindutva ideology of Hindu exceptionalism.

As I hope to show in the rest of this chapter, the contemporary "Vedic science" movement is reenacting the strategies of strategic inclusivism of modern science into the Vedic canon that were pioneered during Act One of the drama. These modes of reasoning and argumentation have such a long shelf life because they resonate with the strategies of orthodoxy through which the gatekeepers of the Great Tradition could bring anything under the sun into conformity with the Vedic canon by drawing resemblances and parallels with the Vedic prototype.

Two strategies of Sanskritization of modern science

The key to successfully "affiliating the foreign with what is one's own," to use Hacker's words quoted previously, is that a) all traces of the process of affiliation must be erased; the scientific must so seamlessly meld into the Vedic that it becomes impossible to even imagine that the two were ever not one; b) all conceivable contradictions between the two must be smoothed over; like a handmaid, the scientific must only validate but never question the Vedic and finally c) "what is one's own" must always be the parent and "the foreign" the aberrant child; the scientific must be an immature, lower-level, "merely" materialistic enterprise which needs the Vedas

to become mature and "whole." Vedas must encompass modern science as merely one element of its own ensemble.

Modern Hinduism has developed two main strategies for encompassing modern science with the Vedas which meet all these key indicators of success. Both strategies had their start in Act One, and both have made a roaring comeback in the ongoing Act Three. The former scientizes the ritual (*karmakāṇḍa*) aspects of the Vedic tradition, while the latter those aspects that emphasize the attainment of metaphysical knowledge (*jñānakāṇḍa*). While the former speaks to the masses at home, the latter finds favour with the global New Age currents. The two strategies can be broadly identified as:

1   Myth as science: This mode of making science Vedic was pioneered by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj. It involves a creative interpretation of Vedic verses wherein the non-literal—hidden, but "real"—meaning of Vedic deities is declared to be nothing other than that discovered by the most current theories of physical sciences. The miraculous deeds of the deities, meanwhile, find their "real" meaning in modern technologies, everything from electricity to airplanes and nuclear weapons. The Vedas are thus "demythologized" by reading them as whatever scientific theory may be current in the vaguely homologous domain of nature that the deities and their associated myths might evoke.
2   Spiritual experience as science: This mode of making science Vedic was pioneered by Swami Vivekananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission. It involves a two-step process which begins with drawing analogies between the "subtle" entities and "energies" of the spirit world and those in the physical world and between "yogic seeing" and scientific experimentalism. Analogies are followed by encompassment: theories and methods of modern science are accepted as a "lower" and "merely materialistic" level of the Whole and Absolute Truth accessible to the spiritually adept through "direct perception."

We now proceed to take a closer look at these two strategies.

Myth as science

Like all religious fundamentalists, Swami Dayananda and those who have followed in his footsteps seek to defend what they hold to be the infallible core of their faith. They believe that this infallible core is to be found in the verses of the Vedas alone—and in no other religious-philosophical tradition under the spacious big tent of Hinduism. The Vedas contain the eternally infallible truths about the cosmos that were revealed by the impersonal Supreme Soul at the beginning of time.

Most scholarly histories of Hindu appropriation of science tend to be dismissive of Swami Dayananda as compared to the attention they lavish on the other Swami, namely Vivekananda. Dayananda gets a short shrift in part because of his wild claims about Vedic "aerial cars" and such, but also because he is seen as having "hardly any hermeneutical sense whatever" (Gosling 2012: 579) and a "violent method of exegesis" (Farquhar 1915: 114).[29]

But this scholarly scoffing at Dayananda is unwarranted for two reasons. One, Dayananda's exegesis of the Vedas is very much in the mainstream tradition of Mīmāṃsā, one of the most influential schools of Vedic hermeneutics. If Dayananda's interpretive method is "violent," the sources lie much deeper. Two, Dayananda's exegetical style is the original inspiration for the Hindu nationalist portrayal of Vedic India as the fount of all sciences known to the modern world. While Vivekananda's scientific spiritualism resonates with the New Age gurus and their

followers, it is the scientism of Dayananda that resonates with the vernacular gurus and religious entrepreneurs. It is not coincidental that two of the most popular movements for Hindu "awakening" which have a wide reach across rural and urban areas and among the poor and the rich alike—Baba Ramdev's yoga and Āyurveda, and the Gayatri Pariwar's popularization of *yagna*s (*yajña*s) and *gāyatrī* mantra—have historic connections with the Arya Samaj.[30] It is these vernacular movements that give traditional practices a sheen of science that appeals to the aspirations of the masses and feeds the popular enthusiasm on which the Hindutva juggernaut runs.

Arya Samaj's reformist and communal agenda is well known and much written about.[31] We are, however, interested in understanding the founder's method of reading the Vedas that permitted a sweeping scientization of these millennia-old texts.

Swami Dayananda's entire philosophy can be summed up in one phrase: *back to the Vedas*. He laid out his understanding of the origin and the eternality of the Vedas in the first two chapters of his last major work, *Ṛgvedādi-Bhāṣya-Bhūmikā*, or *An Introduction to the Commentary on the Vedas* (1878). Here he expounds his belief that the mantras of four Vedas alone were authoritative because these alone are divine revelations, and, being divine in origin, they were eternal, self-authenticating and entirely free from error. The rest of the sacred literature—the philosophical texts of Upaniṣads and Advaita, the *Bhagavadgītā*, *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Purāṇas and Tantra—were deemed to be human creations and therefore neither error free nor eternally true. While he conceded that the *Bhagavadgītā* and the epics derived their authority from the Vedas, he completely rejected the Purāṇas and Tantra as outright fabrications and corruptions by the priestly class. Only a return to the Vedas and the ideals of the pristine Vedic Golden Age could rid Hinduism of its contemporary ills like idol-worship, caste hierarchies, child marriage and so on.

As described by the Swami in his *Bhūmikā*, the divine revelation of the Vedas is unlike any other.[32] For one, it is co-terminus with the creation of the universe, and, second, it is wordless. At the beginning of the present cosmic cycle some 1.9 billion years ago, the all-pervading Supreme Soul imprinted in the consciousness of the ancient sages the eternally valid knowledge of all things, including all known laws of nature. Not being an embodied God, the God of the Vedas has no use for verbal utterances: the Great Being simply breathes forth the truths of the Vedas at the beginning of each cycle of creation and withdraws them at the time of dissolution. This revelation was meant for all of humanity but was received by the sages of Āryāvarta (India) from whom the Greeks, the Egyptians and the Europeans learned all the arts and sciences.

What was the purpose of the revelation? Like a father, God wished to instruct his children in all the useful arts and knowledge containing all the physical sciences, at least in their "germ." Humans could not have acquired this knowledge through their innate abilities, because, just like children kept in the wilderness remain ignorant, humanity needed prior instruction to become civilized.[33]

Because Dayananda believes that the Vedas are the eternally valid utterance of God, they cannot, by definition, refer to transitory, historically located persons, places or phenomena. So, what do the Vedic names for gods, human sages or non-human "persons" (*apsaras*es, *asura*s etc.) refer to? Dayananda revives the ancient etymological tradition of Nirukta to argue that *when the Vedas refer to divine names without qualifiers that suggest infinitude and divine power, they actually refer not to the gods but to the class of material entities that share the properties of the gods.*[34] Thus, when a mantra which reveals the meaning of the word Agni is said to have Agni as its "devatā," it does not mean Agni as a god to be worshipped but simply as a description of all objects which are characterized by the qualities (light, warmth, motion etc.) associated with the word agni (fire). Other Vedic gods—Sūrya, Vasus, Rudra, Ādityas, Indra, Varuṇa etc.—are similarly naturalized. What Dayananda was trying to drive home was that, contrary to

European and Christian misunderstanding, the ancient Aryans were neither polytheists nor nature worshippers; rather, they worshipped only one god, and the various "devatās" named in the Vedas were not gods to be worshipped but simply "subjects" to be understood and nature's powers to be mastered.

This interpretive move, when combined with Dayananda's conviction that the Vedas are the infallible repository of *all* knowledge, opened the gates to reading Vedic gods and myths associated with them as laws of nature. On the premise that no trustworthy knowledge can contradict what the Vedas teach, modern science *had* to be found in the Vedas. Thus, Dayananda interprets the *Ṛgveda* to find in it evidence of heliocentrism, gravitation, steamships, aerial cars, telegraphy and such. His followers went much further finding evidence for electrons and other elementary particles in Vedic verses (Gupta 1977–78).

At one fell swoop, Dayananda gets rid of the charge of Hindu polytheism, de-mythologizes the sacred texts by scientizing the mythic elements and lays priority claim to science for Āryāvarta. Like the post-Enlightenment liberal Christians, Dayananda, too, was offering an allegorical, non-literal interpretation of the Hindu canon. The results, however, were diametrically opposite: while the former abandoned the seemingly factual or cosmological assertions of the Bible in favour of spiritual or psychological interpretations, in Dayananda's hands, the seemingly spiritual/divine entities of the Vedas were abandoned in favour of cosmological and "scientific" interpretations. Rather than separate the magisteria of faith from reason, Dayananda succeeded in fusing the two together in the source text of Hinduism.

Dayananda stands alone among the nineteenth-century reformers in rejecting the authority of all post-Vedic sacred texts, including the much-beloved epics and Purāṇas. The eagerness with which he and his followers set about finding science and technology in the Vedic utterances also made his interpretation look rather quirky to the more philosophically literate.[35]

But the logic of the "Arya school" of Vedic exegesis is not all that different from the orthodox school of Mīmāṃsā. The eternality and infallibility of the Vedas are the founding principles of this school of Vedic exegesis. The denial that the eternal Vedas can refer to non-eternal entities that we find in Dayananda is very much a founding principle of Mīmāṃsā, which held that because the "Vedas had no beginning in time and no author . . . they can have no dimension of historical referentiality" (Pollock 1989: 608). Mīmāṃsā, too, insists that if there are any allusions to historical persons or events, they have to be interpreted to mean eternal entities: Pollock gives the example of how the sentence "the son of Pravāha" is interpreted to mean the son of the "howling wind." This is precisely the kind of interpretation that Dayananda was offering. Dayananda's project can be understood as a revival of the original Vedic fundamentalism of the classical and medieval Hinduism.

The insistence on conformity, or non-contradiction, of all branches of secular learning with the transcendent Vedas has a long, deeply entrenched history in India. It has played a disastrous role in the history of positive sciences in India, as scientific practices had to justify themselves not as advances of knowledge hard won through exercise of reason and exploration, but as "derived from a divine source via individuals who [were] increasingly apotheosized" (Pollock 1985: 506). If all truths are given at the beginning of time, it means that "progress" lies not in "discovery of what has never been known before, but in the . . . more complete discovery of what was known in full in the past" (Pollock 1985: 512). The criterion for authoritative knowledge is not its falsifiability but rather its opposite, infallibility.

Dayananda and his Arya Samaj never managed to develop the kind of pan-India and global presence that could rival Vivekananda and his Mission. Even at its peak, at the time of Independence, it had about 2 million followers, concentrated mostly in the Punjab, where it found favour among the upwardly mobile merchant classes.[36] Its influence, however, has to be measured not

in the membership of Arya Samaj per se but in its ideological legacy, which has become a part of the commonsense of modern Hindus, regardless of which guru, *samāj* or *sampradāya* they may follow.

The current crop of Hindu nationalists are Dayananda's legatees. When the prime minister, Narendra Modi, claimed to find evidence of advanced organ transplants and genetic engineering in Hindu mythology, he was following in this tradition of finding scientific meanings for myths. When Satyapal Singh, the state minister for Human Resource Development in Modi's cabinet, recently declared Darwin "scientifically wrong" because "nobody, including our ancestors, in written or oral, have said they saw an ape turning into a man," he, an ardent Arya Samaji, was literally repeating his master's words.[37] When everything from Einstein's theory of relativity to the string theory is read into Vedic verses, those celebrating the *Eternally Talented India* (Candraśēkhar and Gangādharaprasād 2013) are participating in the tradition of "violent" exegesis that has deep roots in Mīmāṃsā and Dayananda's "neo-Mīmāṃsā." These propagandists are cashing the blank check Dayananda issued when he began the tradition of interpreting Vedic verses and myths not symbolically but realistically, as referring to natural entities and phenomena.

It would be tedious to multiply the examples of the amazing claims that have been made for the Vedas, some of which have been subjected to a critical analysis (Nanda 2016a). Suffice it to say that the legacy of the fundamentalist stream of "scientific Vedas" lives on in the following three pillars of contemporary Hindu nationalist movements: the idea of the Golden Age when the land of the Āryas, Āryāvrata, was the guru to the entire world; a backward-looking understanding of history in which the ancients serve as the models for the moderns and a traditionally grounded epistemology for interpreting myths as factual nature-knowledge.

Spiritual experience as science

If, for Dayananda, the Vedic *ṛṣi*s were spiritually gifted but passive *receivers* of the truths of the Vedas, for Vivekananda, they were independent *discoverers* of spiritual laws. The former "heard" the infallible truths which illuminated everything; the latter went forth, experimented with altering their modes of awareness and independently discovered the spiritual laws which the Vedas teach. For Dayananda, the truths of the Vedic *śruti* or revelation were infallible and self authenticating, but for Vivekananda, the *śruti* is only provisionally true and needs validation through inner experience arrived at through meditative practices. For Dayananda, the Vedic *ṛṣi*s were uniquely spiritually gifted, while for Vivekananda, anyone who can master the yogic techniques of "direct perception" of spiritual realities can become a *ṛṣi*. If the mantras of the Vedas were Dayananda's anchor, Vivekananda found his in the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali, which he expounded upon in his 1896 book titled *Rāja Yoga*.

Not *back* to the Vedas but *forward* to yogic spirituality was Vivekananda's message. Hinduism, in Vivekananda, was a rational religion, a religion of science, and yogic contemplation was its "scientific method," its method of verification. Vivekananda not only masterfully turned the Hindu religious tradition into a sister enterprise of modern science, he also turned the tables on the Christian critics for living by outdated dogmas taken on faith alone. What Vivekananda began in the waning years of the nineteenth century has continued to animate a whole generation of modern Hindu intellectuals and gurus, including such influential figures as Aurobindo Ghosh (1872–1950), Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), A.C. Bhaktivedanta Prabhupada (1896–1977), Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918–2008) and any number of their acolytes, many of them (Deepak Chopra and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, for example) who have become household names not just in India but around the world.

Vivekananda's brand of scientific spiritualism is an example of what Wouter Hanegraaff has described as the "secularization of esotericism," by which he means the "*attempts by esotericists to come to terms with a disenchanted world*" (1996: 422, emphasis in the original). Esotericism is a shorthand description of the enchanted pre-Enlightenment worldview which saw all parts of the universe as alive and governed by the universal law of correspondences, which acted upon each other through secret sympathies, the small being in sympathetic correspondence with the large, the lower with the higher, the visible with the invisible.[38] When this enchanted world-view encountered the post–Scientific Revolution conception of the world run by instrumental causality, which assumes predictable and demonstrable chains of material causes and effects, the former undoubtedly lost its premodern eminence, but it did not simply melt away into thin air. Rather, like all living traditions, it learnt to adapt to the forces of disenchantment by *re-describing the correspondences and sympathies in the language of instrumental causality*. Modern, post-Enlightenment esotericism—or "occultism" in Hanegraaff's scheme—is a "product of syncretism between *magia* and science, correspondences and causality" (p. 423). What is more, once the fabric of Christian faith and reason in which Western esoteric traditions were embedded in was broken, the scientized, occultist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries positioned themselves as "superior alternatives to the claims of traditional Christianity and mainstream science" (Hanegraaff 2013: 91).

Swami Vivekananda's scientific reframing of the Hindu tradition was largely accomplished during the years he spent in the West, mostly in the United States (from 1893 to 1897 and again from 1899–1902). This was a period of great flowering of all kinds of proto–New Age occultist movements in the United States including spiritualism, Swedenborgianism, Mesmerism, Christian Science, Transcendentalism and, above all, the Theosophical Society led by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott, which had moved its headquarters to Adyar. The arguments deployed by these movements, especially the Theosophical Society, the most scientistic among them, to appropriate the scientific vocabulary of cause and effect, verifiability and laws of nature show up in great abundance in Vivekananda's defence of Vedas-as-science as well.[39] Vivekananda's project, in other words, is part and parcel of the marriage between "*magia* and science, correspondences and causality" through which magic learnt to survive in a disenchanted world.

Vivekananda's interpretation of Patañjali's *Yogasūtra*, a compilation of 195 aphorisms dating back to the early centuries CE is the clearest—and paradigm-setting—example of this marriage. In his commentary on the *Yogasūtra*, titled *Rāja Yoga*, Vivekananda unequivocally defended the occult powers—such as becoming invisible, the ability to fly, the ability to enter other bodies, the ability to see past and future, the ability to see the "subtle" layers of nature, remote seeing and so on—that Patañjali promises in the third chapter of this almost 2000-year-old text. How could the same Vivekananda who had so forcefully defended Hinduism as a religion of science in his address to the Parliament of Religions in 1893 now defend ideas that so obviously contradict every scientific principle known in his time and in ours?

The answer lies in the series of resemblances or parallels that Vivekananda draws between yogic meditation and modern science, both at the level of epistemology and ontology. First, he establishes a methodological resemblance between meditative experience and empiricism. All observation, Vivekananda asserts, is a matter of concentrating attention upon an object. While physical scientists concentrate their attention on external phenomena, Patañjali's yoga teaches how to concentrate on the inner recesses of the mind itself in order to "see" the existence of the soul, God and other "subtle" forces that are not perceptible to ordinary senses. When done in accordance with Patañjali's teachings, yogic meditation brings about a vivid intuition of the object of meditation which is as real as seeing, say, a table in front of you—and that vividness itself is proof of the truth of what the yogi "sees." Yoga becomes the "science of the subtle,"

different from physical sciences only in the level of reality but not in its spirit of arriving at truth based only on empirical evidence rather than on divine revelations and received dogmas.[40]

This introspective "science of the subtle" is not limited to revealing spiritual truths alone but provides empirical knowledge of, and control over, external nature as well. Holding as he does to the ontological monism of Advaita Vedānta, Vivekananda believes that the "external world is only the gross form of the internal or the subtle . . . the external world is the effect, the internal the cause." Thus, "the man who has learned to manipulate the inner forces will get the whole of nature under his control. The yogi seeks nothing less than to master the whole universe, to control the whole of nature." Yogic meditation, in other words, is "scientific" in this more robust sense of allowing the yogi to make empirical claims about the external world.

There are deeper ontological resemblances as well. He completely revised the traditional Sāṃkhya philosophy on which the *Yogasūtra* is based, replacing the category of *prakṛti* (matter) with a "subtle" form of matter, *ākāśa*, and the *puruṣa* (Spirit, or Self) with *prāṇa*.[41] Based upon nothing more than a poetic, metaphorical feel of sameness, he then homologized *ākāśa* with "ether" and *prāṇa* with "energy," both of which were well-defined, experimentally verifiable concepts in Newtonian physics of the nineteenth century. In Vivekananda's "novel metaphysics that owed more to Aristotle and Mesmer than to ancient Indian traditions," (White 2014: 130), when the yogis control their breath through *prāṇāyāma*, they are actually controlling the cosmic energy that, in Vivekananda's words, "manifests as gravitation, as magnetism . . . as nerve current, as thought-force." The *Yogasūtra*, in Vivekananda's rendering, not only teach how to control the "cosmic energy" through breath control but also teach the law of conservation of energy, which he derives from the Sāṃkhyan doctrine of *satkāryavāda*, which holds that the effect lies within its cause and, therefore, nothing can arise out of nothing (King 1999: 208). He then proceeds to offer a scientific justification of reincarnation as an example of conservation of matter and energy. Finally, he declares Patañjali the first theorist of evolution for proposing that the "soul takes on new bodies, from amoeba to humans by its own inherent powers," (Brown 2012: 146).

Armed with this analogical logic, Vivekananda manages to celebrate the scientificity of Hinduism *and* defend the yogic paranormal and karmic evolution in the same breath. The key to his "success" lies in keeping the vitalistic metaphysics of Sāṃkhya and Yoga intact while overlaying it with a vocabulary of instrumental causality of material entities studied by physics. At the heart of this overlaying is the age-old, culturally sanctioned habit of resemblance thinking, or looking for correspondences or "*bandhu*s" between apparently unconnected things, which has been described as the "philosophical center around which all Vedic thought revolves," (Smith 1989: 47). Finding parallels between yogic and scientific "seeing," required no great leap of imagination for Vivekananda.

If analogical reasoning has a prominent place in Indian religious-philosophical tradition, so does a hierarchy of truths: the Ultimate Truth, that is, reality as viewed from the non-dualist perspective of *brahman* realization, and ordinary empirical truth arrived at through human senses (King 1999: 55). It was easy, almost natural, for Vivekananda to appropriate modern science but declare it to be "merely" empirical, a lower level of truth which can never contradict the Truth. Even when he so eagerly grasps for it, Vivekananda declares modern science a "surface science," whose defect is that it cannot explain the paranormal powers of yogis. That the surface science may falsify the yogi's extraordinary powers is not once entertained by the Swami or by his numerous modern-day admirers.[42]

With Vivekananda, inclusivism of the kind described earlier in this chapter—"what you mean when you say x is what we mean when we say y, and y is a better way to understand it"—finds it fullest expression. The xs and ys have changed as sciences have progressed and as different elements of Hindu tradition are highlighted by different gurus, depending upon their predilections. But the basic rhetorical strategy of Vivekananda, a curious hybrid between

Blavatskyan theosophy (which itself has overlays of Hindu and Buddhist ideas on Western eso-teric tradition) and Vedānta, has become a standard item in the mental furniture of modern-day Hindus who learn their Hinduism from English-speaking techno-scientific gurus.

Not surprisingly, the Ramakrishna Mission founded by Vivekananda in 1897 and the vari-ous Vedānta societies in the West became the standard-bearers of this scientized Hinduism. But the credit for making it a part of the New Age mainstream belongs to Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918–2008), the founder of the global Transcendental Meditation movement. While Mahesh Yogi did not come from Vivekananda's stream per se, he shared the latter's monistic Advaita Vedānta beliefs and his enthusiasm for scientism. Using the same strategy of parallelisms as per-fected by Vivekananda, only now applied to quantum physics, Mahesh Yogi claimed that "the worldview of physics and quantum field theory had bridged the subject-object divide, pointing to and validating the metaphysics of the Vedic worldview" (Humes 2010: 367) and when physi-cist talked of unified field or vacuum states, they were actually talking of *ātman/brahman*. While Vivekananda only offered a scientistic defence of the yogic paranormal, Mahesh Yogi went to put this "theory" into practice, offering initiation into meditation programs that promised the "power to levitate, read minds and become invisible" (Lowe 2011: 63), apart from offering training courses in everything from astrology, *yagna*s (*yajña*s) to *vāstuśāstra*. Even though these programs were developed in Fairfield, Iowa, in the United States, the home of Maharishi's vari-ous organizations, his ideas have a considerable presence in India, both through his own univer-sity and various educational programs and through the influence of his disciples, including Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (of Art of Living) and Deepak Chopra (the self-help guru).

Vivekananda lives on, larger than life, in contemporary India. He is a much-celebrated icon of the Hindu nationalists (Kanungo 2013) and the intellectuals aligned with Hindutva (Malhotra 2014). His brand of scientized Hinduism has, furthermore, become foundational for the growing New Age spirituality in India (Frøystad 2010; Gooptu 2016). The "New" in the Indian New Age, however, is not a break from the "old" established religions preached from church pulpits as it is in the West but rather a resurrection of the ancient wisdom, once lost to Islamic and Western intruders but now found. When India's hip, upwardly mobile spiritual-but-not-religious turn to the "new" spiritualities, they see themselves as modern restorers of the ancient wisdom of their forefathers which, to paraphrase Vivekananda, modern science has only now begun to "echo."

Concluding reflections

India in the twenty-first century aspires to be counted amongst scientifically and technologically advanced nations. The 2019 election manifesto of the BJP promised support for spectacular leaps in everything from space-missions to artificial intelligence, robotics and genomics.[43] There are occasional rumblings from the scientific community regarding the level of funding and the pseudoscientific pronouncements by political figures.[44] But compared to the virtual war on intellectuals, historians and social activists, the scientific community has remained relatively free from harassment and interference by the Hindu nationalist government. There are attempts to rope in top science and engineering institutions to collaborate in pet Hindutva projects, namely cow urine and Āyurveda.[45] But at the same time, these institutions are constantly exhorted to take on cutting-edge science projects so as to improve their rankings in global science.

So, is science the queen as it appears to be from all the privileges it enjoys under a Hindu nationalist government? Or is science a handmaiden of Hindu nationalism, as this chapter has argued? What kind of a handmaiden is it, if it is simultaneously a queen?

Science in India has won the right to speak for nature but in its own limited technical sphere which is more thoroughly connected with global networks than with the intellectual and even

scientific networks at home. Institutions of modern science in India enjoy a rather dubious kind of "autonomy"—not so much from the state's intervention and agenda-setting but from the sociocultural ethos of the rest of the society.

Outside the boundary walls of institutional science, the queen remains a handmaiden of Hindu nationalism: first as prop for glorification of ancient Hindu traditions and secondarily as a prestige project for international rankings. In the cultural life of contemporary India, science is seen as affirming the wisdom of the ancients and the glory of Mother India.

Barring the fringes of Bible literalists, theology in the West has ceded the right to speak for the empirical world to science while retaining the authority on matters of salvation of the soul. In India, however, Hindu religious traditions continue to lay claims on matters scientific as well as salvific. Using superficial analogies and convoluted logic, modern Hindu apologists have managed to metabolize modern science into the tissue of old orthodoxies while laying priority claims over many of its achievements.

This chapter has tried to unpack the discursive strategies that have allowed modern science to be captured by the Sanskritic tradition. This unpacking is necessary for understanding how this unholy marriage of science with Hinduism has come about, how it is sustained and the ideological work it does for Hindu nationalism.

Understanding the mechanism of Sanskritization of modern science is no doubt a matter of great interest to scholars engaged in religion and science debates. But its significance goes beyond mere matters of academic interest.

The twin ideas—that Vedic India was the original home of sciences and that modern science only affirms Vedic and Vedāntic cosmology and modes of knowing—are the central pillars of Hindu nationalist celebration of Mother India. This supremacist ideology has taken on an increasingly menacing turn against non-Hindu minorities, especially the Muslim community. Indeed, the Citizenship Amendment Bill—which became law as these words were being written—denies Muslims seeking refuge in India the promise of (eventual) citizenship. A majoritarian state is no longer a mere "specter"; it is already a reality.

Given the threats facing India's democracy, it is imperative for intellectuals to not merely interpret the world they live in but to intervene in order to change it. The interpretation offered in this chapter will hopefully serve as a step toward combating the pernicious ideology of Hindu nationalism.

Notes

1 These two registers, Science $_{EMP}$ and Science $_{VED}$, are borrowed from Ankur Barua (2018).
2 There are vigorous and ongoing attempts to "prove" that acupuncture began in ancient India (Alter 2005). Deepak Chopra (2005) has accused Christian fundamentalists of "hijacking" Intelligent Design creationism from Vedāntic Hinduism. See Nanda (2006) for the emerging alliance between Vedic and Christian creationists in the United States.
3 For kinship between pseudoscience and bullshit, see James Ladyman (2013). What the two share is a lack of concern with the truth value of their assertions.
4 Derived from *xenos*, Greek for "stranger or foreigner," the term xenology is often used in science fiction to describe extraterrestrial life forms. In cultural studies, it refers generally to a culture's attitudes toward foreigners. This usage entered religious and cultural studies through the landmark work of Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding*, published in 1988, where it is used as a term for "attitude towards, and conceptualizations of, foreigners" (p. 507, n. 2).
5 For critical reviews of this literature, see Smith (1996) and Sweetman (2003). For a radical postcolonial position that Hinduism has "no existence outside the experience of western culture," and has "no reference in the world . . . there is no Hinduism (whether as a religion or a multiplicity of religions) in the Indian culture," see Balagangadhara (2010: 138).

6 I am influenced here by Sheldon Pollock's non-essentialist cosmopolitan comparativism, which he describes as "the new mode of mutual estrangement," made possible by "the reciprocal illumination of objects of analysis that can now be seen to be *equally different, and neither deficient nor deviant; . . .* Comparison unencumbered by delusions about the essential nature of things allows you to better capture the particularity, and peculiarity, of a given case. Better put: *the true specificity of any given case emerges only against the backdrop of some other*" (2017: 286, emphasis added).

7 The early Christians had access to a relatively "thin" version of the classical inheritance, dominated largely by Plato and a few works of Aristotle. A richer, more complete version of Aristotle's works, along with Ptolemy's astronomy and Galen's medicine, finally became accessible to Christian Europe in the twelfth century after they were translated from Arabic translations into Latin. For more details, see Lindberg 2003.

8 According to Augustine, as quoted by Ernan McMullin (2013: 197), "the truth is rather in what God reveals, than in what groping men surmise. But if they are able to establish their doctrine with proofs that cannot be denied, we must show that the statement of Scripture . . . is not opposed to the truth of their doctrine." McMullin calls it the "principle of priority of demonstration."

9 In what McMullin calls "the principle of prudence," Augustine cautioned against embracing any principle of Biblical interpretation so firmly that "if further progress in the search for truth justly undermines this principle, we too will fall with it" (p. 201). Thomas Aquinas, many centuries later, expressed a similar sentiment: "when there are different ways of explaining a scriptural text, no particular explanation should be held so rigidly that, if convincing arguments show it to be false, anyone dare to insist that it is still the definitive sense of the text. Otherwise, unbelievers will scorn Sacred Scripture, and the way to faith will be closed to them," (quoted here from Edward Grant 1986: 63).

10 See David Lindberg (2003) for the Augustinian position with regard to natural philosophy.

11 For a brief sketch of how Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo challenged the authority of the Church, see Avihu Zakai (2007).

12 The four canonical Vedas are the Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva. Their oral composition is generally dated back to the second millennium BCE. They contain liturgical material in verse form (mantras) for performance of rituals. The mantra portion (*saṃhitā*) of each Veda comes with prose texts classified as Brāhmaṇas (which provide the meaning of the ritual), Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads (philosophical and cosmological speculations) and Sūtras (directions for rituals). The Indian tradition distinguishes between *śruti* ("hearing"), that is, texts revealed to the ṛṣis, the primordial Seers, and *smṛti* ("remembrance"), that is, texts with human authors. All texts from the Saṃhitās to the Upaniṣads are *śruti*, while the late Vedic *sūtra*s are regarded as *smṛti*.

13 Singer describes India's 'traditionalism' as its capacity to incorporate innovations through its remarkable "cultural metabolism which ingests foreign cultural bodies, segregates them, breaks them down into usable forms and eventually builds them into indigenous 'cultural protoplasm'," (1972: 385). This cultural protoplasm is what Singer calls the "Great Tradition" of Sanskritic Hinduism.

14 Malhotra (2015) acknowledges that the modern scientific worldview actually "blocks the shruti altogether." Rather than face up to the contradictions, he would rather "map modern science into the Vedic structures so as to turn it into a smriti that would be compatible with shruti." Thus, *śakti*, or "intelligent energy," has to be saved by treating energy, as understood by physics, as a mere subset of *śakti*. Likewise, "karma theory would see physics as a subset . . . space/ether type of entities could be seen as a small subset of *akasha*. Fire is a subset of *agni* and its many forms. The fashionable term 'energy healing' (itself largely based on appropriating Vedic ideas) is a subset of the vast terrain we know as pranic healing. The list is endless."

15 Restivo's (1978: 151) description of methodology of parallelism between physics and Eastern mysticism is apropos here: "Similar rhetoric, imagery and metaphoric content . . . constitutes the evidence for parallelism. The basic assumption in this approach is that if the rhetorical, imagery and metaphoric content of statements on physics and mysticism is similar, the conceptual content must be similar, and the experience of reality must also be similar among physicists and mystics."

16 Kiblinger credits Paul Griffith's *Problems of Religious Diversity* for the distinction between "closed" and "open" inclusivism. Open inclusivism, unlike the closed variety, draws parallels but does not assume that the alien truths were originally included in the home system.

17 To question the submergence, or to challenge the claims of the Indic from well-established claims and methods of "Western" science, is tantamount to "Orientalism," "Eurocentrism" or a "colonial consciousness"—so the defenders of the Indic "difference" argue.

18 Apart from his evangelical biases, Paul Hacker's idea of inclusivism has been strenuously criticized on two substantive grounds: one, that inclusivism is a pervasive, dominant and uniquely Indian form of

dealing with foreign interlocutors and two, that India never had any real tolerance of other religions, and what Hindus call tolerance is only a passive-aggressive inclusivism. Hacker is wrong on both counts. Inclusivism is by no means exclusive or unique to India: there are many instances of Hacker-style tendency to identify the other with a lower level of one's doctrines and gods in the history of Greek religion, Christianity and Buddhism. Neither is India exclusively inclusive: Hacker ignores the history of the development of Hindu philosophical schools, where, as Andrew Nicholson points out (2010: 188), before the twelfth century, one finds "widespread exclusivist trends, such as Kumārila Bhaṭṭa's rejection of Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Pāñcarātra, Pāśupata and Buddhist interpretation of dharma . . . and Vijñānabhikṣu's exclusivist rejection of the deniers (*nāstikas*)." Nicholson rightly observes that "it is best to think of exclusivism and inclusivism as existing side by side in a variety of different traditions." Or, to take one of the most prominent examples in Hindu philosophical thought: Śaṅkara, the eighth-century exponent of Advaita Vedānta, strenuously rejected Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Buddhists and all other traditions that depended on extra-Vedic sources of authority, including "unguided human reasoning (*tarka*)" and "experience (*anubhava*)" (Halbfass 1991: 55). On the other thesis that Hindus have inclusivism instead of tolerance, Hacker again overlooks historic cases instances of genuine co-existence of various forms of religious life in Indian history (for a brief but succinct review, see Halbfass 1988: 406–409). Inclusivism does not rule out tolerance, albeit of a hierarchical variety.

19 As Mackenzie Brown (2010: 207–208) has noted most perceptively, just four years before Swami Vivekananda proclaimed modern science to be a mere echo of Vedic truths in his Chicago address, he was deeply troubled by Hindu cosmology, which he saw as having been falsified by modern science. His senior contemporary, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who began as a staunch critic of "Veda worship" and other-worldly elements of Hindu philosophical outlook, which he held responsible for retarding the progress of science in India, ends up defending the Hindu trinity of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva as being more "natural and in accordance with scientific theories" than the Christian conception of the divine (Chatterjee 1986: 68; see also Sen 2019). Dayananda Saraswati, who has been described as a "Hindu iconoclast" (Salmond 2003), ends up defending the Vedas as the original source of all sciences and even advanced technologies.

20 For a brief but succinct review, see Rambachan 1994: Ch. 1.

21 Following Michael Cook (2014: 373), if a religious tradition is like a river, the religious fundamentalists are the ones who follow the "upstream option" of restoring the heritage to its original purity, while the conservatives follow the "downstream option" of not worrying about the original purity but taking care of the tradition as they have inherited it. On Arya Samaj as a fundamentalist movement, see Llewellyn (1993).

22 Even though himself a non-believer, Nehru had no problem identifying the nation with the majority religion: "Hinduism became the symbol of nationalism. It was indeed the national religion" (quoted here from Anderson 2015: 54).

23 Partha Chatterjee labels scientific rationality as a "derivative discourse" of colonialism in his influential 1986 book. Looking for "other reason" that can "provincialize Europe" became the holy grail of post-colonial theory (see Prakash 1999; Chakrabarty 2007). See Nanda (2004), Chibber (2013) and Kaiwar (2015) for a critique of postcolonial arguments.

24 The murder suspects have been linked to Sanatan Sanstha, a Goa-based radical Hindu group, and its affiliate, Hindu Janajagruti Samiti. See www.indiatoday.in/india/story/arrested-govind-pansari-murder-dabholkar-gauri-lankesh-kalburgi-1596483-2019-09-06.

25 Peer, Basharat. "Nationalist Attack on Intellectuals and Students." https://lithub.com/indias-nationalist-assault-on-intellectuals-and-students/, accessed March 19, 2020.

26 From 2 seats in the parliament in 1984, the BJP increased its tally to 88 in 1989, 120 in 1991, 161 in 1996 and 178 in 1998 (Jaffrelot 2007: 3).

27 While the RSS gives the BJP a free hand in running the economy, commerce, foreign affairs and defence, the RSS gets a free hand in determining the social, cultural and educational agenda of the BJP government. See Kanungo 2019 for this division of labour in the current government.

28 "Ramdev's Bhartiya Shiksha Board Brings in RSS's Atul Kothari As Special Invitee." https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/services/education/ramdevs-bhartiya-shiksha-board-brings-in-rsss-atul-kothari-as-special-invitee/articleshow/72123530.cms?from=mdr. See also "To Blend Vedic and Modern Studies, HRD Body Clears Bharatiya Shiksha Board." https://indianexpress.com/article/education/to-blend-vedic-and-modern-studies-hrd-body-clears-bharatiya-shiksha-board-5534352/

29 Mackenzie Brown (2012) and Gyan Prakash (1999) are exceptions. Brown devotes an entire chapter to Dayananda's Vedic creationism.

30 Ramdev credits the writings of Swami Dayananda as the source of his inspiration. He was also educated in an Arya Samaj gurukul; www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/in-other-news/300417/saraswatis-writings-inspired-ramdev-quit-school-fled-home-to-join-gurukul.html

    Gayatri Pariwar is a Haridwar-based religious organization founded by Shriram Sharma (1911–1990) and now headed by Pranava Pandya, a medical doctor who carries out research on the alleged air-purifying and health-giving properties of yagnas (*yajña*s) and mantras. Shriram Sharma began his career as the head of the Mathura branch of Arya Samaj. There was a falling out, later on, with Sharma accusing the Arya Samaj of elitism for denying idol worship, while the Arya Samaj accused him of making an idol of the Gāyatrī mantra! The two organizations nevertheless share the same zeal for scientific legitimation of yagnas and mantras. See Heifetz (2019) and Pandya (2009) for more details.

31 See Salmond (2003) and Fischer-Tine (2013) for a review of Arya Samaj.

32 What follows is a summary of his meandering arguments in the *Bhūmikā*.

33 Brown (2012: 42–43) calls God-as-teacher "socio-teleological" argument for the existence of god. On this account, knowledge does not progress but rather declines from the original perfection.

34 As he wrote in his *Satyartha Prakash*, the "Bible" of the Arya Samaj: "where things under discussion are mentioned as created, protected, or sustained, disintegrated or where qualifying words as finite, visible are used, they cannot be taken to signify God; because He is neither subject to such changes as evolution or dissolution, nor is He finite or visible. *Therefore, such names as Virat, Agni (as in the following quotations) signify material objects of the universe:—"Then was created Virat, etc." "Thereafter was created Bhumi—earth"* (quoted here from Salmond, p. 173; emphasis added).

35 Sri Aurobindo being the exception here. While Swami Vivekananda and other thinkers of the Hindu Renaissance admired Dayananda's efforts for Hindu awakening, only Aurobindo is on record for offering fulsome praise for his interpretive method. His remarks can be found at http://inthevedas.blogspot.com/2014/02/aurobindo-ghosh-on-swami-dayanand.html

36 For brief but succinct reviews of Arya Samaj's history, see Fischer-Tine (2013) and Christophe Jaffrelot (2007). Part of the reason Arya Samaj failed to expand was its rejection and polemical attacks on the existing forms of popular Hinduism.

37 "Anti-Darwin Comments in India Outrage Scientists," www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-01241-9. Mackenzie Brown (2012: 7) credits Dayananda as the pioneer of "Modern Vedic Creationism" that "places the creation of humankind some 1,960,852,976 years ago at which time God created all animal species, including thousands of fully adult men and women, and instilled souls into them, after which they reproduced in the usual sexual manner." For Dayananda's remarks on apes not turning into humans, see Brown (2012: 124).

38 Esotericism is notoriously hard to define. The most famous and influential characterization comes from Antoine Faivre, who in 1992 offered a list of four "intrinsic" characteristics of esotericism (correspondences, living nature, imagination/mediations, transmutation) next to two non-intrinsic ones (transmission, concordance). This definition, as Hanegraaff (2013: 5) points out, "read[s] like a definition of 'enchantment', set against the 'disenchanted' worldviews associated with post-cartesian, post-Newtonian and positivist science." More recently, von Stuckrad (2005) has characterized esotericism as displaying three main features: claims of higher knowledge, ways of accessing this higher knowledge and a worldview of ontological monism.

    Hinduism shares all the defining features of esotericism. The Vedic tradition abounds in layers upon layers of correspondences, or "*bandhu*s," between "each Vedic god and . . . unique numbers, consorts, ritual meters, directions, seasons, hours of the day, priestly orders, oblations, sacrificial animals" (Farmer et al. 2000: 53). Finding resemblances between the universe (macrocosm), the "self" (microcosm) and rituals (the mesocosm) constitutes the episteme of the Vedas (Smith 1989). Likewise, levels of truth with higher wisdom available to the spiritually adept are very much a part of the Hindu mainstream.

39 I have reviewed the development of the post–Civil War occultist milieu in the United States and its impact on Vivekananda's scientization of Hinduism in Nanda 2010, 2016a. For a pioneering attempt at tracing the entanglements between Western esotericism and modern yoga, see De Michelis (2005). How closely Vivekananda's arguments track theosophical rapprochement with science also becomes clear from Asprem (2013).

40 Complete references to Vivekananda's statements quoted in this section can be found in Nanda (2016a).

41 In classical Sāṃkhya philosophy, *ākāśa* is a minor evolute of *prakṛti* associated with sound, while *prāṇa* finds no mention at all. The *Yogasūtra* devotes all of one verse to *prāṇa*, where it is clearly meant as the act of breathing. Far from reviving the *Yogasūtra*, Vivekananda was clearly rewriting it.

42 For a rare statement of dissent that demands to know "What would falsify yogic perception?" see Ellis (2012).

43 Vasudevan Mukuth, "S&T in the BJP's Election Manifesto Is No S and All T," https://thewire.in/the-sciences/bjp-lok-sabha-elections-manifesto-science-technologyenvironment, accessed March 19, 2020.

44 Intolerance and funding concern Indian scientists ahead of election, www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-01465-3

45 R. Ramachandran, India's Premier Science Bodies Moot National Programme to Study Concoctions of Cow Excreta, https://thewire.in/science/panchgavya-svarop-iit-csir-cow-urine

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18

RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN PAKISTAN

From *pīr*'s domination to individual connected piety

Michel Boivin

Many studies have been devoted to the issue of Islam and politics in Pakistan, among which some are ground breaking (Shaikh 2009). The purpose of this chapter is different. It is an attempt to provide some insights about how society and religion are intertwined in Pakistan and how, beyond a normative Islamist discourse that prevails in the public sphere, countless arrangements and accommodations are made by different segments of the population. Muslims represent about 90% of Pakistan's 210 million people. Sunnis represent about 75% of the Muslims, and they mostly follow the Hanafi school of law. The Shias are divided into two main branches: the Twelver Shias and the Ismaili Shias. The vast majority of Pakistani Shias are Twelver (*isnā asharī*), because they recognize twelve *imām*s from Ali, and they are expecting the coming of the twelfth *imām* they consider the *mahdī*, the saviour. The Ismailis are divided into subsects, but one of the most influential is composed of Karim Aga Khan's followers. He is venerated as the 49th *imām* in direct line from Ali. In a high range, there would be 50 million Shiites in Pakistan and 30 million in a low range.

Regarding the Hindus, official statistics are contested by the Pakistan Hindu Council, which is based in Karachi. According to it, Hindus represent 5.56% of the country's total population, instead of the 'official' 2%, which would bring their number to more than 10 million. Hindus in Sindh represent 93.3% of the total, and 17.4% of the province's inhabitants are Hindus. According to the official Census, Christians are about 2% of the total population and thus about 4 million. Among them, 80% are reported to be settled in Punjab, 15% in Sindh, and the rest in the other provinces of Pakistan. They are divided into two main churches: Catholics who were converted by the Portuguese from the 16th century and Protestants, converted from the 19th century by Anglo-Saxon missionaries. Some religious minorities are represented by only a few thousand members: Parsis, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, and polytheists. Although they are mentioned in institutional texts, they have not aroused the interest of researchers, with the exception of the polytheist Kalashes.

The State and the progressive Islamization of society

From before its birth in 1947, the movement for Pakistan was divided: which State it should be, knowing that it was created to safeguard the interests of Muslims? The development of the idea

of a Muslim nation of India confronted two groups of protagonists: the first brought together supporters of a constitutional State with the British as a model, where the interests of Muslims would be affirmed but which would simultaneously guarantee religious freedom. The second group was composed of Ulamas belonging to various law schools, for which there could only be Pakistan under the form of a 'Sharia State', that is, a State in which Sharia would have the force of law: they would be named Islamists, since they were supporters of a political Islam. One capital point, however, to be noted and kept in mind is that a minimal consensus did exist within the first actors or within the second. It is nevertheless this cleavage which was at the origin of the disorders that the country faced shortly after its creation, focusing in particular on the definition of a Muslim, which was also divergent and dissensual. It is this balance of power that has been twisted, distorted, and amplified by international events and which feeds the tensions that cross the country.

The 'soft' consensus that presided over the birth of Pakistan, which was admirably embodied by Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1877–1948), was the product of an aporia: the impossibility of giving a single definition of 'Muslim,' given the division of the Pakistani Muslims in terms of schools and sects, sometimes mixed with ethnic discourse or nationalist claims. This situation also fed the Islamist discourse, for which no ambiguity existed on the question. The main Islamist actor was undoubtedly Sayyid Abu Ala Mawdudi (1903–1979), an atypical Ulama, who remains one of the main theorists of Islamism on the scale of the global Muslim world. He was the spearhead of the disorder the Islamists caused soon after the birth of Pakistan, creating a tension that prompted successive leaders to instrumentalize Islam to such an extent that an officially secularist government, headed by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1928–1977), passed a law in 1974 that excluded a group, the Ahmadis, from the Islamic community, the *umma*. The omnipresence of the references to Islam was doubled by a religiosity that permeated all political parties.

The first step of the state Islamization of Pakistan

Consequently, the slow Islamization of Pakistani society undertaken by the State was due to three main processes. First was the social pressure through violent actions organized by the Islamists. Following Mawdudi, a genuine nation for Muslims could only be ruled by a Sharia State, including a democratic system but also discriminatory provisions for religious minorities. Second, there was the fact that very soon in its history, Pakistan saw several military coups for which the democracy could not be used as a legitimate source of power. Thus, it was tempting to refer to Islam to find sources for legitimizing the power. The convergence of these factors created a constant overbidding of Islamic legitimacy in the political sphere. A third factor was the globalization of Islamism resulting mostly from the role played by Saudi Arabia for the Sunnis and Iran for the Shias. This social role was mainly based on the huge funding they provided, especially for building mosques and madrasas, taking care of the needy through these Islamic institutions.

As a matter of fact, the ambiguity about defining 'who is Muslim' was obvious in the fact that it was only in the 1973 Constitution that one can find a 'definition' of a Muslim:

> 'Muslim' refers to a person who believes in the unity and oneness of Almighty God, in the absolute and unspeakable purpose of the prophecy of Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him), the last of the prophets, and does not believe in, or recognize as a religious prophet or reformer, anyone who has claimed or claims to be a prophet, in any sense of the word or description, after Muhammad (Peace be upon him).
>
> (1973 Constitution, article 260–3)

The last part of the article showed this definition prompted to discard the Ahmadis from the Islamic community, since they claimed their founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), was a prophet. Notwithstanding, during the rule of the same socialist leader, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, for the first time ever, Islam was declared a State religion and the president and prime minister had to be Muslim. The State was to ensure that the country's Muslims could conform their lives to the precepts of the Quran and the Sunna, as well as developing the teaching of the Quran. Alcohol consumption was prohibited for Muslims, except for medical reasons, and, for non-Muslims, it had to be limited to religious purposes. The State was to eradicate prostitution, vagrancy, drugs, and obscenity, thus promoting respect for Islamic ethics (art. 37).

The second step of the state Islamization of society

This aspect of Bhutto's rule is often underestimated, although it should be considered the first step towards the state Islamization of society in Pakistan. In 1977, Zia ul Haq (1924–1988) dismissed Bhutto from his position and proclaimed martial law. Chief of staff of the Pakistani Army appointed by Bhutto, Zia ul Haq was a pious Muslim who was once close to the Jamat-e Islami, Mawdudi's political party, though disagreeing on certain points such as the cult of saints, which was considered non-Islamic by the Jamat. Zia ul Haq was the first to publicly announce that the time had come to introduce Sharia law in Pakistan. In February 1979, the 'Islamic punishments,' or Hudud Ordinances, were adopted for the whole country. People convicted of adultery would be punished by stoning (until death ensued), and fornication between unmarried persons by the whip. A thief was to have his right hand amputated. With regard to stoning, it should be noted that it is not a Quranic penalty. Indeed, the Quran does not provide for such punishment for adultery, but many currents of Islam have made it an article of the law. This practice is based on *ḥadīth*s of the Prophet, and in this case, the Sunna is therefore a higher standard than the Quran.

In March 1981, Zia ul Haq created the Majlis-e Shura (Federal Advisory Board), whose role was to help the government speed up the process of Islamization. In 1984, he introduced a system called *niẓām-e salāt* in which a person was designated in each locality to ensure that Muslims observed the mandatory five ritual prayers (*namāz*). The Council of Islamic Ideology went as far as to recommend that any Muslim who did not perform the prayer of the Friday be punished. The same year, 'Islamic' taxes, already recommended in the 1973 Constitution, were enacted, the *zakāt* and the '*ushr*. The *zakāt*, one of the five pillars of Islam, is a legal alms, mentioned in the Quran (IX/104), which was to finance religious schools, *dīnī madāri*s. It consisted of a 2.5% levy on all bank deposits. The Shias, whom the imposition of 'Sunni' measures had mobilized, succeeded in being exempted from it. The '*ushr* was a tax levied in kind or in cash on agricultural yields.

The limits of state Islamization appear with the question of blasphemy. This colonial heritage was updated by Zia ul Haq in 1982 and 1986, then by Nawaz Sharif in 1991. Amendment 295b, adopted in 1982 as part of the Hudud Ordinances, provides for life imprisonment for desecration of the Koran; since 1986, amendment 295c provides for the death penalty for any defamation of the Prophet Muhammad. It should be recalled that the initial article (295) provided prison sentences for any offence against any character worshipped by believers of any religion. The blasphemy law remains, however, an instrument mainly used against religious minorities: Ahmadis, Christians, and Hindus. The blasphemy law is largely exploited by people who use it to appropriate the property of others or to take revenge for what they consider an affront.

How can it be explained that Zia ul Haq carried out an acceleration of the process of Islamization? First of all, it is necessary to return to the regional context. The Islamic Revolution

had propelled Iran as both a forward-thinking leader and a leader of the Shiites in the Muslim world. The Islamization of the Iranian regime therefore set a precedent in the region. In addition to that, Zia was personally close to the Pakistani Islamists out of personal conviction. He was one of those who believed that Pakistan should evolve gradually from a State for Muslims to an Islamic State. However, we cannot underestimate the amount of political calculation. Having come to power through a coup d'état, Zia had to seek the political support he thought he would find among the Islamists.

Islam and the traditional forms of social domination

The Islamization implemented in Pakistani society came first from the State. Nonetheless, we know that the idea of Pakistan as a Muslim nation was built on a 'soft' consensus about the meaning of 'to-be-Muslim.' Notwithstanding, there is an issue which is hardly addressed by scholars: before 1947, how were the Muslims being Muslims? The answer is beyond the scope of the present chapter, but, briefly put, there were many different conceptions of 'to-be-Muslim' all over the territory that would form Pakistan (Boivin 2015). Nevertheless, almost a century and a half ago, a British administrator wrote about Punjabis: 'The fact is that these people are much more connected by a social and tribal custom than by any rule relating to their religion' (Ibbetson 1883: 14). Consequently, it is necessary now to focus on the social structures of Pakistan to settle this issue.

The dynamics of social domination are embodied by the Urdu word *jāgīrdāri*, because it was articulated around the figure of the *jāgīrdār* or *zamīndār*, the one who owned the land (Lyon 2004). The system ensured its replication through two strategies: on the one hand, the sacralization of any power, including profane power, and, on the other hand, alliance with priest groups, those who managed the Islamic religion, usually known as Ulamas, although it includes very different categories in terms of status, such as the *qāḍī* (judge) or the *akhūnd* (schoolmaster in a *madrasa*). However, in many cases, these two powers, which can be artificially described as religious and political activities, were carried out by one and the same person, the Sayyid, whose high status was due to the fact that he was recognized as a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad (Ahmad 1967).

Genealogical sacralization

The domination of the Sayyid highlights the importance of genealogy. *Birādarī*, a Persian word meaning 'brotherhood,' is a key concept to understand Pakistan's social organization, much more relevant than the vague notion of ethnicity is: it is the basic unit of the whole Pakistani society. The *birādarī*, which is not without reminding us of the phratry of the ancient Greeks, refers to the patrilineal group. Other terms may be used, such as *khāndān*, which is also of Persian origin but more applicable to the agnates as prestigious rank holders and also *qabīla*. For Marc Gaborieau, the *birādarī* includes all men who can trace their connection to a common ancestor through the patrilineal lineage, the women they married or their widows, their unmarried girls, and those divorced who are waiting for remarriage (Gaborieau 1993: 302). On the other hand, Hamza Alavi considers that there are two types of *birādarī*s. The first type corresponds to a lineage which is based on the structure of the marriage between patrilateral parallel cousins, that is, marriage to father's brother's daughter. The second type of *birādarī*, which he translates as 'clan,' brings together a certain number of patrilineal exogamous lineages (Alavi 1995: 1–162).

One might ask what the relationship is between religion and *birādarī*. In fact, we observe that, in many cases, the eponymous ancestor of the *birādarī*s is the object of a cult, more or

less asserted, which could be a memory of the ancestors' cult that was, and still is, widely practiced in South Asian Hinduism. In any case, such a cult does exist within *birādarī*s through the celebration of the death anniversary of a Sufi ancestor of the Sufi lodge master. But given the diversity of Pakistani society, it is clear that several dynamics of sacralization are at work. We can divide them into two main groups, the difference between them being based on the nature of the family involved: real or symbolic. In the first one, where the group is based on the claim of membership in a real family, there are three categories: the descendants of the prophet Muhammad, of one of the first four caliphs, or of a companion of the Prophet, whose existence is historically attested or not. The second group consists of two categories: groups that claim a spiritual descent from a Sufi saint, via 'conversion', or from a sacralized hero who may be a mythological divinity, this case concerning the non-Muslim environment, or a tribal chief.

Mythologizing accounts of 'conversion' to Islam are legion. These stories also exist in favour of the Ismaili *pīr*s who, chronologically, arrived in the Indus Valley before the Sufis. The mythical account of the arrival of the saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar at the end of the 13th century in Sehwan Sharif, a strategic town in the Sindh along the Indus River, is edifying. He conquered the city over the unbelievers (*kāfir*), that is, the Hindus, and put an end to the ignorance, the *jāhiliyya*, symbolized in some oral narratives by the nakedness of the inhabitants. They wore, in the real and figurative meaning, knowledge, in the form of Islam they would have adopted. British officials accumulated the stories of 'tribal' conversions by Sufi saints. The more important the saint, because he is powerful, the more groups claim to have become Muslims through his preaching.

Real and symbolic kinship

Real kinship is governed by a patriarchal system in which the *birādarī* is based on the cult of the ancestors, which, in turn, may have helped to strengthen the unity of a group. This is not restricted to the Sufi milieu. In northern Sindh, for example, in the region of Larkana, a recent study indicates that the region is home to many tombs and mausoleums of *birādarī* leaders, known as the *sardār*s. Those who died on the battlefield were the subject of a process of sanctification (Kalhoro 2009). They sacrificed their lives for the group that was being attacked by another group. These events were generally produced in the 18th century, a troubled period that saw the dislocation of the Mughal Empire, followed by Nadir Shah's and Ahmad Shah Durrani's invasions in 1739 and from 1748 to 1767, respectively.

The rituals and places of worship are no different from those related to Sufism, but the buried persons are not Sufis. The members of the *birādarī* come to honour the sacrificed *sardār* who has acquired the status of martyr (*shahīd*). The grave may be a true mausoleum that nothing distinguishes from a Sufi mausoleum. *Birādarī* members visit the place several times a year, but, as in Sufi worship, the peak of the liturgical year takes place during the celebration of the death anniversary of the *sardār*. Again as in the Sufi mausoleums, families belonging to the *birādarī* come to the mausoleum of the *sardār* to perform domestic rituals, such as the shaving of the newborn baby. In this case, membership of the *birādarī* is understood as belonging to a unified spiritual family in the worship of the ancestor. Despite the absence of academic work on 'tribal' religious traditions, elements related to the construction process of ancestor worship may be gleaned from another case, geographically located in the vicinity of these *sardār* tombs: the mausoleum of the Bhuttos, through which it was once questioned.

The Bhuttos family mausoleum is located in Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, in the same region of Larkana. However, the case of the Bhuttos unambiguously shows that the cult of the ancestors, symbolized by a gigantic mausoleum of Mughal architecture, is a recent construction that aims,

through the sanctification of a *birādarī*, to strengthen its social authority in the area and its political power at the national level. Different members of the family are buried, but the two most famous are Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter Benazir Bhutto (1954–2007). One can see in the monumental size of the mausoleum, and especially in its style, a reference to the supreme power that they held: they were prime ministers (and president for Zulfikar) of Pakistan. For the *sardār*s' mausoleums, this is related to local authority, which does not prevent the most refined interior decoration in wall paintings. The conjunction of the real family with the symbolic family only aims at strengthening the power of a dominant group within the *birādarī*.

Despite the importance of the *birādarī* as the basis of the social system, there are other forms of social organization in Pakistan. In the Swat region of northwest Pakistan, Fredrik Barth claimed that the Pathans, another name given to the Pashtuns, were organized according to other patterns, which could be constituted by an acephalic or 'quasi-feudal' system (Barth 1960: 118), the paradigm of tribal egalitarianism. The local society is then characterized by a 'poly-segmentative' organization (idem: 123). In southeast Pakistan, the social organization of the Jats of the Indus Delta is hierarchical, and the authority is centralized. There are about a hundred units called *orak*, which are either *birādarī*s or subdivisions of *birādarī*s, all determined in any case by patrilineal descendants. Each *orak* has a leader, the *wadero*, who is the subordinate of the *mālik*. The *mālik* has the authority to give orders to the *wadero*s, but in exchange, he is obliged to negotiate all the requests he receives (Westphal-Hellbusch and Westphal 1964: 13).

The *wadero*s are compelled to attend the coronation, 'to put the turban on the head' (*dastārbandī*) of the *mālik*. Everyone must tie the turban of the *mālik*, a crown substitute (*tāj*) that symbolizes authority and power, according to its rank, which depends on the status that one inherited and the prestige that he has himself accumulated. Participation in the knotting of the turban means, on the one hand, dependence on the *mālik*, but, on the other hand, it is also evidence of loyalty. The case of the Jats is a significant example of the sacredness with which the leader, as the representative and symbol of the group, is endowed. The unity of the Jats as a group is therefore based on two factors: a symmetrical relationship between them and a relationship of asymmetrical allegiance to the *mālik*, who, it should be noted, is not himself a Jat but a Karmati Baluch (idem: 15).

Religions and the *pīrī-murīdī* system

At the junction of the social and religious fields, there is a typical figure of the Pakistani scene: the *pīr*. The *pīr* gets his power from his *baraka*, most of the time inherited from his ancestors. Before coming back to the origin and structure of its authority and power, it is necessary to focus on the concept of *baraka*, a Quranic term which refers to a beneficial force of divine origin. God is therefore the one who delivers the *baraka*. The first to be invested were the Quran, the Prophet and his family, and the saints. The *baraka* is therefore supposed to be invested by the Sayyids as descendants of the Prophet but also by saints who are not Sayyids. For example, the custodians of the saints' tombs can also capture his *baraka* thanks to the proximity they have with him.

The *baraka* can be symbolized as an influx, often represented by the Quranic term for light, *nūr*. It can be disseminated by its holders through formulas or objects, such as amulets, on which the *pīr* writes Quranic formulas or even Sufi poetry if the disciple is not a Muslim. He also transmits the *baraka* by his breath. The main source of *baraka* nonetheless remains the tomb where the saint is buried, which is designated by a generic term: *the dargāh*. The tomb is literally considered a source of *baraka*. It can be captured by sight and by touch, but a moment in the year is particularly important to its diffusion: the anniversary of the saint's death, the '*urs*.

The **pīr** *as* **zamīndār**

Beyond the *baraka*, an ancient source of the power of the *pīr*s is the land ownership. Since the time of the Sultanate of Delhi, sanctified characters have received special attention from the State. It was under the Mughal Empire, however, that their land privileges were systematized. Unlike other categories of *zamīndār*s, they were not subject to any taxes. They had the right to appropriate surplus crops, but more often than not, entire villages were allocated to them individually and then in perpetuity from the middle of the 17th century. In addition, they could receive taxes on farmers, which, unlike those levied by the *zamīndār*s, were intended for their own use. In Sindh, these privileges were renewed by the dynasties that succeeded the Moguls, until the arrival of the British.

Although impossible to quantify, the result of this policy was that many of the *pīr*s became *zamīndār*s and still are. This category of the Pakistani elite plays a considerable role in the political life of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. We can almost talk about 'dynasties' of *pīr*s/*zamīndār*s who exercised power at the highest level of the State, including the office of prime minister. For example, Sayyid Yusuf Reza Gilani (also spelled Gillani) comes from a prestigious lineage of *pīr*s from Multan, in South Punjab. In addition to its Sayyid status, its name, Gillani, indicates *ad minima* a membership, through a symbolic or real kinship, to the Sufi brotherhood of the Qadiriyya, which can go as far as claiming descent from its founder, Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (1083–1166). Sayyid Yusuf Reza Gilani served as prime minister for four years from 2008 to 2012.

Another famous example is provided by the Pir Pagaro of Sindh. In addition to the role they played in one of the few major rebellions that the Indian Empire experienced (Ansari 1992), Sayyid Shah Mardan II (1928–2011) was president of the Pakistan Muslim League for many years. In January 2013, he was offered the position of prime minister by President Zardari. The Pir Pagaro belonged to the powerful *birādarī* of the Lakiyyari sayyids which, as their name suggests, were from the village of Laki Shah Sadr, located about 20 miles south of Sehwan Sharif. The ancestor of the lineage is Shah Sadr, a Sufi who would have welcomed Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, the saint of Sehwan, when he arrived in the region.

The **pīrī-murīdī** *system*

In theory, the essential function of the *pīr* is that of *murshid*, master in the mystical path or spiritual director. He usually is in charge of a mausoleum where a saint is buried and of whom he is the descendant or descendant of one of his relatives or companions. The *pīr* must guide his disciples, the *murīd*s. One becomes *murīd* either by individual choice or by collective choice. Sometimes members of a *birādarī* or a fraction of this *birādarī* are hereditary *murīd*s of a *murshid*. This means that one of their ancestors became his *murīd* at an undetermined time and that this allegiance was later transmitted among his descendants. The second choice, although it is rarer, is for an individual to become the sole *murīd* of a *murshid*. Most of the time, the future *murīd* is going through health, financial, or other difficulties. He goes to meet a renowned *murshid* for their thaumaturgical powers and decides to become their *murīd*.

To be considered a *murīd*, you must have taken an oath of allegiance to the *murshid*. This oath is the *bay'āt*, an original Arabic term which is used in many contexts. In pronouncing it, the *murīd* promises loyalty to the *pīr*, who, in return, must guide him on the spiritual way. The *bay'āt* is given during a ceremony of initiation that establishes entry into a spiritual fraternity (*tarīqa*). This ceremony is marked by two essential elements: the ritual by which the candidate drinks from a cup of sanctified beverage that he shares with the *pīr* and other *murīd*s, then the granting of a 'word' to be used as a support for meditation. Meditation or *zikr* is indeed practiced in two forms: an individual *zikr* where the *murīd* meditates in singing the 'word' given to him by

his *murshid* and a collective *zikr*, which is sung with the group of disciples. The latter is often performed in the form of a spiritual music session.

Apart from this occasional affiliation, there are several ceremonies which are real 'stage productions' where it is possible to see *murshid*s physically but also to perceive intuitively their charisma. The most significant of these theatricalizations is undoubtedly the procession during the '*urs*, the saint's death represented as his mystical wedding with God. The *murshid* has a priestly function not only because he directs certain propitiatory and prophylactic rituals but also because he plays the key role of spiritual director. He provides advice and therefore functions as a true normative source for the Islamic behaviour of his *murīd*, knowing that he is himself invested in the saint's charisma. The main concern of the *murīd* is the *baraka* of his *murshid*. Propitiatory rituals only exist to ensure the material transfer of the charisma, a transfer that allows the *murīd* to receive supernatural help in the pursuit of his objectives.

There is no real timetable for meetings between the *murīd* and his *murshid*. He can meet him at any time according to his availability. Some times of the year are, however, more favourable. The most recurrent opportunities are the '*urs* of the main saint; the '*urs* of the founder of the Sufi lodge (*khānaqāh* or *kāfī*); the ceremony of enthronement of the master; and Moharram ceremonies, especially when the *murshid* is Shia. Each meeting between the master and his disciple proceeds according to a pre-established protocol. The *murshid* sits on a sofa pompously named a throne (*takht*). The *murīd* prostrates himself at his feet and kisses one of his many rings. The *murshid* places his hand on the *murīd*'s shoulder or head and has him sit on the mat facing him. A ceremonial meal is then shared between the *murshid* and his *murīd*s: it is said to bring prosperity, and the dish consumed is usually biryani, a meal made of a mixture of meat, spices, and rice.

At each of these meetings, the *murīd* is supposed to bring gifts to his *murshid* in addition to the tithe he must pay each year. The tithe is in fact variable, and it does not seem there is today a fixed amount, especially since it can be paid in kind or in cash. It should be noted, however, that each *murshid* keeps a record of his *murīd*s, their gifts, and their acquittal of tithe. In exchange, the *murīd* receives honorific and symbolic goods such as amulets, ceremonial necklaces, or bracelets that symbolically perpetuate the charismatic transfer. The thread or *dhāgo* is the most widespread charismatic object. It is made of woven wool yarn of varying thickness and colour that the *murīd* knots on his right wrist. The *murīd* does not come to meet his *murshid* without making a request to address him. He will be invested with the charisma of the saint, who canonically ensures the execution of the request, thanks to the sprinkling of a few drops of holy water on his face.

A central question is that of loyalty: how far should it go? In some cases, like the Hurs with Pir Pagaro, obedience to the *pīr* may have gone so far as to make the ultimate sacrifice: to give his life for his *murshid*. In the past, several *pīr*s have been accused of ordering assassinations, or the 'right of the first night,' without the facts being proven. Today, it is difficult to evaluate the measure of this obedience, which remains the cornerstone of the *pīrī-murīdī* system. In addition, the question of form of the system is inseparable from another question related to the urbanization of Pakistani society. The globalization of the economy has had an impact, if only through the acceleration of migration abroad, which has weakened the traditional mode of village exchanges based on the *jāgīrdārī* pattern. The *pīr* was able to adapt himself to these new conditions by travelling to visit his disciples, even on the other side of the world.

The middle classes from Islamism to 'connected' piety

Among the many publications that continue to appear on Pakistan, we remain amazed by the limited space devoted to the question of the middle classes. The term does not appear in a recent book on class structure in Pakistan (Rahman 2012: 301). While violence still remains a

dominant polarity, it may be useful to reverse the problem by focusing on the silent majority: how do the others, non-Islamists and non-terrorists, who constitute the majority of Pakistan population live? What ways of everyday life did they develop? How do they respond to the multifaceted violence? What is their position regarding Islam? First, it is necessary to focus on the notion of the middle classes, about which there is no real consensus among sociologists. However, we will confine ourselves to the five categories which are generally to characterize them: level of education, profession, occupation, income, and housing.

Pakistan and the issue of the middle classes

Regarding the issue of the middle classes, a Marxist scholar was a pioneer: Feroz Ahmed. Ahmed did not use the notion of classes but of dominant classes that he divided into four groups: the military, capitalists, bureaucrats, and landowners (*zamindar*s). Within the dominant classes, Ahmed noted that one of them played a key role, which meant that it could not be considered an 'auxiliary' class: the 'employed educated middle class' (Ahmed 1998: 250). However, for him, the specificity of Pakistan was due to the fact that ethnic groups did not have the structure of social classes: this is what he called 'the intersection of ethnicity and class' (idem: 251). The ruling classes, mainly military and bureaucrats, were largely dominated by Punjabis and Pashtuns. The capitalist class was dominated by the Punjabis and Gujaratis of Karachi. Ahmed reported that, moreover, there was no Sindhi bourgeoisie or any strong middle class, nor any Baloch capitalist class (ibid.: 255).

It is fruitful to compare Ahmed's analysis with that of another Marxist, Sergey Levin, who worked on these issues at the same time. Levin focuses on Memons, and for him, the social organization of these merchant groups is representative of the structure of the Pakistani bourgeoisie (Levin 1974: 235). He speaks of a 'monopolistic national bourgeoisie' and observes that capitalist competition often takes the form of rivalry between these trading groups. In addition, their structure has not hindered their modernization.

The Memons, for example, have replaced the hereditary authority of group leaders and *panchayāt*s by autonomous elected bodies that are 'bourgeois in form and essence.' Outside their specialization in trade and business, the Memons are also pious Sunni Muslims, and it might be interesting to analyze the link between their piety and their business practice from the perspective developed by Max Weber in his famous book on Protestant ethics (1964). Do the middle classes today have a particular relationship with religion? Does their religiosity take a particular form? Sheikh (2013) notes a paradox in this regard: although religion is the dominant ideal in the middle classes, it does not exercise a unifying function; quite the opposite. In addition, we know that that many Islamist cadres come from the middle classes. As a result, there are several types of religiosity that reflect the fragmentation even of the middle classes.

According to a recent study and according to the criteria quoted previously, they represent about 30% of the total population, or more than 60 million people. The middle classes have sufficient income to meet their basic needs, and they still have a surplus. According to Durr-e-Nayab, the proportion of the middle classes is higher in Pakistan than in its South Asian neighbours, such as India or Sri Lanka. In addition, their growth is also higher (Nayab 2011: 21). However, this optimistic observation is not shared by everyone. Salman Rafi Sheikh points out the absence of middle classes in Pakistan. By absence, it does not mean that they do not exist; it states that they are not playing the role they should. This opinion is based on the idea that the European democratic process has been built through the role played by the middle classes. For him, the middle classes, which are the equivalent of the bourgeoisie, represent only 17% of the total population, a percentage that he considers much lower than that of other countries. In

addition, the morphology of Pakistan's middle classes is specific: they are made up of military personnel, senior officials and bureaucrats, and liberal professions or technicians (Sheikh 2013). In this, Sheikh agrees to some extent with the conclusions that Feroz Ahmed reached some 15 years ago, although their tools of analysis are different.

Islamism as a status

In his book *L'islam mondialisé*, Olivier Roy writes: 'The Islamist movements, by mobilizing excluded social categories of the political game and by offering an ideological alternative to the clientelism and clanism, contribute to structuring the political scene in their country of origin' (2002: 36). It is necessary to add that in Pakistan, as elsewhere, the Islamists' tour de force was to impose their representation as the legitimate discourse, or at least the most legitimate one, on Islam. In any case, the coercive social system to which must be added the imperiousness of the State are the two determining factors that have accelerated the spread of Islamist ideology in Pakistan. Indeed, another point has long been neglected by research: the fact that membership in an Islamist movement made it possible to escape a very oppressive social structure but also an inferior status.

Moreover, the construction of the middle classes remains chaotic, because they are deprived of real means of action by a State and by the control of dominant groups over incomes and goods. This gap in the social fabric also makes it possible to understand the spread of Islamism, particularly in its the most radical forms. As early as 1999, Mariam Abou Zahab asked whether the emergence of Sipah-e Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), a radical group involved in violence on a large scale, reflected the Islamization of society or a class conflict (Abou Zahab 1999). A little later, Syed Vali Nasr provided some answers, arguing that the group's sectarian organizations such as the SSP are above all 'an avant-garde force for the frustrated middle classes in the urban community' (Nasr 2002: 97). Based on the pioneering work of these researchers, it is necessary to focus on the specific background of the Islamists, especially of the members of terrorist organizations. In her remarkable article on the martyrs of the terrorist Islamist cause, Mariam Abou Zahab studied a sample of about 100 wills written by suicide bombers belonging to the Lashkar-e Tayba, another terrorist Islamist group.

They are part of these 'lower middle classes' from central and southern Punjab and come from peri-urban areas where the population has significantly increased with the rural exodus of the 1980s (Abou Zahab 2006: 103). In addition, these future martyrs are Mohajirs, which means that their family emigrated from India during the partition of 1947. They were certainly from Indian Punjab, but despite this linguistic community, they were considered immigrants and never really integrated into local society. Last but not least, the specialist's sample included a Punjabi Christian and a Sindhi Hindu who had both converted to Islam. A key element in the construction of these martyrs is the implementation of a system of distinction based on an imitation of the rites of passage. Mariam Abu Zahab writes on this subject:

> At every stage corresponds to one of the rites of marriage: the military training camp is the *mangnī* (engagement), the "launch in Kashmir" is the *nikāh* (the signing of the marriage contract), the martyrdom is the *shādī* (the consumption of marriage with the houris of Paradise) and *namāz-e janāza* (funeral prayer), the *valīma* (reception given by the parents of the boy the day after the marriage, formalizing the union).
>
> (idem 107)

The uprooting of rural populations is undoubtedly a major factor that brutally deconstructs social relations. Although the population of Pakistan still remains predominantly rural (60%), it

is experiencing rapid urban growth. The 1980s saw a peak in migration, which affected nearly 8% of the total population. Between 1981 and 1998, 65% of these migrants had left the rural world to settle in urban areas, 25% of which are in the cities of Karachi, Lahore, and Rawalpindi. Karachi alone attracted 13% of the total migration (Hasan and Raza 2011: 33).

The Pakistani middle class and the spread of 'connected' piety

Another factor that was instrumental in the renewing of the urban population is migration abroad. Living abroad, and the return home, had a large impact on the social fabric in giving birth to a 'new' middle class, following Ammara Maqsood's expression (2017). The new Pakistani middle classes stand out above all by the fact that their piety does not owe anything to the traditional religious establishment. Indeed, it emphasizes, in its religious practice, the promotion of the individual in a country where one identifies him- or herself before everything else by belonging to a group. Here, it is a question of implementing a direct relationship with Allah. Different practices contribute to this, but the one that has been growing most in Lahore for about ten years is reading the Koran in the original Arabic text in a group. This reading, followed by comments, is carried out without traditional specialists. For example, there is the case of a woman who opened a Quranic course. This one did not follow the traditional curriculum of Islamic studies; she obtained a PhD from the University of Glasgow.

Ammara Maqsood emphasizes the desire for modernity among the members of this new middle class. A large part of their religious practices, those that seem to them the most authentic, express this desire well. The new religiosity is meant to be 'connected,' which is made possible in particular by the use of the smartphone. There are numerous applications that allow the believer to know the times of the daily prayers to the nearest second and the direction from Mecca wherever he/she goes to find or to keep informed of the major annual celebrations, such as the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad's birth. Advice will be provided to celebrate this pious event the best way depending on age, income, and social origin.

These Pakistanis are shaping their own modernity by often taking the opposite approach from Western modernity—with the exception of being part of the consumer society. They are aware that, to be modern, they must borrow from the West, whether by consuming certain goods or by adopting certain modes that they reappropriate themselves by 'Islamizing' them. Some examples are well known in Pakistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world, such as veiled Barbie dolls or Mecca Cola. But reappropriation has its limits: the author does not hesitate to speak of 'christmatization' of Ramadan, which is accompanied by a flood of advertisements in which McDonald's and many other Western firms participate (Maqsood 2017: 142).

Finally, the new pattern of piety spread by the new middle class is not the work of Islamist Muslims. It was mainly developed abroad by Pakistanis who emigrated to the West and returned home. These Muslims exiled in Great Britain or the United States had to invent a new form of piety to conform to the customs and habits of their host country. In exile, these Pakistani Muslims had to reduce the 'community' part of their membership of Islam and develop a more individualistic form of their religion.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have seen the complexity of the processes through which religion interferes in the social field. Notwithstanding this, three levels of interference between Islam and society can be identified, and some salient points can be summarized. At the beginning of Pakistan, Islamist ideology remained at the level of discourse rather than embodying a dominant

practice of Islam. Its slow transformation is due to various factors, both internal and external to the country. First is the lack of consensus among the Muslim League members about what it means to be Muslim. This situation has left a window open for Islamists, who have not hesitated to use violence from the very beginning to impose their vision.

Subsequently, the obstacles to Pakistani nation-building across ethnic divides have led to periods of democracy alternating with periods of military dictatorships. But above all, the lack of legitimacy that these governments could have derived from the nation has led to an unbridled quest for Islamic legitimacy. However, Islamization from above was reinforced by events outside Pakistan, such as the Iranian Revolution, as well as the reinforced international role played by Saudi Arabia as leader of the Sunni Muslim world. Also, Islam was long used as a legitimization tool for social authority. The sacrifice made by tribal chiefs for their community led to the emergence of a cult practised in their graves, largely borrowed from the Sufi sphere. The sacralization of power is still working, and it mostly employs an Islamic idiom, with its vocabulary and rituals, drawing on the same symbolic capital coming from Sufism.

One of the last developments of Islam is the spread of a connected piety. The practitioners of this Islam belong to a new middle class, often linked with migration, and they do not escape global consumerism. Moreover, they also free themselves from the traditional normative sources of Islam, sometimes going as far as using their academic training to spread the word of Islam. Notwithstanding this, in the field, other social forms of Islam have survived. The most widespread is undoubtedly the so-called *pīrī-murīdī* system. It is articulated around a central figure, the *pīr*, whose legitimacy comes from claiming to be the Prophet Muhammad's descendant or results from another sacralizing process. The specificity of the *pīr* is to accumulate charismatic authority, with one patron heading a network of clientelism, a power generally based on land ownership. The *pīr*'s authority is embodied in the *dargāh*, the site where a saint is buried, which, for his followers, is the main place from which *baraka* is spreading.

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19

RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN BANGLADESH

Unpacking the multilayered relationships

Ali Riaz

Introduction

Despite the dominance of one religion among the Bangladeshi populace, the relationship between religion and society in the country is complex and multilayered. This complexity has increased manifold in recent decades due to the salience of religion in public life, particularly in politics, social changes, and growing involvement of the state in religious matters. As in any society, religion has not only made its mark through formal institutions but also through informal social practices. Social forces of various contours influence how religion is viewed and practiced. The relationship is moulded by epochal events and various twists and turns of history since the nineteenth century. However, this chapter focuses on contemporary Bangladesh since its emergence as an independent state in 1971 and discusses various aspects of the presence of religion in the public sphere. Considering that Bangladesh is a Muslim majority country, Islamic ethos has a longstanding influence on social life, and both Islamic organizations and Islamist parties have gained prominence in the recent decades. This chapter focuses more on the interplay of Islam and Bangladeshi society while shedding some light on other religions.

Religious composition

With 90% of the total population adhering to Islam, currently Bangladesh is the third-largest Muslim majority country in the world after Indonesia and Pakistan. Muslims in Bangladesh are predominantly of Sunni denomination, but a small number of Muslims follow the Shi'a tradition (estimated at 2.1%), and a much smaller number belong to the Ahmadi community. Followers of the Ahle Hadith denomination, that is, those who reject the doctrine of *taqlid* (blind imitation), also exist. They insist that Muslims are not required to follow any of the four established schools of law—Hanafi, Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanbali.

The largest religious minority of the country is Hindu, at 10% in 2011. Adherents of Christianity and Buddhism are also part of Bangladeshi society, but their share in the total population is very small. Adherents of minority religions are not concentrated in any geographical areas, except the southeastern hill districts, where Buddhism is the dominant religion. Among the Christian population, Catholicism is the main denomination.

Table 19.1 Composition of Bangladesh population (in thousands)

Census years	Total population	Muslims (numbers)	Muslims %	Hindus (numbers)	Hindus %	Buddhists (numbers)	Buddhists %	Christians (numbers)	Christians %	Others %
1951	42,062	32,227	76.9	9,239	22.0	319	0.7	107	0.3	0.1
1961	50,804	40,890	80.4	9,380	18.5	374	0.7	149	0.3	0.1
1974	71,478	61,039	85.4	9,673	13.5	439	0.6	216	0.3	0.2
1981	87,120	75,487	86.7	10,570	12.1	538	0.6	275	0.3	0.3
1991	106,315	93,881	88.3	11,179	10.5	623	0.6	346	0.3	0.3
2001	123,151	110,406	89.7	11,329	9.2	862	0.7	369	0.3	0.2
2011	144,043	130,204	90.39	12,299	8.54	889	0.62	447	0.31	0.14
2014	156,800			15,000	9.9					
2015	158,900			17,000	10.7					

Sources: Census data for 1974 through 2011: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, *Population and Housing 2011, National Report, Volume 1. Analytical Report*, Table 3.7.2 and Table 3.7.4, pp. 86, 88. http://203.112.218.65:8008/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/PopCenZilz2011/NRV-1Report2011.pdf

2014 and 2015 data are from Prothom Alo (2016), 'Hindu Population Increased; BBS', June 23, 2016, www.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/article/896800 and BBC (2016), 'Hindu Population in Bangladesh Increased', BBC Bangla, June 23, 2016, www.bbc.com/bengali/news/2016/06/160623_bd_bbs_statistics

Notes: Referring to the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2015 report, carried out by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), BBC Bangla (2016) and the Daily Prothom Alo (2016) suggest that the Hindu population has increased since 2014. While the share of the Hindu population was 8.4% in 2011 and 9.9% in 2014, it increased to 10.7% in 2015. The population also increased to 1.7 million in 2015 from 1.55 million in 2014.

Censuses conducted since 1951 show that the share of the Muslim population has increased significantly (see Table 19.1).

According to the Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2018 report published in May 2019, the Muslim population makes up 88.4% of the total population and the non-Muslim population 11.6%. However, the report indicates a non-linear progression and regression in the case of the Muslim and non-Muslim populations, respectively. For example, in 2014, the total share of the Muslim population was 89.2%, which decreased in 2015 to 88.2% in terms of share of the total population. On the other hand, in 2014, the share of the non-Muslim population was 10.8%, which increased in 2015 to 11.8%. Since 2016, the share of the Muslim population remains unchanged until 2018, with 88.4%, and similarly, the share of the non-Muslim population remains constant at 11.6% (BBS, Report on Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2018).

Religiosity among Bangladeshis

Bangladeshis are deeply religious, and this has increased over time. The World Values Survey has documented a consistent move towards a greater role for religion. Over the course of Bangladesh's two surveys—taking place in 1996 and 2002—a clear tendency towards identifying with religion as a marker of personal identity among its population is obvious. The indicators of religiosity increased in the six years between these surveys. In response to the question of the importance of one's religion to life, 82.45% of respondents said it was 'very important' in 1996, with that number increasing to 87.8% in 2002. In 1996, in response to the question of how much confidence Bangladeshis have on religious institutions, 85.6% of respondents said, 'a great deal.' This number increased to 90% in 2002. Regarding membership in religious

organizations, 33.6% of Bangladeshis reported membership in 1996, which increased to 43.3% in 2002. Finally, that 96.6% of Bangladeshis consider themselves a 'religious person' in 2002 demonstrates the country's pervasive religiosity. Of this population, 86% identified as Muslim in 1996, while 92% identified as Muslim in 2002 (Inglehart et al. 2014a, 2014b). The extent of religiosity among Bangladeshis is well acknowledged by other studies as well. Khondker, for example, argued that the country has been successful in founding a secular 'state,' while the 'society' has remained deeply religious (2010).

The religiosity of the people does not mean that this is the only marker of identity they adhere to, but it means that religion is one of the influences on their personal and social behaviours. Manifestations of this religiosity vary, from strict following to identification only. Religiosity implies that the tradition and daily practices one follows are infused with religion, and the social institutions they value draw on interpretations of a particular religion—Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity. These contribute to the mindset of the common people, but they are far from following literalist interpretation and accepting religion as a dogma. That is why the celebration of Eid of a Muslim community or *pūjā* of a Hindu community becomes a community festival rather than being only for those who strictly adhere to the religion.

Interreligious harmony

For centuries, one of the key characteristics of Bangladeshi society was interreligious harmony. Interreligious harmony, or coexistence, meaning a high degree of tolerance of diverse religious practices, was a constitutive element of social cohesion. Interreligious harmony became rooted in society because of local religious traditions of two major religions—Hinduism and Islam. The Islamic tradition in Bengal, and later Bangladesh, has successfully adapted to Hinduism and other religious traditions. The adaptation and accommodation of various religious and cultural traditions have enriched the experience of the Muslim community. Shared customs, traditions, and practices became part of Islamic tradition. From this perspective, Islam was never considered an exogenous idea, nor were Muslims seen as migrants to the country (Sarkar 1972; Roy 1984; Eaton 1993; Ahmed 1996; Uddin 2006). In the case of Hinduism, Vaiṣṇavism's presence and spread, as well as the appeal of mysticism among a large Hindu population in Bengal, strengthened pluralism and closeness to Muslim mysticism. Vaiṣṇavism's success in 'carving out an autonomous identity in the religious landscape' (Eaton 1993) was a positive factor in shaping interreligious relationships. As noted by Rahman (2018: 55):

> Syncretism was visible in Sufism, Pirism, Nathism, Neo-Vasnavism, Kartabhaja sect, life-style of the Bauls, practices of the scroll painters etc. and the gamut of Bengali literature namely Mangal Kavyas, Vaisnava literature, translated works, Pir literature, Sufi literature, Punthi literature, Atharo Bhatir Panchali, Purba Banga Gitika, Mymensing Gitika etc. witness syncretism in the Bengali society.

Khondker (2010), referring to Anisuzzaman (1993), insists that the strong influence of Buddhism in the early history of Bengal, and relative isolation from the rest of India, played a role in developing heterodoxy in religious ideas which contributed to the interreligious harmony. The presence and appeal of the Fakirs, a subculture of Sufi tradition, also contributed to the syncretism and religious intermingling (Trottier 2000: 17). This tradition began to erode in the late nineteenth century with the rise of identity politics based on religion, and schisms between Muslim and Hindu populations emerged. The economic factors, particularly in the eastern part of Bengal, which later became Bangladesh, became a source of the fissure (Hashmi 1988, 1991).

The rise of social organizations among both communities and elite-common mass differentiation within the Muslim community (Murshid 1995) made a dent in the syncretism in elite social lives, while at the plebian level, the tradition continued to a great extent.

Religion and politics

Religion has been a significant element in South Asian politics since the British colonial era. The long antecedent of religion's role in politics shows that it has been used both as a political strategy and tool of mobilization. This is equally true of mainstream elite politics and subaltern political activism (Riaz 2010). The nationalist uprising of the Sepoys in 1857, commonly referred to as the 'Sepoy Mutiny', was infused with religious symbols. During the colonial period (1757–1947), Bengal—now Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal—had seen the admixture of religion and politics. Religious discourse had permeated various local uprisings even before the Sepoy uprising; for example, 'religiosity was . . . central' to the Santhal Rebellion in Bengal between 1855 and 1856 (Guha 1983: 34–35). Organizations such as Hindu Mahasabha, established in 1915, fervently brought the Hindu identity to the mainstream constitutional political landscape. However, the emergence of the Hindu religion–based political entity can be traced back to various revivalist social movements in the eighteenth century such as the Arya Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj.

As for the Muslim community in Bengal, particularly Eastern Bengal, later Bangladesh, the question of religion emerged with the quest for identity in the late nineteenth century. The phenomenon of 'Muslim consciousness' began as a manifestation of a contradiction within a rural population. Rafiuddin Ahmed, for example, suggests, 'Despite the cultural ambivalence that has characterized Bengal Muslim history since the medieval period, a self-conscious community defining itself primarily as Muslim did emerge over time by the early twentieth century' (Ahmed 2001: 4–5). The roots of this manifestation can be traced back to the emergence of a landed class, thanks to the Permanent Settlement of 1793, who later became the fountainhead of the Kolkata-based urban English educated middle class. As they were predominantly Hindus, Muslim peasants of East Bengal remained alienated and marginalized.

Concurrently, two Muslim revivalist movements, the Faraizi movement (c.1830–c.1857) and Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya (c.1820–1840), emerged and became popular in various parts of East Bengal. The Faraizi movement, which 'spread with extraordinary rapidity in the rice swamp districts of eastern Bengal' (Ahmed 1981: 40) became popular among the Muslim peasants, with messages of Muslim solidarity on the one hand and anti-British nationalism on the other. More indigenous than the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya, the Faraizi movement propagated a message that provided a sense of Muslim identity which had until then been absent among the poorest segments of the Muslim peasants. The pan-Islamic transnational identity, which was at the heart of the Tariqah-i-Muhammadiya's campaign, also resonated because of its distinctiveness from the Hindus in rural Bengal. These movements, often violent, combined personal religiosity, class consciousness, and anti-colonial sentiment and demonstrated that rural poor Muslims could act as a community. Both within the political and social realms, Muslim identity became the principal marker of difference and religion as a means of mobilization.

A combination of Muslim distinctiveness, class differences between Hindus and Muslim, wave of national politics in India, the role of the Indian Congress, and dynamics of regional politics (Chatterji 1994) shaped the trajectory of the Pakistan movement leading to the establishment of Pakistan. During the Pakistani era (1947–1971), despite Islam being the state ideology, the social tradition of interreligious harmony was largely maintained in then-East Pakistan,

except for a few instances of communal riots. The ethnic Bengali nationalist movement which paved the way for the establishment of independent Bangladesh in 1971 had subsumed the religious differences and highlighted the shared past. Thus, at the time of independence, religion didn't feature significantly in the political milieu, while it was no less ubiquitous than before in society.

In post-independence Bangladesh, the constitution declared 'secularism' one of the state principles, promised the neutrality of the state regarding religion, and proscribed religion-based political parties. These provisos provided an impression that the institutional arrangement between religion and politics had been settled in favour of an unequivocal banishment of religion from the public sphere and that religion has been consigned to the private realm. Therefore, it was claimed that Bangladesh did away with the mix of religion and politics.

From this perspective, secularism was interpreted as a binary opposite to religion. Additionally, it was argued that 'secularism is the inherent spirit of Bengali nationalism' (Khatun 2010) which spearheaded the founding of Bangladesh in 1971 (Ahmed 2004; Anisuzzaman 1993, 1995; Jahangir 2002). This grand narrative of national history not only declines to recognize the internal tensions and misunderstanding surrounding secularism but also claims that the elite-constructed and dominated version of 'secularism' represents the aspiration of the masses. While this narrative became dominant, the meaning of 'secularism' remained vague to both the ruling elites and the common masses. The official explanation of secularism, as narrated by one of the architects of the constitution, was the following:

> Secularism stands for the rejection of communalism in all its forms, and of the abuse of religion for political purpose. The principle of secularism that was embodied in the constitution was very carefully worded so as to make clear that it did not stand for hostility to religion . . . The principle of secularism shall be realized by the elimination of (a) communalism in all its forms; (b) granting by the state of political status in favour of any religion (c) abuse of religion for political purposes (d) discrimination against, or persecution, of persons practicing a particular religion.
>
> (Hossain 2013: 142)

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founder president of Bangladesh, asserted that 'secularism does not mean the absence of religion.' He has reportedly said:

> You are a Muslim; you perform your religious rites. The Hindus, Christians, Buddhists all will freely perform their religious rites. There is no irreligiousness on the soil of Bangladesh but there is secularism. This sentence has a meaning and the meaning is that none would be allowed to exploit the people in the name of religion. . . . No communal politics will be allowed in the country.
>
> (Cited in O'Connell 1976: 69)

The Bangladesh government's position on religion and the role of religion in public and political life was one of ambiguity; conflicting signals were sent. On the one hand, an array of activities, including broadcasting religious programs on the state-controlled media, the decision to join the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and pardoning of the Islamists who had collaborated with the Pakistani Army in its genocidal war against the Bengali population, sent a message that it was moving away from secularist principles and professing religiosity, while on the other hand, the state kept highlighting the Bengali ethnic identity in a manner that was bereft of the religious element of the Bengali identity.

Samia Huq argues that the government's decision to ban religious political parties is premised on the dominant secularization theory—'one premised on the good/bad religion distinction' (2018: 136). Huq further notes:

> the government's assurance that secularism was to imprint itself on a polity of majority practicing Muslims was not bolstered by any substantive conversation on what should give content to the 'good religion' that does appear in public in Bangladesh. Certain additional measures such as the banning of the Islamic academy until l974 left the state-run mosques and imams bereft of public direction and focus. The vacuum that was created raised confusion about the religious content envisioned for the polity and the manner in which its citizens would be Muslim or of any other faiths and what the implications of these identities and embodied subjectivities would be for Bangladesh's public/political life.
>
> (2018: 136)

Huq insists that, 'Bangladesh's use and application of the term "secularism" thus, appeared to have inadequately wrestled with its theological, philosophical, and, therefore, political underpinnings' (2018: 136). Others have argued that the regime was pursuing a policy of hard secularism to the extent that it started to remove references and icons of Islam from the public sphere (Islam and Islam 2018).

The perceived settlement between religion and politics and the founding of a secular state was reversed in 1977. The military regime of Ziaur Rahman (1975–1981), which came into power after a military coup in 1975, brought changes to the state principles. In April 1977, soon after the assumption of the office of president, Ziaur Rahman made some constitutional amendments through a proclamation (Second Proclamation Order no. 1, April 23, 1977). This included deletion of secularism as a state principle. The word 'secularism,' was substituted with 'absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah,' and a new clause (1A) was inserted to emphasize that 'absolute trust and faith in almighty Allah' should be 'the basis of all actions.' Article 12, which defined 'secularism,' was omitted, and above the preamble, the words 'Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim' (In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) were inserted to give the constitution an Islamic colour. These changes were incorporated into the Constitution through the 5th amendment passed by the Parliament in April 1979. This provided the space for Islamist parties to reappear in the political landscape, particularly as the multiparty system was reintroduced in the same year. Ziaur Rahman's successor, General Hussain Muhammad Ershad, who usurped state power in 1982 through another coup, declared Islam the state religion in 1988 in a bid to gain political legitimacy.

These developments were matched by the opposition parties' approach to the Islamist parties. Islamist parties, which began to re-emerge in 1979, became influential actors in mainstream politics by mid-1980s. Opposition parties, including the Awami League, befriended Islamists. Throughout the pro-democracy movement (1982–1990), the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), the party proscribed in 1972, worked closely with both the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and the Awami League (AL). After 1991, the party continued to switch sides and appeared as the kingmaker until 2008.

Besides the organizational relationship between Islamist and the self-described secularist parties, religion came to the forefront as various political parties began to adopt Islamic discourses and use religious symbols and icons on a regular basis since 1991 (Riaz 2004: 158–160). This not only marked a shift of party positions on religion's role in the public sphere but also reaffirmed that religion, particularly Islam, is deeply rooted in the social milieu of the country.

There is another interpretation to the resurgence of Islam in the Bangladeshi sociopolitical landscape since independence. This explanation underscores that Islam has remained 'a strong ideology' (Khan 1985: 831) throughout the history of the country. According to this line of argument, the 1971 war succeeded in establishing an independent country but 'failed to diminish the strength of Islam as a strong ideology' (Khan 1985: 831). It is further argued that 'secularism in Bangladesh did not reflect Bangladesh's societal spirit and history. It arose as a utilitarian expediency in the political field' (Maniruzzaman 1990: 69). In this approach, the resurgence of Islam in politics was a 'backlash' to the secularist experimentation (Khan 1985: 845–846). Huque and Akhter argue that, 'considering the nature of Bangladeshi society and the various institutions and forces operating within it, the entrenchment and resurgence of Islam in the country are not surprising. The only attempt at secularizing the country failed as the society and the overwhelming Muslim majority of its population did not undergo a change of lifestyle and outlook' (1987: 224). The deep-seated position of religion in society has brought it into the political realm.

In 2011, with the passing of the Fifteenth Amendment of the constitution, many had argued that the 'Islamist tide' had been reversed, as secularism was reinstated in the constitution as one of the state principles. However, the constitution retained Islam as the state religion. Attempts to challenge the status of Islam as the state religion were rejected by the High Court in March 2016, when a petition filed in 1988 came in front of the court. Ostensibly the petition was rejected on technical grounds, but the implication was maintaining an odd combination of religion and secularism in the constitution.

In the past decades, particularly since the 1990s, a distinct new trend has emerged insofar as Islam in politics is concerned. Organizations which promote a literalist interpretation of Islam have proliferated. The growth of the Ahle Hadith movement is a case in point. Organizations with the agenda of establishing an Islamic state or a variant of it have not only increased, but many of them have advanced the notion that there is a universal interpretation of Islam. They have declared some traditional practices 'un-Islamic' or '*bida't*' (innovation), branded individuals with contrarian views as 'infidel' or 'apostate,' and demanded stricter punishments for them. Many have called for legislating blasphemy law (see next section) to force individuals to comply. The proliferation of these organizations and growing appeal of the literalist interpretation is tied to external influence (Riaz 2009). The external influence came through the media, short-term migration of Bangladeshis to Middle Eastern countries, and the presence of various Islamic non–government organizations.

It is against these developments that Hefazat–i–Islam (HI), an umbrella organization of conservative Islamists, appeared on the political scene in 2011 and quickly rose to prominence. The group flexed its muscle in 2013 as an antidote to the social movement called *Gonojagon Mancha*, which demanded the execution of those charged with crimes against humanity during the country's war of independence (Riaz 2017: 107–138; Zaman 2018). The *Gonojagon Mancha* movement was initiated and led by online activists. These trials, mostly of the leaders of the Jamaat–i–Islami, were widely popular among Bangladeshis but were criticized by the international community and human rights groups for procedural flaws. The HI demanded that the government introduce the blasphemy law to punish those who insulted Islam and the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The HI also described the *Gonojagon Mancha* as un–Islamic, alleged that the organizers of the movement had insulted Islam, and described them as 'atheists.' The HI demanded that the movement be disbanded. The HI initially appeared as a challenge to the government's 'secular policies,' including the Women's' Development Policy. After facing a brutal assault on 5 May 2013, the HI regrouped, mended its differences with the ruling party, and began to put pressure on the government. The ruling party began to succumb to the pressure and accepted some of the demands between January and May 2017. The reason for the

ruling Awami League's gradual, yet decisive, move towards embracing the Islamists' agenda is intrinsically connected to the legitimacy crisis of the government since the controversial election in 2014 and the growing authoritarianism. Jasmine Lorch, in an insightful study, showed how a combination of three factors—the rise of Islamist social movements, fierce political competition, and (semi-)authoritarian rule—have contributed to 'a top-down process of state-led Islamization in Bangladesh' (Lorch 2019: 257).

Islamization of the society and polity, which demonstrates the heightened role of religion in the public sphere, is not only a top-down process but also happens through bottom-up progression. In the case of Bangladesh, the process of Islamization has been from the bottom up, as discussed by Mizanur Rahman (2019).

Notwithstanding the domestic factors, we must be cognizant that the resurgence of religion in politics is a global phenomenon. Religion, once consigned to the private realm, in recent decades has refused to remain in the private sphere (Hadden 1987; Berger 1999). Debates pertaining to the meaning of secularism and various dimensions of secularism over the past decade have amply demonstrated that the relationship between religion and society is far more complex than the conventional secularism thesis posited. Global politics, for example, the so-called War on Terror after the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, has propelled religion into mainstream politics. Bangladesh is no exception to this; instead, complex interactions of these factors have placed religion, particularly Islam, at the front and centre of social and political spheres.

Along with the rise of Islamist political parties and the government's acquiescence to Islamization, a platform of the adherents of other religions has emerged to highlight the needs and demands of the religious minorities in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council (also known as the Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikyo Parishod), established in 1988, has since played a role in advancing the causes of these communities. Although it is a social organization and has no specific political agenda like political parties do, it serves as a platform to voice the political demands of the minority religious communities.

Religion, state, and law

The relationship between the Bangladeshi state and religion has changed in the past 48 years, and increasingly the state has taken an active role in the religious realm, and religion, especially Islam, has influenced the state's behaviour. The declaration of secularism as one of the fundamental principles of state in the original constitution framed in 1972 was portrayed as the separation of state and religion. The constitution further stipulated religious freedom of all communities. The rights of minorities have been protected under Article 41 on freedom of religion and the freedom of every religious community or denomination to establish, manage, and maintain its religious institutions (subject to law, public order, and morality). Article 28 stipulates that the state shall not discriminate based on religion.

The original constitution, in explaining the tenets of secularism, underscored that 'patronization by the state of any particular religion' and 'discrimination against, and persecution of, anyone following a particular religion' (Article 12) would be ended. But the state's position regarding religious issues has evolved, and the state's neutrality has eroded. In the early days of independence, despite repeated assertions that secularism was the state principle, the state and the ruling party gradually showed their preference for Islam, the religion of the majority population.

An amendment to the constitution under President Ziaur Rahman in 1977 removed the principle of secularism, replacing it with 'absolute trust and faith in Almighty Allah.' The Eighth Amendment of 1988 declared Islam the state religion: '[t]he state religion of the Republic is Islam, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the republic.'

The highest court of the country declared in 2005 that the removal of secularism from the Constitution was illegal. The 15th Amendment of the Constitution, passed in 2011, restored secularism as the state principle while retaining Islam as the state religion and *Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim* in the preamble of the constitution. This shows the state's ambiguity towards religion and its role in statecraft.

The Bangladeshi state's preference for Islam is reflected in the budgetary allocation of Islamic institutions and foundations and mosques. In April 2018, the government announced funding of about $905 million for constructing Islamic seminaries, that is, madrassahs in every electoral constituency, 300 in total, in the country. The government also decided to build 560 model mosques across the country, one in each subdistrict, from its own funds. The goal, according to the government, is to preach 'accurate and correct' Islam and to counter the religious misconceptions which cause militancy and extremism (Mamun 2018).

While Bangladesh does not have a blasphemy law, it has in effect inherited a penal law that serves the purpose and has legislated new laws in recent years that practically restrict any criticisms of Islam. Section 295A of Bangladesh's Penal Code (1860) stipulates that any person who has a 'deliberate' or 'malicious' intention of 'hurting religious sentiments' is liable for fines and imprisonment. 'Hurting religious sentiment' has been broadly interpreted by authorities and the courts. Additionally, clauses 99(a), (b), (c), (d), (e), and (f) of The Code of Criminal Procedure allow the government to 'confiscate all copies of a newspaper if it publishes anything . . . [which] denigrates religious beliefs.' It is equally applicable to online publications. Section 57 of the Information & Communication Technology (ICT) Act, 2006 (as amended in 2013) stated that anyone who publishes anything in cyberspace which 'causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief' is liable for punishment. Faced with rampant abuse and harsh criticism from home and abroad, the government scrapped the ICT Act but legislated the Digital Security Act in 2018, which has vaguely defined draconian provisions. The DSA criminalized publication or broadcast of 'any information that hurts religious values or sentiments.' Juxtaposition of all of these laws shows how much power the state has accrued in restricting criticism of religion. There are significant numbers of instances where the government used these laws to shut down online news portals and personal blogs and prosecuted bloggers and others for allegedly 'hurting religious sentiments.'

Religious laws have precedence over common laws when it comes to resolution of issues related to family matters—including marriage, divorce, succession, inheritance, propperty distribution, maintenance, and dower. The Muslim Personal Law Ordinance 1961 governs the application of Muslim laws to the Muslim community. Separate family laws are on the books for Hindus and Christians, based on their respective traditions, with few significant differences. 'Marriage rituals and proceedings [are] governed by the family law of the religion of the parties concerned; however, marriages were also registered with the state. Under the Muslim Family Ordinance, female heirs inherit less than male relatives, and wives have fewer divorce rights than husbands.'

The state provides support to religious communities, although the Muslim community receives the lion's share. The Ministry of Religious Affairs administered three funds for religious and cultural activities: the Islamic Foundation, the Hindu Welfare Trust, and the Buddhist Welfare Trust. In 2018, the Christian Welfare Trust received funding to run its office.

Treatment of religious minorities

Although pervasive anti-communal sentiment in society and rejection of a state-sponsored religious majoritarianism in politics and governance were the keys to the founding of Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi state since its inception has failed to treat minorities—religious and

ethnic—as equals. Constitutional provisos of equality were hardly translated into daily practices. The decline of the Hindu population over the last half-century and the growing intolerance of religious diversity are cases in point.

The censuses conducted since 1951 show that the Hindu population has declined from 22% in that year (Table 19.1). Recent annual reports of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) show that the decline has been reversed and there has been a slight increase since 2011. The decline in the previous decades is attributed to a variety of factors—from migration to low fertility rates. However, the social marginalization of members of the Hindu community is pervasive. The recent growth of the Hindu population notwithstanding, social marginalization and systemic discrimination are discernible, and often they are cited as important contributory factors. The sharp drop in the Hindu population between 1951 and 1971, the year Bangladesh became independent, can be attributed to the growing frustration of the Hindus during Pakistani rule and the large-scale communal riot in 1964. In the post-independence era, social changes, the attitude of the state towards minorities, the growing salience of Islam in the political milieu, and land grabbing by local-level influential political leaders all have caused this phenomenon.

While the number of Buddhists in the country has not decreased markedly, their share in the regional population has decreased due to migration of people from other parts of the country, especially of other faiths. This is a larger issue of trying to reduce the social and political influence of the indigenous population. As most of the adherents of Buddhist faith belong to various ethnic nationalities living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) area and have a distinctly different culture from the majority Bengali population, the migration changes the demographic composition of the areas. For example, the three districts in the CHT—Rangamati, Bandraban, and Khagrachari—have experienced population growth far greater than national average. The share of settler population has now reached more than 50% of the total population, and in two districts, it has surpassed the indigenous population. There have also been several incidents of attacks on the Buddhist population in recent years. For example, in September 2012, several Buddhist temples in Ramu, Cox's Bazaar, were burnt to the ground on the pretext of a fake and doctored Facebook post allegedly insulting Islam.

Members of the Christian community have also faced sporadic violence. In 2016, at least 70 Santal Christian families became victims of attacks, arson, and gunshot wounds allegedly perpetrated by local authorities and members of law enforcement agencies. At least three Santal Christians were killed in the incident.

The rise of sectarianism among the Muslim community, largely non-existent until recently, is quite worrying. Sectarian and denominational differences had never featured in the public discourse and treatment of individuals in Bangladesh. Shia–Sunni differences have had no relevance to the social and/or political life of the region that now makes up Bangladesh. In post-independence Bangladesh, sectarianism remained a non-issue, particularly due to the small number of adherents to Shiism. But in recent years, Ahmadis,[1] a small heterodox Muslim denomination, is facing increased persecutions. These attacks became more systematic in the early 1990s, especially because of the rise of a movement called Khatme Nabuwat (KN). Since the mid-1980s, Khatme Nabuwat has highlighted the denominational differences with the Ahmadi community and demanded declaring them non-Muslims. KN has engendered an intolerant environment in Bangladesh. KN is also used as a cover by powerful groups and political parties to perpetrate violence against Ahmadi. For example, on 30 March 2018, led by a local political Awami League leader, approximately 80 armed members of the Muslim community in Jamalpur District attacked members of the Ahmadi Muslim community at an Ahmadi mosque, injuring 22 Ahmadis (United States Department of State 2019).

Table 19.2 Repression against religious minorities: 2007–2018

Year (s)	Killed	Injured	Assaulted	Abducted	Grabbing		Attack		Looted	Idol Damage	Miscel-laneous	Rape	Total
					Land	House	Property	Temple					
2018	1	34	0	0	0	0	16	11	0	38	0	2	102
2017	0	7	1	0	0	12	9	10	0	122	0	0	161
2016	5	94	0	0	1	1	22	35	0	93	0	1	252
2015	0	102	0	0	2	14	21	17	0	121	1	0	278
2014	1	78	2	0	14	0	371	32	1	193	0	0	692
2013	0	118	0	0	4	0	441	125	2	322	13	1	1026
2012	0	69	2	0	0	1	81	46	24	0	0	1	224
2011	0	107	2	0	6	2	21	25	13	0	4	3	183
2010	2	244	0	0	9	1	20	23	4	0	6	6	315
2009	1	502	5	1	12	4	5	28	4	0	6	5	573
2008	1	90	1	0	7	0	2	24	6	0	0	0	131
2007	1	91	4	6	7	5	4	14	0	0	0	0	134
Total	12	1536	17	7	62	40	1013	390	54	899	30	19	4071

Source: Odhikar (2019). 'Repression Against Religious Minority: 2007–2018.' http://odhikar.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Religious-Minority-2007-2018.pdf

Incidences of violence against religious minorities have continued through the past decade (Table 19.2).

Religion and education

Religious education has increasingly become an integral part of the national educational curriculum. In the government-run educational institutions, which are required to follow a government-prescribed national curriculum and are overseen by national educational boards and the Ministry of Education, offer religious education as a mandatory subject from grades 3 through 10. Students are entitled to receive education in their own respective religions, but lack of resources has limited the implementation of this policy, thus depriving many students of minority religions of the opportunity. Religious education includes both information about religion and religious instructions. Additionally, there are two broad strands of religious educational institutions, Aliya madrasa and Qwami madrassah. The former has been integrated into the national curriculum, and religious education is offered along with various other subjects, for example, sciences, social sciences, and language. The latter comprises privately owned and operated educational institutions with exclusive focus on religious instructions and lifestyles.

The unsupervised nature of the qwami madrassahs and their exclusive religious focus have produced debate about their efficacy in producing productive citizens, while Islamic scholars have argued that these institutions are essential for transmission of religious traditions and creating ethically informed good Muslims. The content of the qwami madrassah curriculum has also drawn criticism for a narrower and literalist interpretation of religious texts. A large number of these institutions are residential, and the environments are very restrictive, which contributes to an exclusionary mindset. There have been attempts to reform the curricula of these seminaries, but these efforts failed due to opposition of the religious leaders and scholars. They have rejected any state intervention in qwami madrassahs. However, the government has

recognized the highest degree of these institutions as equivalent to master's in Islamic studies and Arabic (The Daily Star 2018). Schools offering exclusively Hindu religious education are few, while Christian religious education is offered by 'Missionary Schools,' which follow the national curriculum.

Mandatory teaching of religion, especially in elementary education, has been criticized as a way of creating schisms based on religious identities. Supporters of religious education have argued that religion provides moral and ethical standards and is helpful in character building. Detractors have pointed to the non-availability of teachers for religious education of non-Muslim students. This is largely because of resource constraints and lack of enthusiasm on the part of authorities.

Religion in social and public spheres

Religions, particularly Islam's role in the lives of the citizens, are not only shaped by state institutions and legal arrangements, but social organizations and practices play a very influential role. As argued by Ahmed Shafiqul Huque and Muhammad Yeahia Akhter, 'Islam has an ingrained and overwhelming influence on the values, norms and lifestyle of people in Bangladesh. In fact, most of the social forces operating within the country contribute, in some way or another, to the entrenchment of values whose origins may be traced to the tenets of Islam' (1987: 208).

The influence of traditional practices and institutions can be understood from the popularity of *waz mahfil*, that is, public commentary of scriptures. There has been a significant change in the content and presentation of waz mahfils. While traditionally these public gatherings used to be organized on special religious occasions in both urban and rural areas and primarily as a means of preaching Islam among the believers, they have become frequent and no longer have remained only as an expression of piety. Since the 1980s, these gatherings have become a forum of commentary on current affairs and thus more centred on ideology than on theology. Although a significant proportion of the mahfils are conducted by maulanas with very little knowledge of Islamic theology, with the growth of Islamists—those who view Islam as an ideology—some are being taken over by these Islamists with a specific political agenda. Recorded versions of these mahfils are available as audio and video, which has enabled the message to reach all walks of life at all hours.

In recent decades, new practices have been introduced along with the traditional ones. The most prominent new practices include the informal group meetings often referred to as *halaqa* and study groups. These are employed to reach middle-class and semi-literate/literate segments of Bangladeshi society. Maimuna Huq, in a perceptive exploration of these study groups in Bangladesh among JI's women activists, pointed out that they are rapidly proliferating in many Muslim-majority areas throughout South Asia, and these study circles not only revolve around the Qur'anic texts and hadiths but also 'Qur'anic commentaries and theological texts produced by authoritative traditional religious scholars, contemporary or recent' (2008: 457–458). She further notes that these lesson circles are a key site for 'the production of a particular form of Islamic subjectivity' (2008: 459). I have, elsewhere, explored various other conduits of the spread of new Islamic and Islamist sensibilities, for example, production of Islamist fiction (Riaz 2013). These, along with other efforts, have foregrounded Islam in contemporary Bangladeshi society as much as they benefit from the heightened visibility of Islam in social and political life.

The proliferation of study groups among the middle class is not the only way of gauging the influence of religion in the lives of members of the middle and upper strata in Bangladeshi society; it is also reflected in the public display of religiosity in the articles of clothing—both

men and women. There is a growing tendency to accept and glorify practices akin to practices in Saudi Arabia. This is described by analysts as the 'Arabization' of Islam in South Asia (Hashmi 2015). Härdig and Sajjad describe the phenomenon

> there has been a shift in everyday language relating to common religious practices such as the change from the use of the word 'Ramzan' to 'Ramadan;' saying 'Allah Hafiz' instead of the previously common 'Khuda Hafiz;' and there is a general vilification of local practices of Islam as being 'contaminated' by 'ignorant' cultural traditions. Informal conversations often reveal a desire among a younger generation, particularly urbanites, to learn about 'true Islam,' as if the religious teachings they grew up with were tainted by Bengali cultural traditions and 'improper' Iranian influences. Arguably, by following an allegedly more 'pure' version of Islam, they are at once consumers and co-producers of an Arabized Islam, very different from the Sufi traditions that shaped Bengali culture for centuries.
>
> (2015: 2)

Islam remains present in the social arena also through piety organizations, for example, the Tabligh Jamaat (TJ). TJ has brought a non-hierarchical, open, inclusive, community-based understanding of Islam to public attention in Bangladesh. Although the TJ is now embroiled in the political schism between the supporters of the HI and their detractors, the organization's appeal is far from subsiding, and its influence in shaping the role of religious ethos in society has remained quite strong.

Conclusions

Religion has occupied a pre-eminent position in Bangladeshi society for a long period of time. The ethos, practices, and values pertaining to religion have influenced the people of the country, even before it became independent. The inclusion of secularism, the idea that a separation between state and religion can be instituted, as one of the state principles has not diminished the influence of religion, particularly Islam. Changes in the political environment and consequent policy changes have facilitated the resurgence of religion; however, it would be erroneous to suggest that the Islamization of the Bangladeshi society and polity was entirely a top-down state-sponsored project; instead, the revival was aided by the presence and strengths of social organizations—both formal and informal. Over time, the Bangladeshi state has become deeply involved with the religion question. This points to complex and multilayered relations between society, state, and citizens. Unpacking this complex relationship requires abandoning the preconceived notion of a liner relationship. Examination of the actors and institutions, contextualization of their roles within the historical developments, and locating them within the broad social and political changes are imperative.

Note

1 Ahamdi, also called Qadiani, is a small Muslim denomination. Ahmadis are the followers of reformist Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908), who hailed from Qadian in Punjab, India. Ahmadiyyas claim to practice the Islam that was taught and practiced by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Some Muslim groups—from both Sunni and Shia sects—insist that the Ahamdi are non-Muslims. The acceptance of the finality of the Prophet Muhammad as the last prophet has been cited as the main source of contention between the mainstream Muslim sects and the Ahmadis. In 1973, the Pakistani government declared Ahmads non-Muslims.

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20

RELIGION AND SOCIETY
IN SRI LANKA

Peter Schalk

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the relation of the state of Sri Lanka to its religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, in mainly the post-war period after 2009. Buddhism is not classified by the state as a state religion but is treated as one by the state. All religions are "protected" and "fostered" by the state, but Buddhism "foremostly". Statistically, most Buddhists in Sri Lanka are Sinhala speakers, who made up 70.2% of the population of 20,263,723 in the census from 2012.[1] Buddhism is specified exclusively as Theravāda, which in the Sri Lanka case sidelines Mahāyāna. Buddhists are an absolute majority in most districts, but the densest area is in the districts of the South. In Gālla[2] (Galle), we find 94.0% Buddhists, in Matara 94.2%, in Hambantōṭa 96.8%, and in Moṇarāgala 94.5%.[3]

Most Hindus in Sri Lanka are Tamil speakers, consisting of Sri Lankan Tamils with 12.6% of the population, localised mostly to the Northern and Eastern province. They are an absolute majority in Nuvareliyā, Yāḻppāṇam, Vavuṉiyā, Mullaittīvu, and Kiḷinocci. Most Hindus are Caivas (Sanskrit: Śaivas). Vaiṇavas (Sanskrit: Vaiṣṇavas) are subordinated religiously and administratively to Caivas. The expected rivalry between the two, which we find in India, is not found in Sri Lanka.

Most Muslims belong to the ethnic group of Sri Lanka Moors, with 9.7% of the population. Muslims have no absolute majority in any district. In the census from 2012, the following districts have more than 100,000 Muslims: Colombo, Gampaha, Kaḷutara, Mahanuvara, Maṭṭakkaḷappu, Ampāṟai, Tirukōṇamalai, Kuruṇāgala, and Puttaḷam. In Maṭṭakkaḷappu, Muslims are 25.5%, in Ampāṟai 43.6%, and in Tirukōṇamalai 42.1% of the population.[4] Muslims densely populate districts in the Eastern province.

Christians are divided into Catholics (6.1%) and "Christians" (1.3%), which refers to Protestants. We find both groups among Tamil and Sinhala speakers in all provinces. Catholics are influential in Gampaha with 19.3%, Mannār with 52.7%, and Puttaḷam with 31.2.%.[5] "Christians" are active in Colombo with 2.8%, Yāḻppāṇam with 3.3.%, Mannār with 4.7%, Vavuṉiyā with 4.6%, Mullaittīvu with 3.5%, Kiḷinocci with 5.4%, and Maṭṭakkaḷappu with 4.1%.[6] Among them, we find those who have English as a mother tongue. They are known as Burghers, which are the descendants from intermarriages between colonials and indigenous women. The Department also protects the Protestants in Sri Lanka. They belong to the Anglican Church

(Church of Ceylon), Church of South India, Baptist Church, Dutch Reformed Church, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, and Salvation Army Church.[7]

Idealised and politicised Buddhism

One profile of Sinhala Buddhism is idealised Sinhala Buddhism as an individualised moral upliftment to non-hate and non-violence beyond politics. Another profile is politicised Sinhala Buddhism, which has played a visible, audible, and even obtrusive role in Sri Lankan society from the anti-colonial struggle in the 19th century to its extension of the battle of "the other" in the 20th century, including the post-war period. Political Sinhala Buddhists regard the whole of the island as their territory where Buddhism should prevail, Sinhala is expected to be spoken, and which they claim as their heritage. They work on a political project; it is the establishment of a culturally homogenous Buddhist unitary State where they are culturally sovereign. Hate and violence are rationalised by reference to the heroic and victorious past.

How does the state react to the project of political Sinhala Buddhists? The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) is torn between the idealising of Sinhala Buddhism, a multiethnic Constitution, and the United Nations' expectations on one side and its dependency on the votes by politicising Sinhala Buddhists on the other side. We find, expectedly, an adverse reaction to this project by "the others", the Caivas, Muslims, and Christians who want to preserve a multireligious Sri Lanka as prescribed in the Constitution from 1978. They want to maintain, and in some cases regain, their lost cultural sovereignty in their territories, including religion. We find an adverse reaction also among Sinhala Buddhists who hold onto an idealised image of Buddhism as a religion of generosity, non-hate, and non-violence. The Government of Sri Lanka also cultivates this idealised image of Sinhala Buddhism but is pushed and pulled by political Sinhala Buddhists to surrender to their demands. It would not be correct to focus on political Sinhala Buddhism only without describing the internal resistance against it.

The internal resistance's idealised form of Buddhism is not a prompting revelation from above but an expression of an intensive wish of how Buddhism should be. Idealising is wishful thinking about "lifeworlds beyond politicised ethnies" (see Piyarathne 2018), but by thinking wishfully in encounters, it becomes guidance for the present and coming generations.

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The visitor to Sri Lanka will often hear that Sri Lanka is a Buddhist country. The giver of this information may refer to the fact that Buddhism is the majority religion. S/he may also hold the view that Buddhism should be the only religion in Sri Lanka. This evaluation is conflict creating because it can only be realised if all representatives for Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity; non-religious humanism; and agnosticism and atheism are made second-class citizens.

The Constitution of Sri Lanka from 1978 guarantees freedom to all representatives of all religions but at the same time concludes that Buddhism takes a particular position which is defined as "foremost". The Constitution reflects and promotes a monopolising tendency for the benefit of Buddhism. This formulation is one pillar of support for political/antagonising Sinhala Buddhism. What is not made explicit in the Constitution is that this monopolising tendency aims at homogenising culture by treating Buddhism not only as a state religion but also as the only state religion. Politicising/antagonising Sinhala Buddhists push and pull the government to declare that Sri Lanka is nothing but a Buddhist state.

The Constitution has a section on Sri Lanka as a unitary state. In a unitary state, political power is centralised to the government. Centralising does not exclude relocation/outsourcing:

In Sri Lanka, there are nine provinces which are ruled by nine offices of politically elected chief ministers, but these can be overruled by a provincial governor who is appointed by the president. S/he holds an office of an executive presidency. Power is finally centralised to her/him. Part of the criticism of the present Constitution by the political opposition is to abolish the executive presidency.

A governor of a province in Sri Lanka is the head of a provincial council and representative of the president of Sri Lanka in the province. Established in 1987, under the 13th Amendment to the Constitution of Sri Lanka and deriving its powers from the *Provincial Council Act No 47 of 1987*, a governor exercises executive authority in respect of subjects devolved to the provincial council. The governor may appoint a chief minister, who would be the leader of the political party that commands the majority of the provincial council.

Political Sinhala Buddhists are strong supporters of the unitary or centralised state of Sri Lanka. They reject a confederal, federal state and all kinds of devolution of power, which reduce the power of the centralised state. A unitary state may become consociational in a homogenous cultural state, but in a state with deep ethnic divisions, the unitary state becomes non-consociational. This is the present situation in Sri Lanka. Politicising Sinhala Buddhists are aware of the deep divisions as obstacles to their political project; therefore, they work for the creation of a culturally homogenous state which can be administered consociationally by the unitary Sri Lankan state. This goal is achieved step by step by the conquest of cultural sovereignty in now non-Buddhist territories. The establishment of a Buddhist monastery and/or the raising of the Buddhist and/or national flag of Sri Lanka in a territory of another religion are tokens of obtained cultural sovereignty.

The conquest is rationalised by naming it re-conquest; political Sinhala Buddhists believe that the whole island was ruled in the past "under one umbrella" by Sinhala Buddhist rulers, but through invasions from South India; colonisation by Portuguese, Dutch, and British and world trade movements; and interference by India, the UN, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the island has been invaded by the "other", followed by the loss of cultural sovereignty over parts of formerly Buddhist territory to Hindus, Muslims, and Christians.

Idealised Sinhala Buddhism is not a fantasy but is a selective construction of ideas and values from the canonical Buddhist scripture to govern society. The most famous selected idealising statement is that Buddhism is a religion of peace. It is only a partial historical truth. Historical Buddhism is much more, considering its long history. Almost all religions have created such an idealised form which is promoted in public locally and internationally. Idealising Buddhists act like Caivas, Christians, and Muslims: they go to the source, to the Buddha's "pure" teaching. Buddhists may go the *Dhammapada*, Hindus to the *Bhagavadgītā*, Muslims to *al-Qur'ān*, and Christians to John 15:13.

A Sinhala Buddhist is expected to be a Theravādin following an unbroken (but sometimes weakened) tradition from the arrival of Buddhism during the Aśokan period about 250 BC to her/his own time. This period is history, but the heritage brings us much further back in time. Idealised Sinhala Buddhism refers to Buddhism as transmitted by Sinhala speakers, who have translated the original Pali texts of the Theravādins into Sinhala (Gombrich 1988). Sinhala and Pali are the languages of transmission of Sinhala Buddhism.

Theravāda connects Lanka with a network in Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, and migrated and converted Theravāda-Buddhists in the West and East. With minor deviations, they all have the same canon, written in a North Indian language known as Pali, and a collection of commentaries written by learned monks. The Pali canon, which was finally codified in its formation late in the 5th century CE, is wholly translated into Sinhala. There is also an English translation produced by the Pali Text Society (PTS) in London. Many parts of the Pali

Canon have been translated into national languages, including Tamil. The Great Assembly or Mahāsaṃgha in Sri Lanka has decided that idealised Buddhism is in this canon and in the commentarial tradition, too. One of the commentators, Buddhaghosa, who lived in the 5th century CE, witnessed the existence of a canon which he considered Words of the Buddha and Pali the language of the Buddha. He was attached to Lanka, where he wrote a manual of Theravāda–Buddhism entitled Path of Purity or *Visuddhimagga*.[8] It is a systematic exposition of ideal Theravāda. It elaborates on the Buddha's teaching about the perfect path to the goal of "quenching" (of a flame/desire) or *nibbāna*.

The Buddha taught that winning insight is a gradual process. Buddhaghosa tried to characterise this gradualism as valid for three mental stages. Buddhist teachers throughout the ages pledge that they can guide the individual through these three mental stages: "morality" or *sīla*, "accomplishment" or *samādhi*, and "wisdom" or *paññā*. Morality is codified in the five, eight, and ten precepts for laypeople; in the four "pure dwellings" or *Brahma vihāra*; and the many more precepts for monks. "Accomplishment" refers to mental exercises for the elimination of "impure" thoughts and the creation of "pure" mind. "Wisdom" encompasses the stage when a decision can be made to complete life in the state of *nibbāna*. All three can also be activated on all occasions. Gradualism may concern winning depth in each one of the three. Buddhaghosa's *Path of Purity* is a document of ideal Theravāda. It would be difficult to find it practised in Lanka in totality today, but we still find reminiscences of it in renouncing Buddhism and in the attempt to transform society by Buddhist values.

Renouncing Buddhist's representatives, forest people, monks, and some non-specialists have decided to walk a steep path to reach *nibbāna* as an imminent or impending and transcendent or otherworldly goal. This kind of Buddhism appears to us as anti-community, anti-society, and anti-state, but it would be adequate to call its representatives an alternative community within a Buddhist society. They are integrated into society. Its members are constant reminders of what the final goal of Buddhism for individuals is: *nibbāna* is accepted by all Buddhists, even by political Sinhala Buddhists—under certain conditions (see subsequently).

Renouncers regard Quenching as ultimate, transcendent, and imminent. They are often imagined as monks, but laypeople, too, can walk the steep path towards imminent Quenching. Renouncers' performance is a model for idealising Sinhala Buddhists to follow but usually at the age of retirement from social duties.

Idealising Sinhala Buddhists who determined to form their lifestyle by ideals of abnegation of hate in "thought", "word", and "deed" have regularly closed its doors to racial/racialist ideas and other ideas which are against the moral of, for example, the "Steps of the Dhamma" or *Dhammapada* (P).[9] This book is classified as Buddha's word (*buddhavacana*) in the commentarial tradition and contains basic ethical principles. Hate-abnegating Buddhists have endured Hindus, Muslims, and Christians for many centuries. I say endured, not loved: non-hate is different from love. Sometimes non-hate switches over to hate, but this is a case for political Sinhala Buddhists.

All citizens are aware that there were, are, and will be four different main Lankan religious competing value systems represented by Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam alongside the profiled non-religious alternatives and religious indifference. Awareness of all is there, indeed, but intercultural communication by one Buddhist section, the section of political Sinhala Buddhists, is avoided. They understand agonism as antagonism. Sinhala and Tamil speakers, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians have active cultures that restrict the use of violence to achieve political goals. All parties are aware of and are strongly influenced by restrictions going back to Gandhism; to the enduring and silent martyrdom of the Christian tradition; to the explicit distancing of all violence by the Buddha, even for self-defence; and to modern non-religious concepts of human rights. Both Tamil and Sinhala speakers are inspired

by a complex of different non-violent traditions but with different emphasis on them in peace and war. Muslims also have clear restrictions for the use of violence, but political Sinhala Buddhists and the Tamil Tigers Movement both deselected the culturally inherited restrictions regarding the use of force. Buddhism is not (yet) a state religion in Lanka, but political Sinhala Buddhists aspire to make it one by pushing and pulling the state to complete its started monopolising urge signalled by defining Buddhism as the foremost religion in the Constitution from 1972 and 1978.

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Idealised Sinhala Buddhism has also included "historiography" about the conquest of Buddhism in Lanka documented in chronicles. The most famous is the *Great Chronicle* or *Mahāvaṃsa*,[10] starting with the alleged arrival of Vijaya and finished in the 18th century at the arrival of the British, who replaced the Dutch, who earlier had replaced the Portuguese. This "historiography" gives us a culturally specific form of Sinhala Theravāda-Buddhism. It is exploited in its martial parts above all in the rhetoric and discourse of modern political Sinhala Buddhists. In idealised Sinhala Buddhism, heroism in the chronicles is also praised but not as bloodstained heroism; it focuses on heroic mental endurance in trust of the Buddha despite all obstacles. Above all, the chronicles give a sense of continuity of Buddhism, which is apprehended as genuineness of religion. The *Great Chronicle* itself expected its readers to read for the sake of edification. It is not what we mean by "historiography", but it can be used partially by us for historiography. It is a Pali-Sinhala Buddhist heritage construction.

The *Great Chronicle* is part of a long tradition embracing several other works like the preceding *Chronicle of the Island* or *Dīpavaṃsa* (P)[11] and the following *Small Chronicle* or *Cūḷavaṃsa* (P)[12] and other works. I summarise them by the term "Chronicle Tradition", which promotes a central martial project to which I will come back subsequently several times. This Chronicle Tradition can be evaluated in two ways, as a document of the religious heritage of Sri Lanka, that is, as edification, and as a model or legacy for political martial heroism.

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Buddhists in Sri Lanka have also been exposed to influence from the indigenous neighbouring religion, above all Tamil Caivam (Śaivism) and Vaiṇavam (Vaiṣṇavism), and by foreign traditions representing religious (Christianity, Islam) and non-religious ideologies like human rights; specific political ideologies like Marxism, Social Evolutionism, Fascism, and Nazism; and different evaluations of life and worldviews, which all have influenced insular Buddhists. Among these, we also find racist/racialist ideas, which were used by Tamil and Sinhala speakers from the late 19th century and now by some political Sinhala Buddhists.

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Idealising Buddhism engages in Buddhist value-based projects. It is also called traditional Buddhism, rural Buddhism, or folk Buddhism. It is an attempt to structure one's community according to fundamental Buddhist values. A society based on Buddhist values taken from idealised Buddhism is a precursor to the goal, which is *nibbāna*. Moral values are conveyed by the Great Assembly (of monks) through preaching (*baṇa*) and protection (*pirit*). Children are taught to venerate the Buddha by flower arrangement on a flower seat where a statue of the Buddha is placed. They are also told how to practice generosity (*dāna*) towards monks, elders, and ancestors.

Protection is the name of a Buddhist ritual. It is expected to bestow protection through the recitation of collections of texts in Pali and Sinhala. In Pali, it is known as *paritta*. What protects living beings is in the Buddhist experience and perception the recitation of what is classified as Word-of-the-Buddha. The ritual protection edifies, gratifies, and liberates from fear—in the emotional experience and cognitive perception of Sinhala Buddhists. Idealising Sinhala Buddhism also contains forms of traditional Buddhist Preaching or *baṇa* (Schalk 1988a: 229–256). Protection and preaching were and are still important ways of transmitting the Buddhist tradition by the Great Assembly. In Sri Lanka, folk preachers appear for some time and are then replaced by other folk preachers.

The preaching of monks also gave focused attention to death (*satimaraṇa*), which is a Buddhist version of Remember-That-You-Have-to-Die (Schalk 1988b). We often forget today the idealising roles of Buddhist monks as mediators of protection and consolation. In the media, they figure as street fighters and leaders of aggressive mobs against Caivas, Muslims, and Christians.

Idealising Buddhism also has a dual ritual system of insular Buddhism, one part of the rituals in the monastery and another in the Abode of Gods (*dēvālē*) (Schalk 1974). This *dēvālē* is a temple on the premises of the monastery, housing pictures or statues of gods and goddesses with mostly Sanskrit names, some with Sinhala and a few with Tamil names. The dual system belongs to traditional Buddhism, but the gods were replaceable and renewable and were conditioned culturally in time and space Schalk 1974).

These four rituals, generosity, protection, preaching, and the cult of gods, are also conveyed in homes and schools. To this comes as a minimum the daily repeated recital of homage of the Buddha, the three refuges, the five precepts, and the offering of flowers.

There is a tension within this idealised Buddhism. It appears as a value-base for society, but the societal aspect is apprehended as individuals who each go her/his way. Some Buddhists under the influences of new trends from the world have been sceptical of this kind of individualism. A modern Theravādin is expected to engage in what is called socially engaged Buddhism, which has modernised a value-based conception of Sinhala Buddhism. "Modernised" implies that traditional Buddhist values, as mentioned previously, are now related to contemporary problems like eradication of poverty, discrimination against women, and racialist and caste and class distinctions. However, these cannot be eradicated by the generosity of individuals but by laws valid for all (Watts 2009).

Value-based Theravādins also had a conception of a wheelturner (*cakkavattin*) who was responsible for the formation of a Buddhist society all over the world. He was often a king, never a queen. Today only a shadow of this ideal is cultivated by some politicians who try to live up to the model of a wheelturner. They promote Buddhism through the Constitution and Parliament and by sponsoring monasteries.

One of several sources for this kind of idealising traditional or value-based lay Buddhism is the already-mentioned text *Dhammapada* ("Steps of the Teaching") in *Dhammapada pāḷi*, *5*. One of its steps is the following reflection which Buddhist children learn in Pali (in a Sinhala translation). *Na hi verena verāni—sammantī'dha kudācanam/ averena ca sammati—esa dhammo santano.* The English Christianising translation given is well-known: "In this world hatred never ceases by hatred; it ceases by love alone. This is an eternal law".[13] This wording we find on the Internet and in other English translations, too. We note, however, that the Pali text does *not* say that hate can be ceased by love but by non-hate—which is different from love. This translation gives the correct meaning, but idealising Buddhists often give the Christianising one. Most Theravādins know the reflection, but in a situation of conflict, reflections of this kind are usually suspended.

An idealising value-based Theravādin is expected to profile her/himself against Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna, Islam and Christianity, but also to endure these on the island and even to participate

in interreligious meetings for the sake of "harmony", which is a key term in state-sponsored idealised Sinhala Buddhism. *Nibbāna* is ultimate and transcendent for idealising value-based Sinhala Buddhists, too, but it is not imminent as in the case of the renouncers. Idealising Buddhists may experience *nibbāna* like a pulling mirage into the future. This mirage gives direction to every individual.

Notably, politicising Sinhala Buddhists do not reject idealised Buddhism; on the contrary, they support it and use it to confront idealised peaceful Buddhism against terrorist Islam, animal-sacrificing Hindus, and exploiting and converting postcolonial Christians. The following is a typical example. One of Sri Lanka's cabinet ministers, Pātali Champikā Raṇavaka (Champika Ranawaka), co-founder of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), claimed that Buddhism was the only pacifist religion that did not promote killings, unlike Islamic Jihad. Buddhism did not try to propagate the religion, contrasting it with Jihadism, which he said aimed to exterminate all except those who follow Allah. A Buddhist never expects to assassinate or harm a non-believer. The central teachings of Buddhism are compassion, love, and kindness.[14] The JHU is one of the new leading political Sinhala Buddhist militant groups, which are well documented (Herath and Rambukwella 2015; Gunatilleke 2015, 2018; Ranjith 2016; Waha 2018).

Idealised Buddhism is even made an ultimate concern by the politicising Sinhala Buddhists—in the long run—but at the same time, political Sinhala Buddhists say that the time has not yet come for idealised Buddhism, because Buddhists have no control over the totality of the island; they will get it if the political project to make Sri Lanka a cultural homogenous Buddhist unitary state is accomplished. As the final goal is idealised Buddhism, no costs should be avoided, and no scruples shall pain the mind. The trailblazers in the past for the construction of a unitary state were the martial Buddhist heroes like Duṭugämuṇu and the present are war heroes like Major General Shavendra Silva.[15] The Sri Lanka Armed Forces (SLAFs) have appealed to joining the Great Assembly in accomplishing this political project. When the political goal has been achieved, then idealised Buddhism can become a guide for society, but this process of achieving this political goal is conflict creating, which political Sinhala Buddhist heroism has calculated with. The Tamil Resistance Movement has four names for this project: "Sinhalisation", "Buddhicisation", "militarisation", and "land grabbing/Colonisation" by the GoSL, the Great Assembly, and the SLAFs in the Northern and Eastern Province. It thinks that possessing territory is the same as owning it.

Politicising Sinhala Buddhism has put aside idealised Buddhism for the time and defers *nibbāna* for the benefit of realising its political project, but the postponement of *nibbāna* is different from abstaining from *nibbāna*. Political Sinhala Buddhism is a religion because it insists on a transcendent final solution for humans, but this solution is not imminent. Imminent is an immanent solution: the strengthening of the cultural homogenous Buddhist unitary state as a base for advancing towards *nibbāna*. Political Sinhala Buddhism is one of the main co-actors in creating a non-consociational society by turning political agonism into political antagonism. It provokes other ethnies to react antagonistically in defence against this kind of unitary state. All are made to fight for the sovereignty of their religious and linguistic culture within their threatened territory and heritage.

To understand political Sinhala Buddhism, we should see it as a continuation and extension of the anti-colonial struggle by the Buddhist monks in the second half of the 19th century and especially by its successor Anagārika Dharmapāla (died 1933; Schalk 2006). Already during the precolonial period up to the 16th century CE, the Great Assembly of Sinhala Buddhist monks took the role of defenders of Buddhism against Tamil invaders who came in waves from South India and grabbed land on the island. What counts today is that the memory of the precolonial period is retrieved from the past to remind Tamil speakers that they came as invaders plundering

the Buddhist monasteries and replacing Buddhism with Tamil Caivam. There is no accurate indication that this will happen, but the retrieval of this past by contemporary political Sinhala Buddhists stirs up fear among Sinhala Buddhists and puts Tamil speakers in a position of defence against potential violence.

Buddhists had terrible experiences with the colonial powers, too. The Catholic Portuguese and the Protestant Dutch brought Buddhism to the limit of its survival in coastal areas. In the highlands, in the kingdom of Mahanuvara, Buddhism could still flourish, but the British conquered this area, too, in 1815 and brought it under colonial administration. The British made a solemn promise to protect Buddhism but deceived the Great Assembly several times. The emotional and physical reaction of the Buddhist resistance against colonial exploitation is still part of the consciousness of contemporary political Sinhala Buddhists. Christians, especially, are suspected to be postcolonial. The process towards a unitary state pushed and pulled by political Sinhala Buddhists affected the minorities, which did not consider themselves minorities but majorities within their traditional territory. The Tamil speakers pointed out that they had a traditional homeland in the North and East; they fondly called it "motherland".

The memory of the precolonial and anti-colonial struggle is not only a hangover but is an existing scheme of interpretation by political Sinhala Buddhists in today's fight against the alleged representatives of Indian imperialism, the Muslims, and the representatives of Western imperialism, the UN and representatives of the World Bank, and so on. Geopolitics and the World Bank have in some cases been apprehended as a threat and danger to Buddhism in Sri Lanka, especially when Christian missionary NGOs accompanied geopolitics. Among political Sinhala Buddhists, conspiracy theories against the others are created. They alienate the ethnies from each other.

According to political Sinhala Buddhists, there was in the far-off past a period when the Buddha himself visited Sri Lanka and established Buddhist congregations by chasing away or converting non-believers. The Buddha himself "sealed" Sri Lanka as a Buddhist country by putting his footprint on the Sumanakūṭa, known today as Adam's Peak. This event happened in about in the 5th century BCE according to a chronicle tradition, which was compiled about 1000 years later. The primary source for this narration is the *Great Chronicle*, 1:77. The historical Buddha, however, never mentioned Sri Lanka and never idealised a unitary, united, federal, confederal, or independent state of Lanka. We must turn to the writers of the Lankan Chronicle tradition to get the connection between the Buddha and Sri Lanka. It speaks about Sri Lanka as being under one umbrella, which modern political Sinhala Buddhists interpret as a unitary State, which is not united but unitary (centralised and culturally homogenous). The authors of this Chronicle Tradition concluded that the ruler of Lanka must be a Buddhist. Contemporary political Sinhala Buddhists endowed their doctrine of the unitary state with a religious and heroic past and eschatology, which allayed scruples about striving for centralised power and cultural (religious) hegemony and about the violent means to reach this imminent and immanent goal.

This precolonial thinking was retrieved after independence in 1948 in the struggle against Tamils for an independent country known as Tamilīḻam. It was made part in the construction of a collective memory of the representatives of the postcolonial Lankan nation-state. Political Sinhala Buddhists regularly mimetically repeated the role of the Tamil adversary King Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, Sinhala Duṭugämuṇu (101–77, 161–137).[16] The use of violence to reach the stage of one umbrella was Duṭṭhagāmaṇī's killing of King Eḷāra, who in the *Great Chronicle* was classified as just king but as adhering to another (post-Vedic) faith. This deviation was the only reason for the Buddhist adversary Duṭṭhagāmaṇī to kill him.[17] The killing of Eḷāra is today used in a persuasive homology which justified the killing of Vēluppiḷḷai Pirapākaraṉ

(English: Prabhakaran) in 2009 (Schalk 2013). Political Sinhala Buddhists react to real or imagined provocations by outsiders and inimical insiders, who question and undermine the struggle for supremacy of the Lankan Buddhist state in the island.

Mahanuvara (Kandy) was a problem for the British because the resistance against the colonials was strong. The British used armed suppression but also administrative reform in 1833 by subordinating three colonial centres in Yālppāṇam, Mahanuvara, and Kōṭṭē and their provinces under one central colonial administration. At the same time, each province got a government agent who was answerable to the British governor of Ceylon. The British built an integrated colonialist state in which power was centralised. This state was not called a unitary state, but it was the beginning of a unitary state, which was accomplished in 1972 by the Sinhala Buddhist majority in Parliament in an independent Sri Lanka. In this postcolonial state, Buddhism is given the foremost place, and political Sinhala Buddhists work for a Buddhism given the only place.

The integration from 1833 made the provinces dependent on each other and started a competition between the ethnies for privileges from the centre. The British launched a policy which is known as "my enemy's enemy is my friend", which deepened the ethnic divide. The enemies of the British were anti-colonial Sinhala Buddhists who rejected the colonial administration because of its Christian character. A strong anti-colonial Buddhist movement arose in the second half of the 19th century. The enemies of the political Sinhala Buddhists were also Tamil speakers who had opened the doors for Christian missionaries. The British promoted Tamil speakers as friends against political Sinhala Buddhists.

This policy was an enforcement of a conflict between Tamil and Sinhala speakers with historical precedents in the form of continuous martial invasions in the precolonial period from the time before the 16th century and constant migrations of traders from India, especially South India. These invasions and migrations were retrieved from the past by politicising Sinhala Buddhists to show the otherness of "the other".

Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864–1933) extended the anti-colonial struggle to embrace not just colonials who were Christian but also Tamils who were Hindus and Muslims. He classified them as strangers to the island. At the same time, he transcreated the canonical *dhammadīpa* "having the Dhamma as light" into "(Sri Lanka), the island of the Dhamma" (Schalk 2006). He popularized the idea that the island Lanka is the island of nothing but the Buddhist Dhamma.

The way the British constructed the integration gave Tamil speakers hope that they could preserve their cultural uniqueness and sovereignty when the country became independent in 1948. When the British left, they handed over a Constitution in which minority rights were retained in section 29. The Constitution from 1948 stated in section 29 that no law can prohibit the free exercise of any religion or make persons of any community or religion liable to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of other communities or religions are not made accountable or confer on persons of any community or religion any privilege or advantage which is not conferred on persons of other communities or religions. The Government of Sri Lanka took section 29 out of its new Constitution in 1972. A Buddhist majority wanted to make sure that Buddhism had the leading position. Religion was associated with language, territory, and heritage. The Caiva, Muslim, and Christian defences of cultural uniqueness and sovereignty were deprived of constitutional support. The GoSL deselected the Indian way of disarming conflict by transforming the provinces into federated self-ruling states. India imposed its system on Sri Lanka in 1987 in the 13th amendment to the constitution but against the wishes of the Great Assembly and politicising Sinhala Buddhists. A modified Indian system was applied which was not accepted by the Tamil Resistance Movement and by politicising Sinhala

Buddhists. Suggestions for introducing a confederation, federalism, or devolution of power have been rejected by the GoSL and the Tamil Resistance Movement.

Religions in encapsulated ethnies

In Sri Lanka Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity are not just labelled religions, but they are ethnonyms, too. We find a Buddhist, Caiva, Muslim, and Christian ethnie. Religious leaders are loyal to the peoples' demands to preserve their language, territory, and heritage against expanding political Sinhala Buddhism. Each religion is part of an ethnie. Each one strives to maintain or regain its threatened or already lost cultural sovereignty. Failing in negotiations, some go a step further and demand self-determination for the people within their territory, which is a clear political act. Failing in negotiations, they take up arms. All religions are ethnicised, not only Buddhism.

Christians are not just Christians, but they are Tamil or Sinhala Christians. Sinhala refers not only to the language but to territory and heritage, too. Muslims are Tamils with a demand for territorial autonomy in the East and a legacy from South India and Arabic countries. Christians are not homeless; they share the homelands of Tamil or of Sinhala speakers. The term and concept "identity" is used on all sides of the ethnic divides as a summary of the (four) constituents. "Identity", in this case, is the same as encapsulation by segregation.

On the political Sinhala Buddhist side, there was much pondering of "identity", which resulted in the construction of a national ideology or *jātika cintanaya*, whose main characteristic was Sinhalaness or *siṃhalatva*. Its formation was inspired by the concept Hindutva, which does not refer to Hinduism only but to Indianness; it includes all religions of Indian origin. Sinhalaness, however, is exclusive and excluding; it comprises Buddhism only. Sinhalaness was imagined as a permanent essence of characteristics which must be preserved at any cost and expanded territorially. Sinhalaness is another name for Sinhala Buddhist nationalism/patriotism which has the whole island as a homeland. Its promotion counteracts the attempts by the government to establish "social harmony" within diversity.

When the Tigers Movement attacked a Buddhist monastery during the war, this was apprehended by the perpetrators and victims as not only directed against religion but also against the Sinhala Buddhist state, its language, its territory, and its heritage: against Sinhalaness. In the same way, when political Sinhala Buddhists destroyed and still destroy Hindu temples, they attack all strata of Tamil culture—in the view of the perpetrators and victims. From both sides, attacks are a way to reject the cultural sovereignty of "the other" and to preserve and expand one's own.

"Heritage" recalls a selection of the past and implies a perspective over time. As for heritage study, we must distinguish it from history or academic study of the past. Heritage is that part of the past which a community has selected and which is delimited from that part of the past which a community has deselected. Heritage studies apply a normative approach to the past, often in connection with an emotional language; a heritage is said to be a legacy as a bequest. Heritage studies contribute to a situation of conflict to encapsulate an ethnie. Constructors of heritages sometimes claim that heritage and history are the same to give status and credibility to an inheritance. They make loans in history, but selectively. Mobilising heritage studies in Sri Lanka often occurs as a defence reaction when one's own ethnie is threatened. It is a kind of agonism which is part of a democratic society but which in Sri Lanka has been met with antagonism by political Sinhala Buddhists.

The ethnic divides sometimes take on baffling proportions: if a Tamil Catholic gives priority to Tamil nationalism, s/he may become involved in disputes with Sinhala Catholics. There was

a time when Tamil Catholics neglected the Sinhala Archbishop in Colombo and negotiated directly with the Vatican. Ethnicity can be stronger than religious affinity.[18]

According to the most radical adherents of an ethnie, the connection between the four components is indissoluble, as if the relationship were innate and inherited. Moderates, however, regard the relationship between the four constituents as contingent and the order of the hierarchy of the four as possible to negotiate—and even its continued existence. In the 20th century, Tamil speakers discussed whether they should give religion or language priority. The Tigers Movement marginalised Caivam, Islam, and Christianity but stuck frenetically to language and heritage and above all to territory. The leading Tamil party today, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), being dependent on Hindu, Muslim, and Christian votes, has no reference to religion in its name. The political parties United National Party (UNP) and Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) are dependent on Hindu, Muslim, and Christian votes; they have not put Buddhism as part of their party names, even if all know that they compete in promoting Buddhism "foremost".

We find many statements that Hindus are Tamil speakers, that Tamil speakers are Hindus, and that the conflict between Tamil speakers and Sinhala speakers was a conflict between Hindus and Buddhists. These statements neglect the internal stratification of the constituent religions. Moreover, the connection between language and religion is not "inherited" but is a result of pragmatic and political considerations. Sometimes an individual, a group, a nation, or a state gives priority to language and sometimes to religion, as in the case of the Muslims. In contrast, the government side promoted Buddhism as a political religion in wartime. There was no symmetry in their encounters and clashes with the counterpart.

The Buddhist expansion to the northern and eastern Tamil-speaking areas results in the formation of expanding Buddhist "capsules", guarded by the Sri Lanka Armed Forces, with critical, sometimes inimical, surroundings. A famous "capsule" is the Nāga Vihāra in the centre of Yālppāṇam surrounded by critical Tamil Caivas and Christians, guarded by a section of the SLAFs.

Attempts to unite all heritages in Sri Lanka have been launched repeatedly for many years but have stopped at the slogan level, like "we are all Sri Lankans". A Sri Lankan "identity" beyond formalised citizenship is the object of an intense wish by the GoSL.

"Sri Lankan" is meant as a demonym replacing the preceding colonial demonym "Ceylonese". It is intended to embrace all ethnonyms, but some Hindus, Muslims, and Christians fear that "Sri Lankan" is nothing but a cover for "Buddhist".

Another slogan is "Unity in Diversity", set up on boards in several parts of Sri Lanka, but is diversity possible in a culturally homogeneous unitary state? There is a diversity of ethnies today, indeed, but a threatened diversity.

Buddhism and the state

The state intervenes in Buddhism through the Ministry of Buddhasāsana and Religious Affairs. *Sāsana* refers to the "order" (of the Buddha). Some scholars prefer the translation "dispensation". "Religious Affairs" refers here to the relation between Buddhism and other religions in Sri Lanka. Strictly speaking, the affairs are not expected to be religious but administrative. In the Lankan case, however, the responsible administrators are used to displaying their dedication to Buddhism in public.

When founded in 1988, there was still another idealising plight for the Ministry: to promote moral upliftment. This term has disappeared in the present formulation from 2010, but even in 2010, tasks entrusted to this ministry could be introduced as the formulation of policy programmes and projects to enhance religious values for building up a "virtuous society".

The vision of the Ministry—a typical idealisation—is to be the leading facilitator in bringing about a society with qualitative and moral values. Its mission is aiding in creating a qualitative culture with a better way of living by formulating and implementing policies and programs with the participation of all stakeholders based on all-faith teachings "with emphasis" on Buddhism around religious centres.[19]

The formulation "with emphasis on Buddhism" reflects the Constitution. A similar wording says that the Ministry should "protect and foster Buddhism" per provisions prescribed in article 09 by safeguarding rights of all religions vested in article 10 and 14 (i) (e) as stipulated in the Constitution.[20]

The previous formulation is crucial because it shows that the ambition was and is to create an idealising religion, which we know in the West as "value-based" in conservative political Christian circles. We also note in the formulation previously that not even once is the attribute Sinhala given to Buddhism. Idealised Buddhism seems to have transcended ethnic bonds and limitations, but the grading of Sinhala Buddhism determines the whole vision and mission of the Ministry as foremost.

There are many states in which religion is valued as being foremost, in practically all states where religion is a state religion, not least Great Britain. The difference with Sri Lanka is that the time for pushing and pulling the British government to make Christianity the only religion is past. In Sri Lanka, this is pulling and pushing for Buddhism, above all by the Great Assembly or Mahāsaṃgha, to become more visible and audible from decade to decade. The articles on safeguarding other religions cannot prevent the loud and visible agitation by political Sinhala Buddhists.

The idealising minister promotes a new policy believing that the greatest and foremost environmentalist born to this world is the Completely Enlightened One, or Sammā Sambuddha. Therefore, by now, the responsibility of protecting the Dhamma preached by Sammā Sambuddha and the Assembly or Saṃgha who follow his path has been entrusted to the minister while preserving the environment.[21] The minister is not only an administrator and politician but also an engaged Buddhist.

A new policy must show that it is by tradition. We learn that the minister of Buddhasāsana will not hesitate to take all necessary steps to join the monastery and village together. He wants to adjust lives according to Buddhist doctrine, to update the Dhamma schools which formulate and polish the value of children and produce them for society. He wants to improve the necessary infrastructure facilities for the Great Assembly to disseminate Dhamma and to attend to social service work and the existence of the Buddhasāsana of Sammā Sambuddha for a further extended period. Further, improving facilities of the monasteries located in challenging areas will take a foremost place among the minister's functions.[22]

As the minister is also the minister for sustainable development and wildlife, he will implement all activities to disseminate the Blessed Good Teaching, or Śrī Saddharma, preached by Sammā Sambuddha all over the world and to make Sri Lanka a resource for preserving the Buddhist doctrine. He firmly believes in Arahat Mahinda, who preached that the birds who fly in the sky and the animals on the earth have equal rights, like humans, to live or walk here and anywhere on this ground. All human beings are its inheritors, and they are only their guardians.[23]

The minister's message creates a modernist model for a "green" Buddhism, but the minister relates its origin to Mahinda, who introduced Buddhism to the island in the 3rd century BC.

The ministry has a task to implement the Constitution of Sri Lanka, which gives Buddhism the foremost place, but at the same time the duty to protect the rights of all religions. To achieve this objective, it has become the responsibility of the Ministry of Buddhasāsana to implement suitable projects and to launch programmes which would be helpful for the development of social values in a manner which would cover the entire Sri Lankan society.[24]

The previous formulation does not refer to Buddhist values only. We learn from the minister that the necessity for building up a country with spiritually developed citizens is felt very strongly in the present era. "That is why His Excellency the President is ceaselessly emphasising the fact that what must be done for the creation of a just society should be done without delay". The Ministry of Buddhasāsana is said to be engaged in a continuous mission to provide religious leadership to the people to propagate concepts which would promote unity and reconciliation among the ethnic groups.[25]

The deputy minister of the Ministry is inclined to go from generalities about religion to specific Sri Lankan Buddhism. He tells the world that the Buddha's preaching is a doctrine delivered for the benefit of excellent and human communities in both worlds. It is a matter of great pride that Sri Lanka, where the Gautama Buddha visited thrice and where a this-worldly doctrine is well established, has become the centre of Theravāda.[26]

The deputy minister believes in heritage as history when he refers to the three visits of the Buddha in Sri Lanka. He speaks on behalf of the government. His incapability to distinguish between history and heritage is an essential step into politicised Sinhala Buddhism which classifies the source of the deputy minister, the Great Chronicle or Mahāvaṃsa, as history.

The reference to "human communities in both worlds" is still a standard formulation for idealised value-based Buddhism, but he goes a step further when he identifies being Buddhist with being Sri Lankan. He emphasises that it is a great privilege to all Sri Lankans to have been successful in delivering examples of high social values to the entire world while living in Buddhist social and cultural surroundings. He also makes clear that Buddhism is (nothing but) Theravāda.[27] The four constituents of Buddhist "identity", religion, territory, language, and heritage, become visible in contours in the deputy minister's declaration about the vision and mission of his office.

Beyond declarations of visions and missions, the Ministry must work hard on a program for the benefit of Theravāda by restructuring the Dhamma education network with a high profile which would develop positive concepts while providing a new dimension to strengthen the link between Buddhist places of worship and the people. Other programmes are empowering all Buddhist places of worship with information technology and making them centres providing multiple services, making Buddhist places of worship network attractive places which would attract local and foreign tourists, with systematic physical development for the modern generation while conserving traditions. Finally, the Ministry must propagate Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy by creating a virtuous country with a just society.[28]

Again, the "virtuous society" is made a goal. The propagation of Buddhism is formulated explicitly, but we do not learn if this propagation is among Buddhists, non-Buddhists, or both. The concept propagation is conflict creating, because politicised Sinhala Buddhists reject propagation by Christians among Buddhists and because they deny that they propagate among non-Buddhists. They "convince" them, according to the Buddhist principle "come and see".

The Ministry presents an idealised form of Buddhism; it is an account of a religion that ignores historical evidence which is difficult to accommodate, evidence like hate, violence, revenge, and racism/racialism, which we can study in the history of Buddhism and especially at present in the encounters between religions. Even in the government paper, *The Daily News*, in an editorial from 2019, presents the three visits by the Buddha to Sri Lanka as history.[29] The Ministry's account resembles heritage constructions, which are often idealisations.

Idealisations assist in retreating into an idealised world of the past. Idealising is a sign of dissatisfaction with the present world, which is cruel. Politicians' rhetoric is an example of idealisation, such as when the prime minister spoke at Fullmoon Day 2019 when the arrival of Mahinda was remembered. He referred to an ideal period in the past as a model for the present:

"Our aim is to emulate the dignified royal tradition of the Lichchavi Kings, whereby people would meet peacefully, discuss issues peacefully and disperse peacefully, to ensure good governance and build a united and prosperous nation".[30]

Idealisation by several religions makes it possible to leave the "capsule" for some time in interfaith encounters. These encounters are frequently organised by religious organisations. Even if all are aware that the religions teach different paths to salvation, these differences are respected as a form of democratic agonism, but when religion is connected with the territory, language, and heritage, controversies arise. Then we see the politicisation of religion in the antagonistic struggle for cultural sovereignty.

Idealisations appear as conventionalisation. The conventionalisation of the Ministry appears as a well-known cluster of themes like the connection between the village and the monastery, the virtuous or just society, and so on (see previously). We also note that the Ministry cannot idealise the present and the past without making concessions to political Sinhala Buddhists.

In homes and schools, idealised Buddhism is taught to children much in the same way as idealised Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam are taught in Hindu, Christian, and Muslim homes and schools.

Despite the protection and fostering by the GoSL, some Buddhists have been attacked verbally and physically by Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. Why can this happen not once but repeatedly? Moreover, some Buddhists have attacked some Caivas, Muslims, and Christians. What has the Ministry done to prevent this? The Ministry's way is to preach idealised Buddhism, which may prevent some hate speech and some violence, but it does not disarm the explosive formulation about Buddhism being foremost, which encourages—given the historical premises—transgressions of limits by attacks and counterattacks.

An examination by human rights activists is underway into the involvement of the Archaeology Department and the Ministry of Buddhasāsana in the intensive process of "Sinhalisation" and "Buddhicisation" in the North. A commitment to these would show the dilemma of the Ministry of Buddhasāsana, whose duty is to protect and foster Buddhism but also the rights of Caivam, Islam, and Christianity. If Caivam is fostered, Caiva temples are not expected to be erased to give place for Buddhist monasteries.

Caivas and the state

Today, we find among Caivas a connection between territory, language, and heritage, but the 19th-century motto that a good Tamil must be a Caiva, directed against the Christian colonial presence, has been marginalised and modified by the motto that a good Tamil can be a Muslim and Christian, too. Above all, a good Tamil is expected to care for her/his language and heritage, but most of all for his/her territory, the Northern and Eastern Province. Patriotism is intense among Tamil speakers today as well as in the diaspora. It includes care for the heritage, which includes tangible and non-tangible objects and the preservation of Caiva monuments of the past and the legends connected with them.

The GoSL "protects" Caivam, too, through the Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs. It was established on 1 January 1986 and is presently functioning under the Ministry of Buddhasasana and Religious Affairs.[31] Its vision and mission are to actively contribute to preserving, promoting, and propagating the Hindu religion, Hindu culture and arts, and Hindu religious education.[32]

The department also allows the registration of Hindu morality schools, which should be managed under the temple or organisation which is registered in the department. The department administers a series of publications about Caivam in Tamil and English.[33]

A problem for the state is to win the hearts and minds of Tamil speakers for the preservation of the unitary state, which deprives them of their cultural sovereignty in their two provinces. Leading Tamil politicians go for federalism, which the GoSL has rejected several times. According to Tamil politicians, federalism would preserve Tamil cultural sovereignty, including the promotion of Caivam, Islam, and Christianity. They also state that the choice of federalism is part of the right of self-determination of a people—and that the Tamil speakers are a people/nation.

Muslims and the state

The origin of the Muslims in Sri Lanka is Arabic and related to trade, as was the case in South India.[34] Most of them are Sunnis of the Shafi legal school. Having married local wives, they were integrated into the local culture, adopting the matrilineal and matrilocal family pattern shared by South Indians and Sri Lankans. Many Muslims settled on the East coast to prevent settlement by the Portuguese.

The category Muslim also embraces Malays descended from Javanese soldiers. They had been brought to Sri Lanka by the Dutch. They also were Sunni Muslims. Now they are concentrated in Colombo and Hambantota. The state "protects" Muslims through the Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs "to preserve and promote the religious and cultural activities at its betterment".[35] The department's report expectantly idealises the relation between Muslims and the state. It avoids mentioning conflicts within the Muslim community, between Muslims and Hindus and Christians, and disputes with the state. Having read the department's idealising account, nobody can presume that the Muslims have a problem with their surroundings, but the issues are tremendous.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Muslims in Sri Lanka were put into two broad categories, though the use of the term Mouros (Moors) in Portuguese documents of the period tends to blur any distinction between them. The Portuguese used the label Moor for all Muslims, even though Moor refers to Morocco. The first group comprised those Muslims whose families had long been resident in the island. They, therefore, looked upon Sri Lanka as their homeland. They are referred to as Indigenous Moors. They were also called Ceylon Moors to be accepted in the communal representation of the British colonial system. They appeared in public as an independent "race" of Arab origin. They refused to be a subcategory to the Tamil or the Sinhala speakers. The Muslims have had bitter experiences with both Tamil and Sinhala speakers. The second group comprised principally the merchants. They manned and worked the boats sailing between the two countries. This group visited the island year after year, coming in at the start of the sailing season and going at its close or during the next year. During each visit, they spent several months on the island. Over time, they set up business relations, acquired friends, property, and perhaps wives, too, and fathered children. This group is referred to in Dutch and early British documents as "Coast Moors".

As the early settlers were traders, they adopted Tamil as their spoken language. At this period, Tamil was the medium of trade and commerce. Many Arabic words were introduced, and Tamil began to be written in Arabic script, giving rise to what is termed "Arabic-Tamil". Many literary works and recitals were composed in Arabic-Tamil, most of which are popular even today.

Many customs were adopted from the Tamil and Sinhala communities, and these are prevalent today. Those Muslims who migrated to the Hill country have taken "gē" names like the Sinhala people. Marriage customs such as the use of *tāli*, a necklace which the bridegroom gives to the bride; the throne, like the one of the Tamils; and the ceremony to ward off the evil eye are all customs adopted from these communities.[36]

The Muslim community consists not only of the descendants of the Arab traders who settled here; later, many Muslim settlers arrived from India and from the Malayan region.[37]

Muslims have a particular ethnic concern. When we enumerate the language groups in Sri Lanka, Muslims do not wish to be classified as Tamil speakers. In their classification, there are in Sri Lanka Sinhala and Tamil speakers—and Muslims. They break up a linguistic classification and create a peculiar "capsule". The reason is not to disappear in their "identity" as Muslims among Tamil speakers, who for decades have proclaimed that Muslims are nothing but Tamils who have converted to Islam.

Muslims in Sri Lanka have chosen to emphasise religion as an ethnic icon, which goes against the GoSL's interests. In June 2019, Sri Lanka's prime minister criticised a former Muslim governor for identifying himself as "Muslim", stating that everyone should identify themselves as "Sri Lankans".[38]

Islam has been a unifying factor for the Muslims in Sri Lanka, but for some decades, Wahabi and Salafist influences have come from Saudi Arabia, which rejects saintly tomb shrines and Sufi interpretations of Islam, which are classified as blasphemy. They also introduced *hijab*, *niqab*, and *abaya*. The influences have radicalised some groups, which decided to follow the call on Easter Sunday in April 2019 by ISIS to take up the struggle against Western influence, understood as Christian influence. This attack was not part of the expected antagonism between Muslims and politicised Sinhala Buddhists, but the persevering process of hostility has facilitated radicalisation in the direction of ISIS.

With the progress of time, community leaders realised the importance of participation in the national system of education, which was imperative to the progress of the community. This trend could be observed in the establishment of Ahadiyya schools (were known as Maktabs), Arabic colleges, Qur'an madrasas, Islamic preschools, Muslim schools, and universities.[39] A large number of government schools were opened in Muslim areas, an increased number of Muslims were appointed as teachers, training colleges were established for the teachers, instructions in the subjects of Arabic and Islamic were introduced, and special textbooks for those subjects were produced.[40] Muslim leader M.H.M. Ashraff (1948–2000) must be mentioned as the founder of a political party for Muslims for the first time to confirm the "identity" of Muslims in Sri Lanka.

There is a problem: the state's "protecting" and "fostering" Islam is counteracted by Muslims' persevering claim for regional autonomy in the East as part of their "identity" and by the hate speech of political Sinhala Buddhist for decades. The recent influence of ISIS and the tragedy on Easter Sunday in 2019 have been exploited by political Sinhala Buddhists, including monks, to restart violent campaigns against Muslims in general and rationalise these by reference to Buddhists being "foremost".

Christians and the state

The state of Sri Lanka "protects" Catholics and "Christians" through a Department of Christian Religious Affairs. Its vision and mission are to implement programs according to the policy framework of the government, to ensure the wellbeing of the Christian community while contributing to the development and preservation of Christian religion and culture.[41] "Christian" refers here to both Catholics and Protestants.

In another formulation, we learn that the department works for the welfare of Christians; provides secular support for the sustenance of Christian religion and culture; and promotes Christian values, culture, and beliefs in a socially acceptable manner.[42]

The department intervenes for the celebrations of church feasts; it provides financial assistance to renovate churches and religious buildings, it produces Parliamentary bills and acts; it

promotes Christian literature, art and culture, and religious education; it safeguards the rights and privileges of Christians; and it assists in the celebration of Christian festivals.[43]

Of particular interest is the formulation of the department's primary objective; it is to safeguard the rights and privileges of the Christian community, as guaranteed in the constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in liaison with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL), National Christian Council Churches (NCC), and the government in all matters that pertain to the rights of the Christian community concerning worship, practice of the faith, and its promotion, as guaranteed by the Constitution.[44]

There is a problem: the state's "protecting" and "fostering" of Christians is counteracted by political Sinhala Buddhists[45] on whom the state is dependent.

Summary and conclusion

The GoSL leaves no doubt that it "protects" and "fosters" Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians by the Constitution, which, however, demands special treatment for Buddhism. The situation resembles the situation in many Christian multireligious countries where we find a state religion which enjoys special treatment, but still, there is no existential fear among these minority religions because there is no politicised Christian movement that claims hegemonic cultural sovereignty like political Sinhala Buddhists do.

We have already seen that politicising Buddhists have an interpretation of what special treatment is. It comprises the complete cultural sovereignty of Buddhism in the whole country. We must go deeper into the construction of the Constitution's section on sharing of power of the centre with the provinces. An ethnically deeply divided country without power-sharing in a unitary state creates a non-consociational society breeding politicised antagonising ethnies, including religions.

From the formation of an integrated state as a beginning of a unitary state by the British in 1833, there has been a demand from the ethnies for the realisation of power-sharing. A unitary state may be democratic if there is a shared religion, language, and territory, for example, in Sweden, which had Protestantism as state religion up to 2000; one language, Swedish; and one territory under full control in all directions. With the growth of a consciousness of minority rights in the 20th century, even the Swedish state had to recognise cultural and territorial rights for Saamis and other minorities in Sweden, including territorial autonomy. Sri Lanka does not have one shared religion like Sweden, but to get one, even if is not shared, Sri Lanka eliminated minority rights from the Constitution in 1972. These minority rights were the last attempt in 1947 by the British to prevent the creation of non-consociationalism. True, there has been a relocalisation/outsourcing of administration in Sri Lanka, but relocalisation/outsourcing is not power-sharing.

India forced Sri Lanka to accept a pseudo-federal system in 1987, but this was done against the wishes of the Tamil Resistance Movement and political Sinhala Buddhists and does not function properly today. All suggestions for a confederation, federation, and devolution of power have been rejected by both sides, because it is too little for the former and too much for the latter. It is, of course, not idealised Buddhism which prevents power-sharing; it is the construction of the unitary state in a deeply divided society. This construction results in aggressive majoritarianism as represented by the political Sinhala Buddhists to encapsulate a defence reaction by the minority ethnies.

After independence in 1948, the government of Ceylon/Sri Lanka has been involved in at least 172 violent confrontations ending in massacres with protesting Tamil civil speakers in the north and east (NESoHR 2012). These Tamil speakers had demanded some form of

power-sharing, and some were ready to fight for it with arms. Some required a separate state called Tamiḻīḻam. They had lost confidence in the parliamentary procedures, which were called majoritarianism. Some Muslim parties demanded regional autonomy, but they failed, too. The absence of cultural sovereignty for ethnies also affected the relations between the ethnies in Sri Lanka. Their use of violence against each other is not due to innate or racial evilness of individuals, groups or "races" or to their belonging to a particular evil religion but to the absence of cultural sovereignty in their territories, which makes it possible for Sinhalaness, including political Sinhala Buddhism, to expand. In Sri Lanka, religions are representatives of ethnic projects. In the struggle between ethnies and between ethnies and the state, not only is religion at stake but also an encapsulated religion's language, territory, and heritage.

The recent new engagement by ISIS does not belong to the expected antagonism between Lankan ethnies consisting of attacks and following convulsions of violence. There is little experience in 2020 by the state how to handle this new factor and how to prevent degrading generalisations about Muslims by Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians in Sri Lanka.

Notes

1 *Official Website of Department of Census & Statistics*. Population by Districts—2012 (Religion). www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2012Visualization/htdocs/index.php?usecase=indicator&action=Map&indId=11#
2 In this chapter, diacritics are also used in names of modern figures, organisations, and place names.
3 *Official Website of Department of Census & Statistics*.
4 *Official Website of Department of Census & Statistics*. www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/index.php?fileName=pop43&gp=Activities&tpl=3
5 *Official Website of Department of Census & Statistics*.
6 *Official Website of Department of Census & Statistics*.
7 *Ministry of Christian Affairs Sri Lanka*. www.christian.gov.lk/
8 *Visuddhimagga*, *The Visuddhi Magga of Buddhaghosa*. Edited by C A F Rhys Davids. London: PTS, 1975.
9 *The Dhammapada*, Edited by J R Carter and M Palihawadana. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
10 The *Mahāvaṃsa*, Edited by Wilhelm Geiger. London: PTS, 1958 (1908).
11 The *Dīpavaṃsa*. *An Ancient Buddhist Historical Record*. Edited and Translated by Hermann Oldenberg. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services (Reprint), 1982.
12 *Cūḷavaṃsa*, *Being the More Recent Part of the Mahāvaṃsa*. Edited by Wilhelm Geiger. Vols. I, II. London: PTS, 1980 (1925–1927), 1980.
13 *Dhammapada pāli,* 5.
14 "Buddhism Is the Only Pacifist Religion Says Sri Lankan Minister." *Tamil Guardian*, June 10, 2019. www.tamilguardian.com/content/buddhism-only-pacifist-religion-says-sri-lankan-minister
15 "New Army Chief of Staff Assumes Office." *Sri Lanka Army*, January 10, 2019. www.army.lk/news/new-army-chief-staff-assumes-office-0.
16 The first dating is made by Wilhelm Geiger, the second by The University of Ceylon, *History of Ceylon*.
17 The story about the killing of Eḷāra is in the *Mahāvaṃsa*, Chapter 25. For an analysis, see Schalk 2013.
18 For the relation between Sinhala and Tamil Christians see Pinto, Leonard (2015) *Being a Christian in Sri Lanka. Historical, Political, Social, and Religious Considerations*, 71–96. Bloomington: Balboa Press.
19 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019. http://mobs.gov.lk/en/25-main/about-us, accessed March 18, 2020.
20 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019.
21 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019.
22 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019.
23 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019.
24 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019.
25 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019.
26 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019.
27 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019.
28 *Ministry of Buddha Sasana* 2019.

29 "Arrivals and Revivals of Buddhism." *The Daily News*, June 15, 2019. www.dailynews.lk/2019/06/15/features/188412/arrivals-and-revivals-buddhism

30 "Government Determined to Ensure Good Governance—PM." *Daily News*, June 17, 2019. www.dailynews.lk/2019/06/17/local/188564/government-determined-ensure-good-governance-pm

31 *Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs* (2019). www.hindudept.gov.lk/web/

32 *Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs* 2019.

33 *Department of Hindu Religious and Cultural Affairs* 2019.

34 For an excellent summary of Muslim perspectives, see McGilvray 2007.

35 *Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs*, Updated 9 September, 2017. http://muslimaffairs.gov.lk/.

36 *Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs*.

37 *Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs*.

38 "Everyone Should Identify As Sri Lankan Says Prime Minister." *Tamil Guardian*, June 12, 2019. www.tamilguardian.com/content/everyone-should-identify-sri-lankan-says-prime-minister

39 *Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs*.

40 *Department of Muslim Religious and Cultural Affairs*

41 *Department of Christian Religious Affairs*. www.tourismmin.gov.lk/web/index.php/en/

42 *Ministry of Christian Affairs Sri Lanka*. www.christian.gov.lk/

43 *Ministry of Christian Affairs Sri Lanka*.

44 *Ministry of Christian Affairs Sri Lanka*.

45 For the propaganda against Christians, see Pinto 2015: 292–332, 478–520.

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21

RELIGION AND SECULARISM IN CONTEMPORARY NEPAL

David N. Gellner and Chiara Letizia

Introduction

Religion in Nepal has always been simultaneously an individual, a family, and a political matter.[1] It has been individual because there has always been the freedom, within certain limits, for individuals to pursue their own style of devotion or ritual practice, should they wish to do so. It has always been familial in that for, a long time, maintaining the traditions, rituals, and festivals of the household, one's *kul dharma* or 'family religion,' was the main and minimal obligation that society expected people to fulfil. That expectation is still strong, even today. And, finally, religion has always been political because the rulers followed certain cults and traditions (primarily Śaivite and Śākta, though labelled as Vedic) that marked them as legitimate Hindu rulers.[2] They also forbade certain practices (killing cows, eating beef, hypogamous marriages) the banning of which served to mark their kingdom as a sacred Hindu realm; they ranked their subjects according to the degree to which they respected those taboos. Religion has always been political for a second and related reason: it has often (though not always) been a key marker of the ethnic group or caste to which a Nepali belongs. This has become increasingly self-conscious and politicized in the democratic and ethnically assertive era ushered in by the 1990 revolution and the fall of the Panchayat regime. Performative assertions of identity are made through large gatherings at newly created annual ethno-festivals that contest the dominant nationalist narrative of Hinduism, monarchy, and the Nepali language (Krauskopff 2003; Gaenszle 2016; Holmberg 2016).

Today, Nepal is officially a secular republic. Article 4 of Nepal's most recent constitution, promulgated in 2015, reads: "Nepal is an independent, indivisible, sovereign, secular, inclusive democratic, socialism-oriented federal democratic republican state." There immediately follows an explanatory clause: "Explanation: For the purposes of this clause, 'secular' is to be understood to mean religious and cultural freedom, along with the protection of religion and customs practised from ancient times."[3] The last part of this explanation can be interpreted as giving the state permission to provide special protection for older established religions, that is, Hinduism and Buddhism, protection that it does not necessarily need to provide for new religions coming from outside South Asia, that is, Islam and Christianity (for the census figures for religious affiliation, see Table 21.1). The affinity between the diverse religions of South Asia is often asserted by Hindu activists using the term 'the Omkar family,' that is, those religions that recognize the sacred syllable Om, which, when taken together, are claimed to account for more

Table 21.1 The religious breakdown of Nepal according to the decennial censuses

Religion	1952/4		1961		1971		1981		1991		2001		2011	
	Number	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*	*Number*	*%*
Hinduism	7,318,392	88.9	8,254,403	87.7	10,330,009	89.4	13,445,787	89.5	15,996,953	86.5	18,330,121	80.6	21,551,492	81.3
Buddhism	707,104	8.6	807,991	9.3	866,411	7.5	799,081	5.3	1,439,142	7.8	2,442,520	10.7	2,396,099	9.0
Islam	208,899	2.5	280,597	3.0	351,186	3.0	399,197	2.7	653,218	3.5	954,023	4.2	1,162,370	4.4
Kirat									318,389	1.7	818,106	3.6	807,169	3.0
Christianity			458		2,541		3,891	<0.1	31,280	0.2	101,976	0.5	375,699	1.4
Jainism			831		5,836		9,430	0.1	7,561	<0.1	4,108	<0.1	3,214	<0.1
Nature													121,982	0.5
Bon													13,006	<0.1
Others	684						365,445	2.4	26,416	0.1	78,994	0.3		
Unstated			5,716	0.1					18,138	0.1			61,581	0.2
Total	8,235,079	100	9,412,996	100	11,555,983	100	15,022,831	100	18,491,097	100	22,736,934	100	26,494,504	100

Sources: H. Gurung (1998: 95), Dahal (2003, 2014).

Notes: percentages do not always add up to 100 because of rounding; the last digit of the total for 1981 has been corrected from '9' to '1'; the total for 2001 is left as reported in the 2001 census even though it is 15 too few.

than 90 percent of Nepalis (Letizia 2016b: 38; Wagner 2018). This idea is not new. Conversion to non-traditional religions was explicitly prohibited in Jang Bahadur Rana's law code of 1854 (Höfer 1979: 158). Proselytization was banned in the 1935 law code, which referred to Islam and Christianity as being "contrary to religion" (*vidharmi*) and "foreign" (*videśi*); they did not qualify as *dharma* and were instead referred to as *mat* ('belief') (Gaborieau 1999).

The insertion of an explanation of the term 'secularism' into the 2015 constitution was certainly not a coincidence. It can only have been the outcome of a compromise between those who wanted to remove secularism from the constitution altogether and those who wanted to retain it. There had been persistent rumours before the finalization of the constitution that the word 'secular' would be removed and would be replaced with a guarantee of religious freedom. It is certainly true that many Nepalis were and are very uneasy with the term *dharma-nirapekṣa* used to translate 'secular'. Literally, the Nepali term (a Sanskritic neologism shared with Hindi) means 'non-aligned with respect to *dharma*' or 'religiously neutral.'[4] Many Nepalis felt instinctively that the word implied a state that would remain indifferent if religious and moral rules were broken and unconcerned by the possibility of the majority of Nepalis converting away from their ancestral religious traditions (Letizia 2012, 2016b). Many would have liked a referendum on whether Nepal should continue to be officially Hindu, even if it was already a given that the country would dispense with the monarchy and become a republic.[5]

On the other side of the argument, many other Nepalis were and are keen to avoid the state being closely identified with Hinduism. Such Nepalis believe that granting Hinduism special status would reinforce the entrenched and traditional privileges of those considered 'high caste' in the past, that is, the Bahuns (Brahmans), approximately 13 percent of the population, and the Chhetris (Kṣatriyas), who are roughly 19 percent. This objection to official Hinduism does not only come from those who are followers of religions other than Hinduism. It is strong among many of those from Janajati (*janajāti*) backgrounds (i.e. those groups who in the past were referred to as 'hill tribes' or, in the nomenclature of the nineteenth-century law code, as *matwālī* or 'alcohol-drinkers,' and who are often called, loosely and colloquially, 'ethnic groups' in English today). Janajatis are slightly more than a third of the total population. The Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN; founded in 1991 and today with representative member organizations from 56 of the 59 officially recognized Janajati groups) positions itself as non-Hindu or anti-Hindu.[6] This is problematic because, though there are many more Buddhists among the Janajatis than among other groups, as well as many Christians and followers of the new census categories 'Kirat religion,' 'Bon,' and 'nature-worshipper,' there are many Janajati Hindus, too.[7] Even the many Janajatis who choose a non-Hindu label for census and other official purposes often follow daily and occasional religious practices that can broadly be classified as Hindu. Among those who are happy to describe themselves as Hindu in official contexts, there are many who nonetheless object to high-caste domination and would prefer the state not to be identified with Hinduism (there are also some Janajatis who disagree and support the campaign for a Hindu state).

There is a Hindu-inflected discourse (discussed further below) that seeks to deny the idea of 'secularism' any place within South Asia, or, alternatively, to appropriate it as a uniquely Hindu concept. According to this discourse, no distinction between the religious and the non-religious is made within the traditional Hindu concept of *dharma*. The idea that the state should not participate in, or should keep its distance from, or should avoid identification with any religious institution is, it is claimed, a foreign importation. This anti-secular discourse is popular in India and draws sustenance from the supposed traditional tolerance of Hinduism, its ability to encompass many different spiritual paths. This line of argument has many followers in Nepal also.[8]

In this chapter, we seek to explore how, in actual practice, the dividing lines between the religious and the political, the religious and the social, or the religious and the cultural, are being drawn up. Sometimes these are merely local and personal matters, as when a Christian Nepali has to decide whether to participate in the festival of Bhai Tika. In other cases, political battle lines and legal cases are the result. In the fight over animal sacrifice at the Gadhimai temple, examined below, the power of the state (expressed through the courts) lies with those who make modernist distinctions between religion and other spheres and who seek to distinguish between religion and superstition. In this, they follow the precedents of postcolonial Indian courts, which have frequently pronounced on what religion is, and on what is and what is not an 'essential part' of a particular religion (Galanter 1971; Fuller 1988; Berti et al. 2016; Das Acevedo 2016; Sen 2016). Those who defend traditional practices without recourse to secular argumentation to buttress their religious position have little chance of success. On the other hand, as Shneiderman shows, in analysing temple-building among the Thangmi of Dolakha, local actors can sometimes show considerable agility and flexibility in negotiating the new categories of the state and turning them to their advantage. As she remarks, the introduction of state secularism, and its application as a principle for distributing state resources, has in effect "increased awareness of such categories ['religion,' 'ethnicity'] through processes of reification and objectification" (Shneiderman 2018: 79).

The religious and the secular/cultural/social: a new divide

Many Nepalis would agree that in daily life, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish what is religious from what is merely cultural practice and therefore secular. Buddhist Newars, for example, have a long tradition of being enclaved within a broadly Hindu context (Gellner 1992). They have a strong sense of their own distinct identity, yet at the same time, it is possible for them to appear very similar to their Hindu neighbours, so similar that they can represent themselves, when necessary, as just a variant on Hindu themes. They have many rituals that parallel exactly their Hindu equivalent (for example, *śrāddha* mortuary rituals). As long as such rituals are performed by a Buddhist priest (a Vajrācārya rather than a Brahman), and therefore in a Buddhist idiom, as long as they are directed towards Buddhist divinities, using Buddhist mantras, they can claim to be Buddhist. At the same time, they share with Hindus the same festivals and sacred sites, and they can worship many of the same deities as Hindus while ascribing to them an alternative identity (seeing Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of learning, as Mañjuśrī, the Buddhist bodhisattva of wisdom, for example). There is a sliding scale, therefore, of core Buddhist practices, practices that are shared (but carried out in a Buddhist idiom), and shared practices that are identical and in common with Hindus. It is rare for Newar Buddhists ever to stop and ask themselves: Is this Buddhist? Should I be doing it? It is only a minority of Buddhist reformists (e.g. followers of the newly imported Theravāda tradition or modernist reformers among the Tharus and Magars) who seek to make a sharp distinction, consciously and deliberately avoiding everything that could possibly be labelled as Hindu (LeVine and Gellner 2005: 9–11, 282–283; Letizia 2014; Leve 2017).

There are many Nepalis who practise their inherited 'tribal' religion, which incorporates many Hindu elements. In the past, they would have been labelled as 'Hindu,' the default category for anyone not clearly Buddhist, Muslim, or Christian. The specialists of these tribal religions are shamanic priests and healers. The activists, whether religious, ethnic, or both, of these traditions have been involved in a huge attempt to reclassify their traditions as 'Kirat dharma' (introduced from 1991), 'Bon,' or 'nature-worshipper' (both from 2011) (Table 21.1). Many from these backgrounds, however, continue to practise in a pluralist and polytropic manner and are happy to continue to be labelled 'Hindu.'[9]

By contrast, for some Muslims and most Christians, living surrounded by a Hindu society, the issue of demarcation from Hinduism is—as it is for the purist or 'hardcore' Theravādins (Leve 2017)—much more pressing. The Muslims of the Nepalese hills, who have long acted as itinerant bangle-sellers, as well as being hill farmers, had to work out a modus vivendi a long time ago. Their ethnographer, Marc Gaborieau (1993), describes how they often have close relations with their Hindu neighbours. They share the same language and the same kinship system. They often participate in local festivals, defining these as 'customs,' not 'religion'. At the time of Dasain, the biggest Hindu festival of the year, when everyone in Nepal strives to return to their home village to be with their relatives, hill Muslims participate in the festival, declining only to take a red-vermilion *ṭikā* on their foreheads. Instead they give each other a *ṭikā* with mustard oil, which leaves no visible mark. Reformist Muslims have made use of these same distinctions to mark out precisely this kind of practice, along with saint worship, as 'not really Islam' and therefore as forbidden practices to be abandoned (Sijapati 2011: 61, 109, 123).

Newly converted Christians, of whom there are now many from all castes and backgrounds, face a similar problem. Problems arise particularly at times of death. Burial is a key cultural practice that differentiates Christians from most Hindus, who cremate their dead.[10] For Hindus, the idea of burial, except in the case of exceptional spiritual personalities (who by contrast *should* be buried), is somewhat threatening. Burial may lead to ghost attack through possession of the descendants of the deceased person. As Sharma (2013) has described, this has led to cases of forcible exhumation and cremation of the remains. Leaving aside death rituals, there are numerous occasions in everyday life when Nepali Christians have to make a decision about whether something is merely a part of Nepali culture, in which case there is no problem about participating with their neighbours, or whether it is in fact religious, in which case they must avoid it. Clearly, they cannot participate in overt acts of worship or the accepting of blessed food and other substances (*prasād*), still less have anything to do with animal sacrifice. But what about family-oriented festivals such as Dasain or Tihar? Some Christians do perform the ritual of Bhāi Ṭikā, in which sisters 'worship' or 'bless' their brothers for long life and the brother in turn gives a present to his sister. Some Christians participate in the rite while substituting Christian blessings for the Hindu ones. Kirchheiner (2017) shows how the Christians he worked with make a distinction between 'culture' (*sanskṛti*) and 'Hindu [life-cycle] rituals' (*sanskār*) in order to work out when is acceptable for them to participate with friends, neighbours, and Hindu family members and when it is not.

In the distant past, it was hard to imagine conversion of the Abrahamic sort in the Hindu or Buddhist contexts of Nepal. Individuals might have a deep spiritual experience and renounce family life and become an ascetic, but this was not conceptualized as a move from a false idolatry to true religion. It did not put into question the basic frame of family and group religious identity, one's inherited *kul dharma*, except for the individual concerned. It did not imply that everyone belonged or should belong to one and only one named religious tradition. In the first national census, carried out in two phases in 1952 and 1954, people had no idea what to answer when faced with the question, 'What is your *dharma*?' The idea that it had to be one, and only one, from a suite of options—Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam—was unfamiliar, and the census enumerators had to be trained on how to recognize the adherents of one or other religion (Gellner 2005: 755, 771). Still further in the past, in the eighteenth century, Capuchin fathers lived in the three city states of the Kathmandu and attempted to convert the rulers. King Ranjit Malla of Bhaktapur refused to convert himself, but he offered them some of his low-status subjects (Alsop 1996: 132). It seems that the converts themselves were not given much choice in the matter.

When Prithvi Narayan Shah conquered the Kathmandu Valley in 1768–9, these few Christian converts were expelled from Nepal; they settled near Bettiah in Bihar. Prithvi Narayan, his successors, and the Rana prime ministers who ruled Nepal from 1845 to 1951 all agreed that they did not want Christian converts appearing in their society. The idea that individuals can attempt to abandon their position in the caste hierarchy and leave off their *kul dharma* remains threatening to many Hindus even today. When Christians began to appear and speak in public after 1990, many Hindus were shocked (Hoftun et al. 1999: 313f), and this strengthened their resolve to make sure that the country continued to be officially Hindu in the 1990 constitution. Seventeen years later, in January 2007, it was only because of the tight connection between the monarchy and Hinduism that the interim assembly passed an interim constitution with no mention of Hinduism and then, in May 2008, the new Constituent Assembly voted to get rid of both Hinduism and the monarchy. Subsequently, many MPs regretted their action (Letizia 2016b: 40–42).

Despite laws against providing incentives for conversion, there is plenty of evidence that Christian conversion is happening at an increasing pace. The 2011 census recorded 375,699 Christians, or 1.4 percent of the population, up from 0.5 percent ten years earlier. Many believe that this is a considerable underestimation. There are two main patterns of conversion. In one pattern, whole villages (usually Tamangs) convert together (Fricke 2008). The advantage here is that the social tensions caused when an individual or just one household converts are avoided. There is mutual support. The other main pattern is when an individual—often someone who has experienced considerable tensions and conflicts with neighbours and kin—falls ill and cannot be cured by any of the conventional means (doctor, spirit medium, Tantric healer). As a last resort, often at the suggestion of a friend, they try visiting a church and find instant relief. The church provides both physical healing and a readymade community (Gibson 2017a, 2017b). For many, it would seem that the adoption of Christianity is a form of 'suitable modernity' and, in some cases at least, a way to be both true to local history and internationally connected at the same time (Campbell 2016; Liechty 2003).

In the eyes of the Hindu majority, foreign missionaries hold out inducements that encourage vulnerable people to convert, the old South Asian accusation of 'rice Christians'. The evidence from those who have studied the phenomenon is that the evangelizing is done by Nepalis themselves rather than by foreigners. What Nepali Christians seek is a secular state in the sense of a state that will not play favourites between religions, a state that will give them the freedom to follow their faith without interference and allow them spaces to use as cemeteries.

A parallel problem is faced by those groups determined to shake off an older Hindu identity and to declare themselves Buddhist or Kirat. They have to identify those elements of what they are used to doing that can be easily and conveniently labelled as 'Nepali culture,' and therefore can be continued, from the specifically Hindu elements that must be abandoned. Out of this process of constructing a 'not-Hindu' identity, there grew the campaign to boycott the national festival Dasain. Janajati activists were the leaders of this movement.[11] After some years of controversy, a kind of steady-state compromise has emerged in which a few activists self-consciously avoid the festival altogether, but most Janajatis participate, while saying, 'This is not our festival,' 'It was imposed upon us by others,' 'It symbolizes our defeat,' and so on.

The two major Janajati groups whose activist leaders began to advocate for a new Buddhist, and not Hindu, identity in the 1990s and early 2000s were the Tharus and Magars. Tharu and Magar intellectuals proposed new historiographies for their groups, affirming a Buddhist past (Krauskopff 2003, 2009; Letizia 2014). Tamangs, by contrast, had always been Buddhist (Holmberg 1989, 2016; Steinmann 2016). Gurungs had a traditional affinity with Buddhism without ever being so unequivocally Buddhist as the Tamangs (Tamblyn 2002); many of them had, in

fact, come to think of themselves as Hindus, so that a Buddhist conversion or re-conversion movement was necessary among them, too (Hangen 2010: ch. 6). The Rais and Limbus, in the far east of the country, have no tradition of following Buddhism and therefore, among them, anti-Hindu activism takes the form of espousing the label 'Kirat religion' (Gaenszle 2013, 2016; Shrestha and Gellner 2018).

This religiously oriented Janajati activism converged with that of Buddhist Newars in the Kathmandu Valley, who ever since the 1920s had been experiencing a revival of Buddhism in its modernist Theravāda form (LeVine and Gellner 2005; Leve 2017). These Newar Buddhists, both monks and laypeople, had a key role in the campaign for a secular state in 1990. Their activism also took the form of missionary work to spread Buddhism among other Nepalese groups, in part to increase the number of Buddhists in the decennial census, which they firmly believed had been kept artificially low during the Panchayat period. These Buddhist activists organized Buddhist Awareness Camps for ethnic groups, where an introduction to Buddhism with a modernist flavour was mixed with ethnic and political activism. The camps led to a series of activist campaigns to construct local monasteries, to substitute Buddhist life-cycle rituals performed by lay officiants for rituals performed by Brahman priests, to find evidence of a Buddhist past in the group's traditions and artefacts, and to encourage Tharu and Magar boys to ordain as Theravāda novices and go for education and training in Thailand.

Tharu and Magar activists saw Buddhism as a rational and modern system of values that would help their people discard superstitions (such as the Gadhimai sacrifices discussed below), the worship of gods, blind obedience to authority, and costly rituals celebrated by Brahmans (all features attributed to Hinduism). In their eyes, just as for Ambedkar as leader of the Dalits in India, Buddhism was a positive tool for the modernization, education, and development of their group, freeing it from a position of inferiority in a religiously defined hierarchy and from exploitation by Hindu high castes. Buddhism has the added advantage in Nepal of being an identity that cannot be accused of being 'un-Nepali,' because Lumbini, the Buddha's birthplace, lies in Nepal. Nepal therefore claims the Buddha as a 'son of Nepal,' a fact of which the government seeks to take maximum advantage (diplomatically and to encourage tourism/pilgrimage). All Nepalis, whether Buddhist or not, are proud that the Buddha was born in Nepal and resent the way in which he is often represented as Indian (Dennis 2017; Gellner 2018).

What is secularism in the Nepali context?

When the state was defined as secular in the Interim Constitution of 2007, there had been no discussion of what secularism was or could be. At the time, it was mostly accepted by the political elite, with some misgivings, as a necessary tool to remove the king and as part and parcel of establishing a republic. Although they understood that it was a momentous and necessary step towards a more egalitarian society, they did not engage in any debate on the complex changes that would need to be worked out.

This lack of clear leadership from pro-secular politicians created a vacuum, which was filled by other stakeholders and multitude of different voices. Amidst the variety of religious, political, social, and geographical circumstances, secularism appeared as a fluid and multivocal notion. What all the different advocates and positions had in common was the idea that secularism was not simply a debate about the proper relationship between the state and religion but was rather about the broader response of the state to ethnic and religious diversity. For Janajati activists and for non-Hindu religious activists, whose movements had been created and taken off in the 1990s, secularism was a means to counter a centuries-old process of Hinduization. The point was to de-Hinduize the state and to establish a multicultural Nepal.[12] Distinct ethnic groups and

religious minorities wanted to be recognized at last on an equal footing with the majority. For them, secularism did not imply the shrinking of religion to the private sphere; it was about giving minorities the chance to affirm their existence in public, with official recognition, including their own specific religious festivals and traditions. Thus, state recognition for new religious festivals linked to particular groups, and state contributions to funding them, were considered victories for secularism.

The Maoists, who were very influential in the period when secularism was being established, saw secularism as a way to free Nepali society from a deep-rooted feudalism based on Hinduism. Interestingly, for them, it was a 'gradual path' (towards an atheist agenda), a path of respect for all religions. Thus, they shared, though for different reasons, the dominant mainstream vision of secularism.

Muslims and Christians favoured secularism because they identified it with a notion of equality for all religions that implied special treatment for specific groups on issues that were important for them. Muslims hoped that secularism would mean that they could have *shari'a* law recognized for their community and they hoped to receive state funds for Madrasa education and going on Hajj, as happens in India. Christians, on the other hand, focused on secularism as implying religious freedom, specifically the freedom to choose one's religion (and to convert).

On the part of Hindus, there was a wide spectrum of views. Some simply denied that the vote for secularism was valid. Others, in line with a pervasive discourse discussed further in the next section, believed that secularism was a Christian conspiracy to allow proselytization and that it would lead to the mass slaughter of cows and communal violence. Secularism is thus a threat (to the Hindu order), which is therefore a justification for a (sometimes violent) defensive response.[13] Another rather convoluted position of the Hindu right appropriates secularist ideals into its own discourse on the lines of 'Hindu secularism' described above. It equates secularism with 'religious tolerance' and 'equal regard to all religions,' but in the same breath, it denies these qualities to actual secularism, which is portrayed as promoting proselytising religions and thus being disrespectful and disruptive. Hinduism, in contrast, is described as a true all-encompassing and tolerant tradition, thus providing the neutral and 'secular' ground on which all Nepalis can meet in harmony (Letizia 2016b: 59–60).

A Hindu stance, distinct from the foregoing, which is both anti-secular and progressive, focuses on reforming 'superstitious' and 'backward' practices within Hinduism. In other words, social activism does not require secularism; reforming Hinduism to weed out the backward aspects of tradition can provide a solution that does not imperil the Hindu order. The very fears and hostility expressed by Hindutva associations and activists demonstrate that both the opponents and the advocates of secularism share an understanding of it as the recognition of religious diversity and the institutionalization of freedom of religion: in other words, that secularism marks the end of the former primacy of Hinduism.

It was inevitable that the vague and ambiguous clauses of the new constitution would end up being tested in the courts. In 2008, the Supreme Court quashed a petition invoking secularism in order to repeal the law criminalizing cow slaughter. The Court skirted the issue by pinning the justification for the ban on a secular provision (that the cow is the national animal) rather than the expected and usual understanding that it is a sacred Hindu animal (Letizia 2016b). Another case that reached the Supreme Court concerned the young girl chosen to be the famous 'living goddess' Kumārī. The petitioner claimed that the living goddess tradition infringed the child rights of the girl chosen. In a balanced judgement delivered on 16 August 2008, the Court argued that, while supporting tradition, it was necessary to exclude 'backward practices' from the Hindu religion, thus paving the way for reform and yet maintaining a reformed and modernized Kumārī tradition (Letizia 2013, 2016a).

The first case where the Supreme Court was obliged to rule on the boundary between 'the secular' and religion arose because of a controversy over the appointment of Nepali priests at Paśupatināth temple, as instructed by a new Maoist-led government that controlled the temple's governing body (Letizia 2012). The government, seeking an advantage in the cultural struggles it was waging against dominant forms of practice, invoked nationalist reasons to appoint Nepali priests at Paśupatināth, going against the centuries-old tradition of appointing south Indian Bhaṭṭa priests to the Paśupati temple. However, this provoked such a backlash in Nepal and India that the government had to back down. It was ironic that one of the first legal invocations of the principle of secularism came on behalf of a Hindu temple seeking to block government action perceived as anti-Hindu (whereas it was widely presumed that secularism was about protecting non-Hindus from the Hindu majority). The court supported the principle of non-interference by the government in its judgement of 11 January 2010. The Paśupatināth case led people to understand secularism in a new way, as involving the principle of non-interference by the state in religious institutions and practices—a notion that was inconceivable under a Hindu state (and not previously applied in the other cases). However, the substantial reforms (new administrative structures) that were introduced at Paśupatināth after this case allowed the state to continue its direct involvement in the running of the temple. Thus, surprisingly, the notion of non-interference invoked in the petition and nominally validated by the court did not have major consequences for the way the temple is run.[14]

Among ordinary people, the introduction of secularism (despite the absence of a clear definition or significant legislation) created a generalized 'feeling of epochal change,' in some cases feared, for others anticipated with hope.[15] The Western notions of secularism—the separation of state and religion or the privatization of religion—are not what Nepalis generally understand by the term, nor is it (the Paśupatināth case excepted) what is implied in most legal arguments, either. Hardly anyone questions state support for religion as such. Rather, for most people, the issue is about treating all religions equally and fairly. In line with Indian notions of secularism (Bhargava 2010, 2012), it is assumed by almost everyone that religion is, and should be, expressed at individual, familial, and group levels. Only a few intellectuals imagine that secularism should mean confining religion to the private sphere with a concomitant general secularization of society. Most people expect that religious arguments, religious symbols, and religious groups will find their place in the public sphere. Non-Hindus hope to be accepted on the basis of equality and without the hierarchical expectations of the past. Having said that, it is important to note that Muslims in Nepal do not feel sufficiently secure to campaign openly in the way that Buddhists frequently do. Some have even been persuaded to come out with statements favouring a Hindu state.[16]

Despite the fact that religion is still important at all levels—within households, in public, in politics, and at the group level—it would not be correct to say that there has been no secularization of Nepali life at all. The much greater prestige and resources received by Western biomedicine in Nepal, as compared to Ayurvedic medicine or alternative forms of ritual and quasi-religious healing, is one indication of that gradual secularization (Gellner 2001b). In politics, even under the Panchayat regime with its public self-presentation as the world's 'only Hindu Kingdom,' there was in practice a considerable secularization of governance (Gaborieau 1982). In the aftermath of the devastating 2015 earthquakes, it was an entirely secular monument, the Dharahara tower (also known as the Bhimsen tower), and not the Paśupatināth temple, that came to symbolize the nation in poetry, essays, and the iconography of a nation reborn (Hutt 2019). In law, as will be shown in discussing the Gadhimai festival below, secular reason increasingly trumps purely religious reason.

Despite the gradual process of secularization, the simple fact of becoming an officially secular state has had consequences for key religious issues such as conversion and cow slaughter. Christians feel relatively more secure and less likely to be harassed over the issue of conversion (Letizia 2016b: 62–63), though both Christians and Muslims continue to feel insecure to varying degrees. Ironically, as in the Paśupatināth case, secular arguments have been invoked by the courts for the continuation of state protection for cows. But prosecutions of Muslims for cow slaughter, though continuing, are much less likely to be successful (ibid.: 66–7). At the time when secularism was first declared, and the old Criminal Code still remained in place, those charged with applying Nepal's laws in line with the new constitution found themselves caught between aspirations and fears; they had to juggle the symbolic power of the law, token enforcement, and pragmatic accommodations for the sake of social harmony.

The place of Hinduism in a newly secular state

As we have seen, Hinduism was the main legitimating framework for the Shah dynasty from the time of the formation of the current state of Nepal (in 1769 and the years that followed). It was equally the framework through which the Rana prime ministers legitimated their rule between 1845 and 1951. As Michaels shows (Chapter 9 in this volume), there is a deep history to the link between Hinduism and rulership in Nepal, going back nearly 2000 years. As Hinduism was the religion of the rulers, it is no surprise that there was considerable pressure to Hinduize as the Gorkhali state expanded its control and intensified its rule—pressure to which many local elites responded more or less enthusiastically over the course of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2008). At the same time, there was a gradual, almost imperceptible, bottom-up process by which Janajati peoples adapted to Hinduism and Hinduized; sometimes they were hardly aware that they were doing so (Allen 2008). There was the gradual emergence, at least in the 'middle hills,' the central band and heartland of the new Nepalese state, of a shared Hindu framework, perhaps best illustrated by the cult of the uniquely Nepali goddess, Svasthānī (her name means, literally, 'own place'). Worshipped by means of a fast and a text reading held over a month in winter, the Svasthānī cult started out in a Newar-speaking milieu in the Kathmandu Valley but quickly spread in its Nepali version during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is now widely practised wherever there are Nepali speakers and may be said to be the quintessential expression of popular Nepali Hinduism (Birkenholtz 2018).

Inevitably, in this Hindu-dominated polity, the two highest Hindu castes, the Bahuns (Brahmans) and the Chhetris (Kṣatriyas), came to dominate in almost all spheres of public life. The history of political and social mobilization since 1990 has been largely that of attempts by other groups in a highly diverse country of 125 castes and ethnic groups and 123 languages to find a new space and new recognition, to escape from that domination. For some of these groups, religion—either Buddhism or Bon or Kirati religion—has been a banner under which to contest this domination (Lecomte-Tilouine 2003; Letizia 2014; Gurung 2015). For others, mobilization as a new ethnic 'macro-category'—as Dalits (former Untouchables), as Janajatis (former 'hill tribes), or as Madheshis (people of the plains or Tarai)—has been an effective means to gain greater political representation.[17] Ethnic divisions and religion do not coincide in Nepal, meaning that there is no single religious label under which all those opposed to the dominant Hinduism can unite. There is, in short, fragmentation between the various movements and, for the most part, the dominance of Bahuns and Chhetris has continued (Lawoti 2013).

Despite such long-term deep structural continuities, there has been radical change in Nepal following the end of the Maoist movement, the removal of the monarch, and the introduction of a federal republican political system. Secularism came along with these changes. The push

for secularism was thus primarily about redefining the social and political role of Hinduism and was first manifested in the adoption of a multireligious holiday calendar and other measures intended to give a voice and recognition to religious minorities.

Anti-secular Hindu activists, who surfaced after 2008 and grew louder after the failure of the first Constituent Assembly in May 2012, were met at first with a surprising lack of response from pro-secularism intellectuals. This meant that constructive debate on the form that secularism should take in Nepal did not ensue, and the task of explaining and defining secularism was left largely to anti-secular voices, the Hindu Right in particular. Opposition to secularism between 2006 and 2015 was built around some recurrent arguments, which can be summed up by saying that the Hindu majority felt increasingly threatened. Describing Hindus as a 'besieged community,' supposedly undermined by Christian and Muslim proselytization, these arguments, borrowed from Indian antecedents, had already emerged in the early 1990s.

The issue of the loss of Nepali 'cultural identity,' intertwined with the issues of illegal conversion and cow slaughter, attributed to Christian and Muslim communities, respectively, have emerged as the focal points of the Hindu Right's opposition to secularism in contemporary Nepal. Secularism is often presented, in line with ideas widely circulated in India, as the product of a foreign Christian (and/or European Union) conspiracy intended to allow proselytization, convert people away from Hinduism, and weaken the country. The Hindu Right also blames the secular state for unleashing the 'dangerous potential' of minority religions, giving rise to communalism and conflict instead of peace and harmony. Secularism is condemned for allegedly opening the door to mass conversions. It is portrayed, simplistically, as giving religious minorities the right to convert to other religions and to eat cows, whereas protecting cows and banning conversion symbolized the purity and the Hinduness of the former kingdom. The country's loss of cultural unity and identity (Nepaliness equated with Hinduness) is lamented with the cry that Nepal is no longer the 'last land of the Hindus.'[18]

The backlash against the idea of secularism reached its peak in the months preceding the enactment of the new Constitution of 2015. As mentioned above, many hoped that the very term 'secular' (*dharma-nirapekṣa*) would not be used, but they were to be disappointed. The leading spokesperson for this point of view is Kamal Thapa. His party, the RPP-N, did extremely well in the 2013 elections, picking up many middle-class Hindu-leaning votes in Kathmandu and Birganj in the proportional part of the vote (every voter had two votes, one for a first-past-the-post candidate in their constituency, one for a proportional party list). The RPP-N won 44 seats, making it the fourth-biggest party and conferring considerable influence (Gellner 2014). From October 2015 to August 2016, Thapa was both foreign minister and deputy prime minister in a coalition government that was trying to implement the new constitution. This gave him a platform for his agenda of restoring Nepal's status as the world's only officially Hindu nation and also for the return of the monarchy. However, when elections were finally held in 2017 for the various tiers of the new federal system, with a national parliament much reduced in size, his party ended up with only one MP, thanks largely to the huge success of the UML-Maoist alliance. It seemed that the highwater mark of political Hinduism in Nepal had passed.

Meanwhile, the new republican state needed to work out how to deal with the huge number of Hindu rituals, temples, and land that it had inherited from the erstwhile monarchy. Before Nepal became a republic, the King would be present at many festivals. He was simultaneously the foremost Hindu 'sacrificer' or *jajmān* of the country and a symbol of the nation-state. On the one hand, the successful accomplishment of the festival and/or rituals brought about the fertility and prosperity of the kingdom through the person of the king. On the other, whatever the ethnic, regional, or cultic differences existing between its members, the nation could view itself as a unity in and through the king. Once the king had been removed, it was essential—so

the politicians now in charge of the country realized—to prevent the ex-king, Gyanendra Shah, from continuing to perform his ritual duties or he might one day return to power (Mocko 2016; Zotter 2016b). They could not risk a situation, as in India, where former princes continued their ritual roles despite no longer having any official status in the country's constitution, a position some have exploited to become powerful elected politicians. The Nepali government therefore set about systematically replacing the king with the president in big public festivals. Meanwhile, on occasion, Gyanendra attempted to sneak in and insert himself in proceedings at the appropriate time, claiming that it was his right, as a private citizen, to attend whatever religious event he wished. Monarchists still seek out Gyanendra's blessing at Dasain, as if he were still the king of the country. Similar issues occur in many local festivals where the king has a symbolic presence. The newly reconstituted relationship between political power and the gods has to be negotiated there, too, even when the state itself is no longer involved (Zotter 2016a).

It was clear to Baburam Bhattarai, leading Maoist ideologue and from 2008 to 2009 the finance minister in the Maoist-led coalition government, that depriving the ex-king of his ritual roles was not enough. Gyanendra also had to be removed from his principal residence, the Narayanhiti palace, and the palace converted into a museum, in order to mark a clear break with the past (Whitmarsh 2017, 2018). This happened in 2009. Most of the palace staff were retained as museum employees. Rs 50 million was allocated for the design and building of a republican memorial to be placed within the palace grounds, so that visitors would be guided on a teleological tour from monarchy to republic, from feudalism to hope, as they walked through the museum (Whitmarsh 2018).[19]

The debate over animal sacrifice at Gadhimai

Animal sacrifice to the gods has long been controversial in South Asia. Movements both outside of Hinduism, notably Jainism and Buddhism, and within it, for example Vaiṣṇavism, made a virtue of *ahiṃsā*, literally 'the absence of a desire to kill,' conventionally translated as 'non-violence.' Even those Hindus and Buddhists who do eat meat and/or do tolerate sacrifice refrain from doing so on certain days or under particular ritual circumstances. Campaigns against sacrifice were influential in India under the British and became stronger after independence, so that animal sacrifice there is, with some exceptions, mostly carried out away from the public gaze. In Nepal, by contrast, Vaiṣṇavism was much weaker and Buddhism accepted compromises (Owens 1993); the state sponsored and still sponsors large numbers of buffalo sacrifices at the annual Dasain festival (Michaels 2016). Thus, to the shock of some tourists and increasing numbers of Nepalis, the sacrifice of animals at Hindu shrines is frequent and easily observed. Debates over whether to sacrifice animals or to replace the animal with a vegetable substitute have reached even into villages (Adhikari and Gellner 2016b).

The Gadhimai festival, held every five years, at which large numbers of buffaloes, goats, and pigeons are slaughtered, is an outlier even among these practices.[20] As the Gadhimai temple is in the Nepalese Tarai and close to the Indian border, large numbers of Indians cross over to attend. It is estimated that possibly 250,000 animals, including 18,000 buffaloes, die and, in 2009, up to four million people attended. The festival has, since 2009, generated a considerable volume of activism, both in the public sphere and in the courts (Michaels 2016: 209–221). It was during the festival of 2009 that news and pictures of the slaughter started to circulate on the Internet, giving rise to vehement protests, locally and internationally, and attracting the condemnation of, amongst others, both Brigitte Bardot and Maneka Gandhi. Three separate petitions were filed at the Supreme Court of Nepal on the eve of the 2014 festival. The arguments placed before the Supreme Court invoked both religious and secular reasoning: that what happens at

the festival contravenes laws about the health of animals, cruelty to animals, the quality of meat, and pollution of the environment, and that it has negative effects on the psychology of children. It was also argued that sacrifice is not really dharma but, it was claimed, a corruption contrary to the spirit of ancient Hindu religion, which was based on non-violence (*ahiṃsā*).

On 4 August 2016, the Hon. Justices Ishwor Prasad Khatiwada and Anil Kumar Sinha responded to all three petitions together. This was a landmark judgement because the Court not only took it upon itself to determine the essence of the Hindu religion but also to recalibrate the social space given to a particular religious practice by giving more weight to competing (secular) human and animal rights. According to the Court, animal sacrifice is not a proper part of Hinduism, it is not justified in its scriptures, and it is contrary to Hindu norms of non-violence. They rejected the defendants' arguments that animal sacrifice is necessary to please the goddess on the grounds that the mother of the universe would not be happy to see her own children sacrificed. They stated that brutally killing thousands of animals "in the name of religion or tradition" is not appropriate for a modern civilization in the twenty-first century: it is a superstition and must be abolished.

In addition to these modernist Hindu arguments, the Court invoked the philosopher Peter Singer on animal liberation and compared the laws of 14 foreign countries that forbade and penalized cruelty to animals. The judgement concluded: "From whatever point of view one considers the matter—whether religious, social, cultural, ecological, moral, or logical—it appears desirable to bring an end to the practice of animal sacrifice." The judges recognized, however, that it would not be possible to stop the sacrifices overnight but rather directed the government to make a plan for bringing them to an end over time and in stages, and, in the meantime, to raise public awareness and take measures to ensure that proper health and environmental controls were in place to promote animal welfare.

Both the activists and the Court relied simultaneously on Hindu reformist and secular perspectives to re-describe the vocabulary of animal sacrifice, based on the idea of an asymmetrical exchange relationship with the goddess, in legal and reformist terms. Instead of being a renunciation of one's self and a righteous exchange with a higher power, animal sacrifice is refigured as a superstitious practice that needs to be banned, a barbaric and foolish display of violence without purpose, a classic 'social evil' against which all right-thinking people must protest. The local Hindu and Tharu perspective, in which faith in the goddess is an unequivocal good, to be expressed by each devotee in their own way, is certainly challenged by this combination of activist and legal reasoning, of Hindu reformist and secular-legal pressure. Although the festival has not come to an end, the number of sacrifices has undoubtedly decreased. By laying down general principles, the Supreme Court has established a precedent that can be used to challenge animal sacrifices at other festivals elsewhere in Nepal. The power of the court judgement to begin to effect change depended on its ability to wield *both* secular arguments about health, welfare, and rights *and* arguments about what Hinduism 'really is'. The defenders of sacrifice, who presented it as a valid, historical Hindu tradition and an expression of devotion protected by the right to freedom of religion, were not able to combat the arguments that their idea of Hinduism was 'backward,' 'superstitious,' and based on a misguided notion of the Hindu religion.

Conclusion

Avash Bhandari begins his study of the conflicts over the admission of non-Bahun pupils to the priestly school within the Paśupati area with the statement that "Secularism remains a highly contested term in the newly secular state of Nepal," and he ends with the observation that "the debate on secularism and inclusion in Nepal is far from a sealed deal" (Bhandari 2016: 85, 109).

The various examples of religious phenomena in contemporary Nepal described in this chapter certainly support these conclusions. Yet, despite the contestations, secularism has emerged as part of a new shared vocabulary, along with new concepts, such as 'religion,' 'ethnicity,' 'exclusion,' and 'gender,' to describe Nepal's famous heterogeneity.

Nepal is well behind India in the degree to which its society and traditions have modernized, but it is catching up fast (Gellner et al. 2016; Sijapati and Birkenholtz 2019). Change and adaptation cannot be avoided. Even the remotest villages are profoundly affected by the international migration of so many of their sons and daughters (Adhikari and Hobley 2015; March 2018; Zharkevich 2019b). In the personal practice of religion, many new, individualistic, and relatively ritual-free paths have emerged that appeal to the new urban middle class (Toffin 2016). The official position of the state on Hinduism and secularism changed radically with the 2007 Interim Constitution and the final adoption of the 2015 Constitution. We have described how secularism has been an ideal for those who wished to combat traditional Hindu dominance. We mentioned the way in which new distinctions between the 'religious' on one side and the 'non-religious' or 'secular' on the other have to be made by Christians, Muslims, and 'hardcore' Theravāda Buddhists in order to decide which Nepali traditions they may continue to practise and which have to be given up. Even the Thangmi villagers of Dolakha, described by Shneiderman (2018), have had to learn to think of their traditions as either religious or ethnic in order to negotiate the new categories of the state.

The institutionalization of minority rights has led the Hindu majority to feel newly on the defensive. Suddenly other religions also have a claim on the resources of the state. The king is no longer there, and the constitution no longer states (as it did in 1990) that he must be "a descendent of the Great King Prithvi Narayan Shah and an adherent of Aryan culture and the Hindu religion" (Dhungel et al. 1998: 226). In this context, a newly assertive Hindu modernism is attractive—for some as a political stance, for others as a cultural mission, and for yet others as a useful ally in the battle for the protection of animal rights. The Gadhimai festival distils many of the dilemmas and contests over the modernization of Hinduism. It highlights the combination of religious and secular reasoning that characterizes attempts at reform. Despite the fact that under the constitution, the state is no longer aligned with any one religion, the Supreme Court could not avoid taking a position on what Hinduism is. Despite its recommendation of gradual change rather than an outright ban, the most influential legacy of the Court's decision may be the attempt to define what Hinduism is, in its essential core, and its consequent specification of what can and should be changed in the long run.

Notes

1   We thank Rajendra Pradhan and Krishna Adhikari for helpful comments on this chapter. We are grateful to the British Academy for the support that it gave to Letizia for her research on secularism in Nepal as a Newton Fellow within the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, between 2009 and 2011. Gellner acknowledges also the support of the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) [grants ES/1036702/1, ES/J011444/1, ES/L00240X/1].

2   See Michaels (this volume) and the references on Dasain in note 11. Shneiderman et al. (2016) is a useful survey of recent literature on Nepal.

3   This is our translation of the Nepali: 4. *Nepāl rājya: (1) Nepāl svatantra, avibhājya, sarvabhaumsattāsampanna, dharmanirapekṣa, samāveśī, loktantrātmak, samājvād unmukh, saṃghiya loktāntrik gaṇatantrātmak rājya ho/ Spaṣṭikaraṇ: Yas dhārāko prayojanko lāgi 'dharmanirapekṣa' bhannāle sanātandekhi caliāeko dharma saṃskṛtiko saṃrakṣan lagāyat dhārmik, sāṃskṛtik svatantratā samjhanu parcha/.*

4   There has been intense argument in India ever since 1947 over how secularism (which was only written into the preamble of the Indian Constitution by Indira Gandhi in 1977) should be understood. Many argued for a different translation, *sarva-dharma-samabhāva*, or 'respect for all religions'; many have

suggested it should mean the equal treatment of all religions (often those who disliked the specific privileges of particular minorities, especially Muslims); and Rajeev Bhargava has theorized the actual practice of the Indian state as 'principled distance', that is, the state remaining equidistant but not necessarily treating all traditions the same (Bhargava 2010, 2012).

5 On the history of how Nepal became secular, see Letizia (2012, 2013, 2016a, 2016b), Leve (2007), Gellner and Letizia (2016, 2019). The 2015 Constitution attempts to give rights to and to satisfy everyone, thereby leaving the courts with much to adjudicate. In 2019, a case was brought arguing that the criminalization of conversion in Article 158 of the Criminal Code contradicts the freedom of religion guaranteed in Article 28 of the Constitution. The Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench dismissed the claim as unsubstantiated. Despite this, the state of the law—in particular, what constitutes an illegal act of conversion—remains uncertain (Payne and Shrestha forthcoming).

6 While the definition of *Ādivāsi-Janajāti* ('indigenous nationality') adopted by NEFIN includes the criterion of not being a part of the Hindu caste system, in line with the activism of the early 1990s that first introduced the idea of indigeneity to Nepal (Gellner 1997: 20–1), the definition used by the government-funded Nepal Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN), set up in 2002, omits it (Hangen 2010: 52).

7 On these new census religious categories, see Dahal (2014). On Kirat religion, see Gaenszle (2013, 2016). The link between religion and ethnicity is covered in more detail in Gellner and Letizia (2019) and in Gellner et al. (2016). On ethnicity in Nepal more generally, see, inter alia, Hangen (2010), Fisher (2001), Guneratne (2002), Lawoti (2005), Gellner (2007), Gellner et al. (2008), Lecomte-Tilouine (2009a, 2009b), Lawoti and Hangen (2013), Toffin (2013: ch. 3), Adhikari and Gellner (2016a), and Shneiderman (2015).

8 Even the lawyers who wrote a comprehensive commentary on Nepal's 1990 constitution (which, unlike the 2015 constitution, designated the country as a 'Hindu Kingdom') argued in defence of the idea of 'Hindu secularism': "There is no mysticism in the secular character of the state and so the institution of the Hindu state amounts to little more than that the Hindu mode of secularism is to prevail. . . . Thus the state treats alike the devout, the agnostic and the atheist. It eliminates God from matters of state and ensures that none shall be discriminated against on the ground of religion. . . . [B]y giving continuity to the concept of Hindu secularism the framers of the constitution warded off in Nepal the dichotomy between the theory and practice of secularism present in many jurisdictions" (Dhungel et al. 1998: 76).

9 For the term 'polytropy', see Gellner (2005). There is a huge literature on the shamanic religions of Nepal. See, i.a., Höfer (1974), Hitchcock and Jones (1976), Holmberg (1989), Mumford (1989), Sales (1991), Maskarinec (1995), Riboli (2000), and Gaenszle (2002).

10 A considerable number of Kirat people bury their dead as well (see Gaenszle 1999).

11 See Hangen (2005, 2010: ch. 6). On the contested interpretation of the Dasain festival, see also Levy and Rajopadhyaya (1990), Ramirez (1993), Krauskopff and Lecomte-Tilouine (1996), Campbell (1995), Pfaff-Czarnecka (1996), Gellner (2001a), Uesugi (2007), and Leve (2017).

12 See Leve (2007), Hangen (2010), Letizia (2014), Shneiderman (2018), and the sources given in note 7.

13 For a detailed case study of one extreme Hindu activist jailed for his possession of weapons and bomb-making equipment, see Letizia (2015); cf. Wagner (2018).

14 For earlier disputes, including court cases, about rights and control in the Paśupatināth temple, see Michaels (2011).

15 This is explored in many of the case studies in Gellner et al. (2016), including Zharkevich (2016); see also Zharkevich (2019a).

16 ET (2015). On Muslim insecurity, see Letizia (2016b: 48) and in more detail Sijapati (2011: ch. 4).

17 On ethnic mobilization, see the references in note 7. On these 'macro-categories,' see also Gellner (2016, 2019).

18 These ideas appeal to upper-caste Nepalis facing discrimination in the United States as well, as described by Sijapati (2019: 262f).

19 Much more detail on continuities and discontinuities between the pre- and post-republican periods can be found in Mocko (2016) and Whitmarsh (2018); the topic is also covered in Gellner and Letizia (2019) and Gellner (forthcoming).

20 This section is based on Letizia's fieldwork at the Gadhimai temple (Bara district) and in Kathmandu between 2016 and the present. The fieldwork and the court judgements are discussed in much more detail in Letizia and Ripert (forthcoming).

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22

IF YOU BUILD THEM, THEY WILL COME

The transformation of female monastic education in contemporary Bhutan[1]

Dorji Gyeltshen and Manuel Lopez

Introduction

Vajrayana Buddhism is the official state religion of Bhutan, and Buddhism has formed part of the cultural and political fabric of the country since its introduction in the 8th century. Before the arrival of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (Dz. Zhabs drung Ngag dbang rnam rgyal, 1594–1651), to Bhutan in 1616 and the formation of the country as an independent polity, the history of Buddhism and, by extension, of monastic education in Bhutan was deeply rooted in Tibetan monastic institutions in Tibet. The arrival of the Zhabdrung in the 17th century and the establishment of the Drukpa Kagyu as the dominant sect in the country changed the religious landscape. With very few exceptions, the only other dominant tradition that thrived in Bhutan until the present has been the Nyingma school, with a network of independent temples and monasteries led by charismatic lamas.

Although the establishment of the current monarchy in 1907 upended the theocratic system founded by the Zhabdrung, and the constitution approved in 2008 delineated clear boundaries between church and state, religion still plays a central role in Bhutanese politics and culture, and even economic policies such as "Gross National Happiness" have their roots in Buddhist principles. At the same time, Bhutan has also embraced economic development and progressive policies. Since 1959, for example, the country introduced universal secular education, challenging the monopoly on education held by Buddhist monasteries for centuries. The success of secular education forced religious institutions to rethink the goals and values of Buddhist education in Bhutan. This chapter explores how those changes have affected the education of nuns in the country.

Difficult beginnings: Bhutanese nuns in the 1980s

When Ani Tsultrim Wangmo (Dz. A ni tshul khrims dbang mo) decided to become a nun in 1982 at the age of 19, there were only three nunneries in Bhutan: Jachung Karmo (Dz. 'brag khyung dkar mo) in Punakha, Kila Gonpa (Dz. spyi la dgon pa)[2] in Paro, and Kunga Rabten (Dz. Kun dga' rab brtan), in Trongsa.[3] Jachung Karmo, the oldest of the existing nunneries in Bhutan,[4] was, at the time, abandoned and had been offered to the Central Monastic Body[5] as

a retreat place for monks.[6] Kunga Rabten had been built as a small temple in 1968 by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso (Tib. mkhan po tshul khrim rgya mtsho), a Tibetan lama exiled in Bhutan after the occupation of Tibet in 1959, to host a small group of 11 nuns who came with him into exile, and Kila Gonpa only had a handful of nuns. None of the nunneries offered formal education to nuns, none of the Bhutanese nuns were ordained,[7] and most of them did not even wear formal robes.

In order to receive an education, Ani Wangmo travelled to India, where she was ordained in 1984,[8] and informally studied at several Tibetan nunneries in exile. Over the ensuing decades, many Bhutanese nuns like Ani Wangmo travelled to India and Nepal to get the ordination and education they could not receive in their own country. Their exposure to the struggles, but also the new educational opportunities that Tibetan nuns were offered in India, inspired them to work to transform the status and education of nuns in Bhutan over the following decades. During this period, nuns have grown from a handful to almost a 1,000,[9] and nunneries have gone from the 3 already mentioned to 30 (and counting), with many nunneries now also opening satellite nunneries or retreat centres in different parts of the country.

Never in the history of Bhutan have there been as many nuns or as many nunneries, and Bhutan is currently living a remarkable period in which nuns are attaining a status as ordained nuns (and in some cases fully ordained nuns) and an education in numbers never seen in the history of the country. Some of this transformation can be explained as a consequence of the parallel transformation of religious education for monks in the country during the same period, a product of the introduction of universal secular education in 1959,[10] the adoption of the commentarial curriculum as the centrepiece of monastic education in the late 1980s,[11] and the rise of the shedra or commentarial college as the central educational institution for monks, which began in 1988 with the creation of Tango College.[12] Our contention though is that, in addition to those factors, female religious education in Bhutan has faced unique challenges that have forced nuns to search for creative and alternative ways to improve their religious and social status, as well as to have access to a better religious education. We argue here that historical, cultural, and religious constraints imposed on nuns, as reflected in the lack of full ordination (and in many cases even novice ordination), as well as insufficient institutional support, have forced nuns to rely on a transnational network of Buddhist institutions (mostly in India and Nepal), as well as in local non-governmental organizations such as the Bhutan Nuns Foundation (BNF), in order to improve their situation, as well as to think beyond the traditional framework of the status and the monastic education afforded to them in Bhutan.

In order to discuss this remarkable transformation and the impact it is having in the religious landscape of the country, this chapter will explore 1) the fight for recognition of Bhutanese nuns, and the growth of nunneries all over the country over the last 30 years, including the slow but steady implementation of various educational curricula for nuns; 2) the effects that the issue of ordination (or the lack thereof) has played in granting them access to education; and 3) the role that the Bhutan Nuns Foundation has played in developing alternative and socially oriented programs of education for nuns.

This chapter also aims to contribute to the research done on the recent innovations in Buddhist education and the monastic curriculum in the country over the last few decades by scholars such as Aris (1990), Phuntsho (2000), Denman and Namgyel (2008), Rennie and Mason (2008), Gandhi (2009), Zangmo (2009), Stiles (2009), Schuelka (2012), and Dukpa (2016). In particular, we want to contribute to the recent contributions to the study of nuns in Bhutan by Zangmo (2009), Robles (2014), Pommaret (2015), and Wangmo et al. (2018). We also want to participate, offering Bhutan as a case study, in the recent research done on female Buddhist education in other Buddhist countries, such as those by Havnevik (1989),

DeVido (2010), Salgado (2013), Kawanami (2013), LaFever (2017), and Langenberg (2018), among others.

A common theme in the research of scholars working on issues of Buddhism and gender is that the life and contributions of women have been neglected by modern scholarship because women have been, for the most part, institutionally and textually excluded from the tradition.[13] In the specific context of Bhutanese Buddhism, we agree with Wangmo et al. (2018: 145) that "Bhutanese nuns have been mostly invisible," and that they "remain invisible in contemporary Bhutanese religious literature and modern academic writing."[14] We hope this chapter brings some visibility to the remarkable work of Bhutanese nuns in their efforts to transform female monastic education in the country over the last 30 years.

First things first: building the foundation

Re-establishing novice ordination for nuns and building nunneries

As we have seen, in the early 1980s, there were three nunneries in Bhutan, Jachung Karmo in Punakha, Kila Gonpa in Paro, and Kunga Rabten in Trongsa, although none of the Bhutanese nuns were ordained, wore robes, or received any kind of formal education. The 80s, though, became a clear inflection point, with slow but significant changes in both the status of nuns and the number of nunneries that would signal a new beginning for female monastics in the country.

In terms of status, in 1982, two nuns from Shechen Ugyen Chozong (Dz. Zhe chen O rgyan chos rdzong), on the outskirts of Thimphu and popularly known as Sisina, were formally ordained in Kathmandu, becoming the first Bhutanese nuns of the modern era to officially receive the novice vows (Tib. dge tsul ma, Skt. śrāmaṇerikā) and to officially wear monastic robes.[15] Sisina had been the residence of the famous Tibetan Nyingma lama Dilgo Khyentse (Tib. Dil mgo mkhyen brtse) and his wife Khandro Lhamo (Tib. mkha' 'gro tA re lha mo), who had moved to Bhutan after leaving occupied Tibet in 1959. In 1969, Dilgo Khyentse built a small temple on the property and put a small group of nuns in charge of it.[16] Although Sisina, as a Nyingma institution, was not supported by the state, the fact that two of its nuns were officially ordained and wore monastic robes sent a signal to the rest of nuns in the country that change in status of female monastics in Bhutan was a possibility.[17]

As for the situation of Drukpa Kagyu nunneries, officially supported by the state, the restoration of Jachung Karmo in 1986 as a nunnery, and the reappointment of the charismatic Ani Lopenma Paldon as its head nun, signalled a reverse of fortune for the oldest nunnery in the country. The fourth king of Bhutan, Jikme Singye Wangchuck, sponsored 30 nuns to live in the nunnery, and the Je Khenpo sent a teacher to teach the nuns prayers and rituals. Although there was no change in the status of nuns (still not ordained), it showed the beginning of a commitment by the Central Monastic Body (CMB) to improve the condition of nuns in Bhutan.[18]

The 1990s saw further improvements, with new developments in the status of nuns, as well as with the emergence of new nunneries. Sisina, again, was at the centre of many of these transformations. In 1993, Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche (Tib. Zhe chen rab 'byams rin po che) sent 11 nuns from Sisina to Hong Kong to receive full ordination (Tib. dge long ma, Skt. bhikṣuṇī), the first Bhutanese nuns to achieve that status. In 1996, Sisina also was officially converted into a nunnery, under the official name of Shechen Ugyen Chozong, with a close connection to Shechen Monastery in Kathmandu,[19] and in 1998, it became the first nunnery in Bhutan to have its own shedra or commentarial college, with teachers brought from Shechen Monastery to teach the commentarial curriculum. Sisina is, arguably, the single most important nunnery

in the recent history of Bhutan, having been the first one to ordain nuns both as novice and fully ordained nuns, as well as being the first to provide nuns with the formal education of the commentarial curriculum.

Following the developments of Sisina, in 1998, the Ninth Gangte Tulku Kunzang Pema Wangyal (Dz. Kun bzang padma dbang rgyal), a Bhutanese Nyingma lama, began supporting some nuns at his main monastery in Gangte (Dz. sgang steng dgong pa). When the number of nuns was too big to ignore, he funded the construction of a new nunnery, Pemacholing (Dz. mtho slob pad theg mchog chos gling), in Tang valley, Bumthang. The nunnery also started its own commentarial college in 2001.[20]

As for the Drukpa Kagyu nunneries, progress was arguably slower. In 1995, the Queen Mother Ashi Tshering Yangdon Wangchuk donated funds to renovate the main temple at Jachung Karmo and to build new quarters to support new nuns, but by the mid 90s, it became clear that progress in the nuns' status and education was following two different speeds, if not two different tracks. The Nyingma nunneries, encouraged and supported by a transnational networks of monasteries, lamas, and nunneries, mostly in India and Nepal, took a more forward-thinking and progressive attitude, facilitated by the fact that they were able to implement changes without having to ask for approval or funding from the CMB. Changes in the Drukpa Kagyu tradition were significantly slower, since the CMB prioritized funding and the transformation of male monastic institutions.

Slowly but surely, the innovations of nunneries such as Sisina and Pemacholing, as well as the social and cultural transformations that were sweeping the country (the impact and influence of secular education that began in the 1960s, the radical changes that began in male monastic education in the 1980s, with the introduction of the new commentarial curriculum and the rise of the shedra or commentarial college that began in 1988 with the creation of Tango College) sparked an explosion of nunneries throughout the country from both the Nyingma and Drukpa Kagyu traditions, as seen in Maps 22.1 and 22.2.[21]

Map 22.1 Nunneries in Bhutan 1982

Map 22.2 Nunneries in Bhutan in 2019

There are several factors that can help explain the rapid increase of nuns and the growth of nunneries in the country. An obvious one is that the female monastic tradition had almost disappeared from Bhutan, and the sudden exposure to ordained Tibetan nuns and the growth of nunneries in India and Nepal inspired a revival of the tradition in Bhutan. The development of a universal and gender-inclusive modern secular education system in 1959 also challenged the cultural perception that women could not become nuns with the same rights to education and infrastructure as monks.[22] New policies implemented by the government during the second half of the twentieth century that advanced the rights of women in the country began to have an impact on the religious leadership of the country.[23] Finally, Tibetan nunneries in exile, such as Jamyang Choling (Tib. 'jam dbyangs chos gling), Chubseg (Tib. Shug gseb), Dolmaling (Tib. Sgrol ma gling), and the commentarial college at Ngagyur Nyingma Shedra (Tib. Mtsho rgyal shad sgrub dar rgyas ling), became models of educational institutions for nuns that individuals like Ani Wangmo had been exposed to and shared with Bhutan's religious leadership.

Introducing the commentarial curriculum: from ritual practice to intellectual learning

While the emergence of new nunneries all over the country signalled a change of attitude towards female monasticism, many of the nuns joining the new nunneries had a very limited access to education, which mostly focused on ritual learning and practice, and had no access to the modern religious education that was afforded to monks in the country in the form of the commentarial curriculum that had been introduced in the country in the late 1980s after the creation of Tango College.[24]

Prior to 1988, monastic education in Bhutan was mostly focused on ritual, and it was learned at the Dratshang or ritual college. The arrival of Tibetans from the exile from India and Nepal in the 1960s also brought the new commentarial curriculum that had been developed

in Tibet in the late 19th century by Khenpo Shenphen Nangba (Tib. mkhan po gzhan phan snang ba, 1871–1927), most commonly known as Khenpo Shenphen, a Nyingma scholar who wrote what became known as the Thirteen Great Texts (Tib. gzhung chen bcu gsum),[25] a series of commentaries to 13 classic Indian texts that became the spine of an alternative curriculum to the one developed in the 14th century by Tshongkhapa (Tib. Tsong kha pa,1357–1419 CE) for the Gelukpa school[26] and that was embraced by the non-Gelukpa traditions: Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya.

The first nunnery in India to offer this new commentarial curriculum was Tsogyal Shedrub Daryelin (Tib. Mtsho rgyal shad sgrub dar rgyas ling), a branch of Namdroling (Tib. theg mchog rnam grol bshad sgrub dar rgyas gling), the main Nyingma monastery in India, established in 1993. The shedra opened in 1994, played a very important role in signalling new educational possibilities for Nyingma nuns, and became a model for other female shedras in India and Nepal which would, ultimately, influence Bhutanese Nyingma nunneries such as Sisina and Pemacholing into opening their own shedras.

As we have already mentioned, Sisina was the first one, opening Sechen Ugyen Chozong in 1998, first as a four-year dratshang or ritual college, and in 2003 it also opened a nine-year shedra or commentarial college. Gangte Monastery built Pemacholing Nunnery in 2000 with around 30 nuns and immediately afterward began implementing a monastic curriculum that now includes a three-year ritual curriculum at the dratshang level and nine years of shedra studies.

As we have seen already, the independent nature of the Nyingma nunneries, unencumbered by the many demands and procedures that such cultural and political change demanded for the Drukpa Kagyu nunneries, meant they were able to introduce a commentarial curriculum without having to deal with the bureaucratic nature of the CMB, which also seemed to have more reservations about opening the commentarial curriculum to the nunneries (and/or was more focused on developing the infrastructure to implement it at the level of monasteries at the time).

Both Sisina and Pemacholing nunneries closely follow Tsogyal Shedrub Daryelin's curriculum, with some alterations to accommodate their different lineages and to acknowledge the lack of full ordination for nuns. Sisina, for example, uses the *History of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism* of Dudjom Rinpoche, acknowledging the Tibetan roots of the nunnery and its main teachers, while Pemacholing includes a Bhutanese history, since Gangte Tulku is a Bhutanese teacher. Sisina offers Sanskrit, just as most shedras do now in India and Nepal, while Pemacholing, like most shedras in Bhutan, does not (only Tango Monastery offers Sanskrit as part of the curriculum). Sisina also includes some commentaries by prominent teacher Shechen Gyeltsab (Tib. Zhe chen rgyal tshab), while Pemacholing includes texts by the famous Bhutanese teacher Pema Lingpa (Tib. Padma gling pa, 1450–1521). Sisina also offers some innovative courses in English, the environment, and modern sciences (physics and biology) that reflect the more open approach to sciences in the monasteries of India and Nepal, while Pemacholing sticks mostly to the traditional curriculum, with the exception of incorporating some English. Sisina also offers poetry (Tib. snyan ngag), while Pemacholing does not, since, according to their main khenpo, it is a little awkward teaching nuns poetry, implying the sensual nature of the topic.[27] Pemacholing also includes the study of the preliminary meditational practices, or ngondro (Tib. sngon 'gro), during the first two years (they complete half of it during the first year and the other half during the second).

Sisina, following the model of modern Indian and Nepalese shedras, also allows nuns to complete a slightly modified version of a Western-style Ph.D. after their shedra studies, something that Pemacholing does not. Neither nunnery offers the study of Vinaya or monastic rules, since the leadership considers that nuns cannot have access to it, since most of their nuns are

not technically fully ordained (or even if they are, this is not recognized by their respective establishments).[28]

Although Sisina started the shedra first, it was at Pemacholing where the first batch of nuns graduated after finishing the program. The first 8 nuns graduated in 2011, and now they have around 20 nuns teaching the curriculum. Occasionally they invite a khenpo from Gangte to teach some of the tantric curriculum, but the education is mostly taught by nuns, and over the last few years, a group of nuns have rotated yearly in the position of abbess of the nunnery.[29] The success of the nunnery has sparked the creation of two branch nunneries in Eastern Bhutan, although those nunneries only offer the ritual curriculum of the dratshang, and if they want to study the commentarial curriculum, they have to do it at Pemacholing.

At Sisina, the first batch of nuns graduated in 2012, and 15 of their graduates are already teaching other nuns at the shedra, together with one tulku and two khenpos from Shechen Monastery in Kathmandu. Some of their graduating nuns are also teaching now at their affiliated nunnery in Phobjika.

Following the innovations of Sisina and Pemacholing, some of the nunneries under the CMB also requested access to the curriculum, although their path to achieve an education on a par with the one received by monks under the CMB or by nuns at other independent Nyingma nunneries has been more fraught and complicated. Currently, there are only four nunneries under control of the CMB offering access to the commentarial curriculum to nuns. Two of them, Kila Gonpa, which began its shedra in 2010, and Wolakha (Dz. 'Og la kha gsang chen rdo rje lhun sgrub), which opened its commentarial school in 2008, offer the full nine-year curriculum, while Losel Yangcheling (Dz. Blo gsal yang chen gling) in Mongar and Sherab Choling (Dz. Shes rab chos gling 'bring rim bshad grwa) in Gelephu offer the first four years of the curriculum (Dringrim or Secondary School), and if nuns want to continue their studies, they have to join either Wolakha or Kila Gonpa.

After several interviews with the leadership at the CMB, as well as with khenpos and nuns from various shedras, it became clear that, unlike the introduction of the monastic curriculum in the male shedras under the CMB, the implementation in the nunneries was less planned and more ad hoc, which, as we will see, had important consequences over the last few years. It also seemed clear that the more progressive approach taken by Nyingma nunneries (in terms of the ordination of their nuns as well as their education) had a strong impact on the nuns under CMB control and inspired their desire to introduce similar changes in their status as well as in their education under the CMB.

The history of the curriculum at Kila Gonpa illuminates how the curriculum was introduced in the nunneries of the Drukpa Kagyu tradition but also the challenges faced by nuns fighting for equal educational opportunities and status under the CMB. Ani Dechen[30] joined Kila Gonpa in 1989, when she was 16 (the same year Tango College was created). She had never gone to school, and during her first few years at the nunnery, she learned basic literacy and the rituals central to the institution. In 2009, and after having seen the changes made to male monastic education by the CMB, as well as the educational opportunities offered to nuns at Sisina and Pemacholing, which opened their shedras in 1998 and 2000, respectively, she and another nun travelled to Thimphu to formally request starting a shedra at Kila Gonpa. The CMB was receptive to the request, and within three months, they started planning the shedra with the help of a khenpo sent by the CMB. To Ani Dechen, the shedra was essential in order to keep the nuns engaged, as well as an important tool to reinforce the commitment to monastic life in the context of a new social and educational environment, with important educational opportunities offered to women in the modern secular system.[31]

The studies at Kila Gonpa began in 2010, but being one of the first female monastic colleges under the supervision of the CMB and without a clear mandate, they simply replicated the curriculum as studied by monks at Tango College. Initially, the CMB did not create a specific curriculum for the new female shedras that opened under its control, and during the first years, they mostly followed the male monastic curriculum, with very little supervision. In the fourth year, the CMB asked all female shedras under their supervision to change the curriculum, since according to the leadership, nuns should not be able to study the Vinaya sections due to their lack of ordination. They were also concerned that nuns were not yet ready to study too much pramana and debate. All the nunneries with the exception of Kila Gonpa changed the curriculum to respond to the suggestions of the CMB, although they were still not given clear guidelines about what the monastic curriculum at female shedras should look like.

At Kila Gonpa, though, the nuns refused to change the curriculum and continued studying and taking the yearly examinations required by the CMB. In 2018, though, when the nuns were ready to take the examination for the last year of the curriculum, one that includes sections on the Vinaya and the Three Vows, the CMB refused to test the nuns, under the justification that they had been warned not to continue studying the curriculum designed for monks due to their lack of ordination. In our conversation with nuns at the nunnery, it was quite clear that the nuns considered this unfair. If they had studied the same curriculum as the monks, they argued, why were they not allowed to prove their worth by taking the final exam and graduating like monks do? In order to offer a solution to this situation, the CMB proposed the nuns retake the exam of the seventh year as their final exam in order to graduate, but the nuns did not think this was a satisfactory response, since they had already taken that exam.

The situation with Kila Gonpa reflects the lack of preparation of the CMB when it came to the implementation of the monastic curriculum in nunneries. Although it has been open to offering religious education for nuns and has allowed for its development, it is clear that it lacked a clear plan and that some traditional cultural assumptions about the role and the status of nuns has influenced its decisions. The CMB acknowledged the situation at Kila Gonpa, but it does frame it in the context of a rapidly changing cultural, political, and religious landscape and one in which limited resources cannot always respond to the needs of all constituents.

To address this situation, the CMB has finally issued a new curriculum to be followed by all nunneries under its control. While the new curriculum allows nuns to follow most of the education offered to monks, nuns study most subjects at a slower pace than their male counterparts. The first year, for example, nuns focus mostly on ritual, something that monks do during their years prior to entering the shedra, at the dratshang, while monks focus on basic grammar and literacy. Most of the relevant texts are taught later in the new curriculum for nuns: monks begin their Madhyamaka studies in their third year, while nuns do it in their fifth; monks study Prajñāpāramitā in the seventh year, while nuns do it in the ninth, but the most remarkable absence is debate, which is considered a secondary subject for nuns, and Vinaya, which is now absent from the curriculum. The monks also study some tantra in their last years, while nuns do not.

The reaction at Kila Gonpa to these changes has not been positive. Their situation is interesting, since they can criticize the new curriculum from the vantage point of having already studied and been exposed to the curriculum for monks. In some cases, they found the new curriculum demeaning. Ani Dechen told us about her particular interest in Pramāṇa and debate, and she even expressed her desire to continue her studies at some of the Gelukpa monasteries in India, since they cannot pursue those studies in Bhutan. To some of the nuns at Kila Gonpa, the new curriculum clearly does not consider them as intellectually capable as monks and reflects culturally outdated perceptions of the abilities of women to learn at the same level as men.

A glass half full or half empty: the issue of full ordination

This is not the place to discuss the long and complex history of female monastic ordination in Buddhism, but for the purpose of this chapter, suffice it to say that, historically, Buddhism had two levels of ordination for monks, *śrāmaṇera* or novice monk (Tib. dge tshul) and *bhikṣu* or fully ordained monk (Tib. dge slong), and three levels for nuns, *śrāmaṇerikā* or novice nun (Tib.dge tshul ma), *śikṣamāṇā* or probationary nun (Tib. dge slob ma), and *bhikṣuṇī* or fully ordained nun (Tib. dge slong ma).[32] Over time, many Buddhist countries lost the lineages that sustained full female ordination, or, as in the cases of Tibet and Bhutan, the only level introduced was that of *śrāmaṇerikā* or novice nun. In the case of Bhutan, by the 1980s, the tradition had mostly died out, and the few active nuns in the country were not ordained and, in many occasions, did not even wear monastic robes.

As we have seen, the 1980s saw a change in attitude towards nuns thanks to the efforts of Nyingma nunneries such as Sisina, which sent some nuns to India and Nepal to be ordained. Over the next three decades, Nyingma nuns in Bhutan were regularly ordained, mostly as novice nuns, although there is an increasing number of nuns who have opted, with institutional support, for full ordination. Remarkably, although the number of nuns in both the Nyingma and the Drukpa Kagyu tradition has dramatically increased from the handful of the 80s to the almost 1,000 of today, nuns of the Drukpa Kagyu tradition, under the control of the CMB, did not receive any type of ordination until 2014.

The ordination of Drukpa Kagyu nuns in 2014 emerged from the pressure of non-governmental organizations like the Bhutan Nuns Foundation, which in December of 2013, and with the help of Sakyadhita, the International Association of Buddhist Women, organized the first International Buddhist Nuns Conference in Paro.[33] Although the conference did not explicitly have as a goal the discussion of the issue of formal ordination for nuns in Bhutan, it was quite clear to all participants that this was one of the main issues at stake.[34] The topic of ordination did become, indeed, one of the main issues at the conference, and the CMB, to its credit, listened to the demands that came out of the conference and decided to finally grant novice ordination on May 10, 2014, to 140 nuns from seven different Drukpa Kagyu nunneries at Sangchen Dorji Lhundrup (Dz. gSang chen rdo rje lhun grub chos gling) nunnery in Punakha. The Seventieth Je Khenpo Jigme Choedra (Dz. 'Jigs med chos gra) presided over the ordination.[35] Again, we can see how the transformation of the status and education of nuns in Bhutan follows two different speeds, with the Nyingma tradition moving faster, due mostly to their important transnational connections and to their being open to the changes that are occurring in female monastic education in institutions in India and Nepal. The Drukpa Kagyu nunneries, due to the fact that they are subsumed in the hierarchical structure of the CMB, have followed a slower pace, some of it due to traditional perceptions of the role of women in general and of nuns in particular, as well as the fact that the CMB has prioritized change and resources to male monastic institutions.

While by 2014, it seemed that the issue of formal ordination for women in Bhutan had been resolved with the reintroduction of the *śrāmaṇerikā* lineage, a central concern that kept emerging during our many conversations, and one that had a direct impact on Bhutanese nuns' access to education, was that, without full ordination (*bhikṣuṇī*), nuns had no access to the full curriculum offered to monks in the various commentary colleges throughout the country. While some nuns do not seem to be concerned with the situation, others see this as a clear sign of discrimination and inequality between monks and nuns. Currently, none of the Drukpa Kagyu or Nyingma nunneries in the country allow nuns to study the same curriculum as monks. This is the case even in institutions like Sisina, which has a small number of fully ordained nuns.

Nuns who embrace the idea of full ordination, though, argue that if all Bhutanese nuns who want to become *bhikṣuṇī* are allowed to do so, it will be a matter of time until their situation is normalized and they are finally allowed the same level of education as monks.

This is the case of two nuns we interviewed at Kunga Rabten in Trongsa. This is a unique nunnery in Bhutan, since it does not belong to the Drukpa Kagyu or the Nyingma traditions. It is a Karma Kagyu nunnery[36] founded in 1969 by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso, a Tibetan who came into Bhutan in 1959 and established himself in the Kunga Rabten area with a few Tibetan nuns who came into exile with him. The nunnery is closely linked to the Karmapa, and their nuns travel to India and Nepal to participate in teachings organized by Kagyu leaders, such as the Karmapa or Tai Situ Rinpoche. In March of 2017, during the annual Kagyu Monlam Chenmo, the Karmapa presided over the ordination of a group of 18 nuns from various Kagyu nunneries from India, Nepal, and Bhutan, who were ordained as *śrāmaṇerikā* or probationary nuns following the Dharmaguptaka *bhikṣuṇī* lineage from China (Ch. 法藏部). The idea is that, in a few years, these nuns can pursue full *bhikṣuṇī* ordination if they decide to do so. While this may not be recognized yet by the monastic authorities in Bhutan, the two nuns who have taken these vows hope that their situation will help other nuns see this as a reasonable path. In other words, one way to legitimate full ordination is to normalize it.

As we saw with the case of Kila Gonpa, the issue of full ordination has an impact that goes beyond the lack of access to the Vinaya section of the curriculum. Since they are not seen as monastics with the same status as monks, their access to education is curtailed in other ways. Nuns at all Drukpa Kagyu shedras do not have the same access to pramāṇa, since the CMB considers nuns are not fully prepared for it. The CMB has made clear that this is not an issue of discrimination. They argue that because nunneries have not had until very recently the eight years of primary education (Dz. gzhi rim) that precede shedra studies, nuns have not been as prepared and, as a result, their performance in the yearly examinations has not been as good. Kila Gonpa was brought up as an example, in which in one year, of the eight nuns who took the yearly exams, only one passed. From the CMB perspective, the current curriculum for Drukpa Kagyu nunneries is designed to account for their lack of full ordination but also to make sure the nuns develop a solid intellectual foundation. The CMB made clear that it can revisit the issue in the upcoming years if it feels that nuns demonstrate a good grasp of the various elements of the current curriculum.

Ultimately, we could approach progress of the status of Bhutanese nuns using the glass half-full or half-empty image. On the one hand, clear progress has been made at all levels in the status and the education of nuns, with most nuns finally ordained at the *śrāmaṇerikā* level, and with significant access to education in the many shedras, both Nyingma and Drukpa Kagyu, built throughout the country. On the other hand, there are still some factors, mostly their lack of full *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, that have curtailed nuns' access to the same education as monks.

Thinking outside the box: the Bhutan Nuns Foundation and the training and resource centre project

While some nuns continue fighting for equal educational opportunities within the traditional monastic structures, the Bhutan Nuns Foundation has played an important function in reimagining the role that nuns can play in modern Bhutanese society and has developed interesting new educational opportunities for nuns. Founded in 2009 by Tashi Zangmo, a lay Bhutanese activist, and under the patronage of her Majesty the Queen Mother Ashi Tshering Yangdoen Wangchuk, the mission of BNF has been to provide "a high leverage means of empowering and educating Bhutanese women," and "it aims to improve living conditions and economic vitality

of rural villages, and preserving Bhutan's strong, sustainable culture and spiritual heritage, as it faces rapid economic development."[37] The institution has played a very important role since its foundation in raising awareness about the status of nuns and the importance of providing infrastructure and an education on a par with that of monks. As Tashi Zangmo made clear during an interview, Bhutan's nunneries receive no support from the government and barely any support from the CMB. The progress made by nuns over the last few decades, including the construction of most of the current nunneries all over the country, as well as their fight for access to the commentarial curriculum, has been mostly carried out by the nuns themselves. A lot can be said about the work of BNF, but here we want to focus on the current construction of a training centre in the outskirts of Thimphu, which started construction in 2013, and it is expected to be completed in 2020.

The training centre is a project unlike any other in the current religious environment in Bhutan. It is not a nunnery, and it is under the control of neither the government nor the CMB. Although it has an educational goal as its core mission, the type of education it will offer will be neither ritual nor that of the commentarial tradition. The centre's core mission will be to provide training for nuns that will have social impact and, as acknowledged by Tashi Zangmo, it wants to embrace the idea of socially engaged Buddhism as it has been developed in other Buddhist countries. The centre will offer counselling training; hospices and basic healthcare; palliative care; leadership and management workshops; short meditation courses for nuns and lay women alike; and Yoga, Tai Chi and Qi Gong short retreats. After a conversation with Tashi Zangmo and a close look at their annual reports, it becomes clear that many of the ideas behind the centre are not influenced by the impact of secular education in Bhutan or the influence of Nyingma nunneries in India and Nepal but to the exposure by Tashi Zangmo and many of the nuns at BNF to a series of transnational Buddhist networks and institutions that have approached the status of nuns, their education, and their role in modern society in new and creative ways. Over the years, BNF has visited Buddhist organizations like Tzu Chi in Taiwan[38] and has been inspired to incorporate some of their programs in health care and environmental programs into their curriculum at the training centre. A visit to the Kasih Hospice Care Society (KHC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, also inspired BNF to incorporate some of their palliative care programs in Bhutan. The training centre is expected to open in 2020, and it represents a creative alternative model for what nuns can learn and do: it is a pedagogical and social experiment that aims to change the role and the status of nuns in Bhutan.

Ideas like the training centre are important not only because they offer new educational opportunities for nuns but because they are rethinking the role and the status of nuns outside the confines of traditional monastic institutions and structures, either those of the CMB, which controls the Drukpa Kagyu institutions, or those of the independent Nyingma nunneries that are connected to particular lamas in Bhutan or larger Buddhist networks in India and Nepal. Only time will tell the impact that the training centre will have, but it certainly has energized and empowered those nuns fighting for change.

Conclusion

While change in monastic education for monks in Bhutan has been, generally speaking, a top-down affair, mostly imposed by the CMB in the case of Drukpa Kagyu monasteries and the leadership of a few lamas in the case of Nyingma ones, the situation of nuns has been the reverse, with nuns driving the conversation and fighting for a change of their status, as well as for the educational opportunities that monks were being offered. This lack of centralization in the implementation of education for nuns has encountered important obstacles (as the case

of Kila Gonpa showed) but has also allowed the nuns and various nunneries, with the help of institutions like the Bhutan Nuns Foundation, to be more creative and think outside the box in terms of what it means to be a nun and what should be part of their monastic education.

Notes

1 The research that made this book chapter possible is the result of a collaboration project between the New College of Florida (NCF) and the Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law (JSWSL). The field research took place during the summers of 2018 and 2019, where Prof. Gyeltshen and Prof. Lopez visited several nunneries and talked to nuns all over the country, as well as discussing the topic presented in this chapter with the Central Monastic Body (Dz. gzhung gra tshang) and with relevant organizations such as the Bhutan Nuns Foundation. Prof. Gyeltshen and Prof. Lopez would like to thank all the people who have made this project possible, among them Her Royal Highness Princess Sonam Dechan Wangchuck; the dean of JSWSL, Dr. Sangay Dorjee; Vice Dean Michael Peil; Head of Research Kristen DeRemer; Tshewang Lhamo; and all of the faculty and staff at JSWSL. Fran-çoise Pommaret has always been extremely generous sharing her knowledge of all things Bhutan. We also want to thank the support of the New College Provost Barbara Feldman and Humanities Chair Miriam Wallace for their financial support. Thanks to Ani Tsultrim Wangmo, whose book *Nunneries of Bhutan* and work on behalf of nuns all over the country has been a great inspiration for this project. Thanks to Tashi Zangmo, founder and president of the Bhutan Nuns Foundation, for all the work they do on behalf of nuns all over the country and for talking to us about their hopes and goals for the training center discussed at the end of the chapter. Also, thanks to all of the nuns who talked to us during our research project and made our research possible. Finally, to Chuki Wangdee and Needup, for all the local support and for their gracious hosting during Prof. Lopez's repeated visits to Bhutan.

2 Note on transliteration. Although Tibetan and Dzongkha belong to the same language family, I have used the abbreviation Tib. when transliterating names, places, and terms used in a clearly Tibetan context and the abbreviation Dz. when those are used in the specific context of Bhutan.

3 The official name of Kila Gonpa is Kila Dechen Yangtse (Dz. spyi la dbe chen yang rtse dgon pa), and Kunga Rabten's is Karma Drupdey Palmo Choki Dingkhang (Dz. kar ma sgrub sde dpal mo chos kyi lding khang).

4 Jachung Karmo was founded in the 17th century by Sewla Choje Ngawang Pekar (Dz. chos rje ngag dbang pad dkar), one of the main disciples of the first Zhabdrung Sungtrul, Chokle Namgyel (zhabs drung gsung sprul phyogs las rnam rgyal, 1708–1736). Choje Ngawang Pekar appointed his sister, Ani Rinchen Zangmo (Dz. A ni rin chen bzang mo) as the head of the nunnery, and it was said to have had over 100 nuns during her time. On the figure of Choje Ngawang Pekar, see the entry on the Second Zhabdrung Sungtrul in the Treasury of Lives (https://treasuryoflives.org/biographies/view/Shakya-Tendzin/7874). For the history of the nunnery, see Ani Tsultrim Wangmo (2013); Sonam Wangmo et al. (2018).

5 The Central Monastic Body (Dz. gzhung grwa tshang), CMB from now on, is led by the figure of the Je Khenpo (Dz. rje mkhan po), and it is the religious organization in charge of setting policy for all Drukpa Kagyu institutions in the country. Drukpa Kagyu monasteries and nunneries are organized in a very hierarchical way, and they have to follow the rules and regulations of the CMB. The other important tradition is the Nyingma sect, with old roots in the history of Bhutan that stretch back to the 7th century. Most of the Nyingma monasteries in the country (with a few exceptions) are run by independent charismatic lamas, and they do not receive funds from the central monastic body and do not have to follow their rules and regulations. As we will see, this duality (of Drukpa Kagyu and Nyingma) has played an important role in the different speeds at which the nunneries of the Nyingma and those under the CMB have implemented changes to the status and the education of nuns in Bhutan. The only current exception to this duality in the religious reality of the country as it pertains to nunneries is Kunga Rabten, which technically belongs to the Karma Kagyu school. For the history of these two Buddhist sects in Bhutan, see Aris (1979) and Phuntsho (2013), among others.

6 In 1984, when Ani Wangmo found out about this, she talked to Ashi Sonam Choeden, the fourth king's sister, to make an official request to the Central Monastic Body to stop this from happening. In 1986, Ani Loponma was reappointed as head, and a few nuns joined the nunnery. Interview with Ani Wangmo November 6, 2019.

7 The only Bhutanese ordained nun who was mentioned several times during our interviews prior to 1982 was Ani Jamyang Choden (Dz. A ni 'jam dbyangs chos ldan), commonly known as Lopenma Paldon (Dz. slob dpon ma dpal ldan), who had been ordained in Tibet in 1956. According to Ani Wangmo, even though ordained, Ani Jamyang did not wear robes. (Interview with Ani Wangmo November 6, 2019.) There is a short biography of Ani Lopenma and her contributions to the improvements in the lives of nuns in Bhutan in Ani Wangmo's *Nunneries of Bhutan*. For more on her life, also see Sonam Wangmo et al. (2018). The nuns in Kunga Rabten were ordained, but they were Tibetan refugees and not Bhutanese.

8 She was ordained in Pangan Gonpa (Tib. snga 'gyur thub bstan bshad sgrub bsam gtan chos 'khor gling) in Manali by Khenpo Thubten (Tib. rme ba mkhan po thub bstan 'od zer, 1928–2000) where she studied for four years. She also mentioned during the three interviews we had with her that, although she visited and sporadically studied at several nunneries in India, such as Jamyang Choling, a Gelukpa institution in Dharamsala, she never formally studied the scholastic curriculum of the Gelukpa school or that of the commentarial traditions at non-Geluk institutions.

9 See the 2017 Bhutan census, p. 27, www.nsb.gov.bt/publication/files/PHCB2017_national.pdf, accessed July 12, 2019.

10 For a discussion on the introduction of secular education in Bhutan, see Dorji (2003); Schuelka and Maxwell (2016); Robles (2016); Mancall (2017).

11 For a history of the monastic curriculum in Tibet as well as in India, see Dreyfus (2003); Pearcey (2015); Gyeltshen and Lopez (forthcoming).

12 We have already written about the history and the factors that influenced the transformation of male monastic education in Bhutan in the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st in the forthcoming article "So Old and Yet So New: Buddhist Education and the Monastic Curriculum in Contemporary Bhutan," so we will not repeat our findings here. On the transformation of monastic education in modern Bhutan, see also Phuntsho (2000); Denman and Namgyel (2008); Dukpa (2016).

13 Rita Gross (2009: 57) also faults the androcentric approach of scholars, in which "male norm and the human norm are collapsed and become identical." Simmer-Brown (2002: 137) argues that modern scholarship has mostly neglected "the contributions, insights, and transmissions of women, which have often been seen as superstitious or merely folk traditions."

14 On this issue, see also Mittal and Kumar (2004).

15 They received ordination by Tsulshik Rinpoche (Tib. 'khrul zhig ngag dbang chos kyi blo gros). See Ani Tsultrim Wangmo (2013).

16 For a more detailed account of the foundation of the nunnery, see Dilgo Khyentse (2008); Ani Tsultrim Wangmo (2013).

17 During our several interviews with nuns in nunneries all over the country, Sisina repeatedly came up as the place where nuns had pioneered the issue of female ordination as well as of religious education.

18 Ani Lopenma had been the abbess of Jachung Karmo between 1950 and 1975, when she retired and was succeeded by Lopenma Pekar Wangmo. Under her tenure, the nunnery lost most of its nuns and was abandoned for almost 16 years. On the recent history of the nunnery, see Wangmo et al. (2018: 153).

19 Although Shechen Monastery has a long history in Tibet, dating back to the late 1600s, the monastery was destroyed during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Dilgo Khyentshe began building Sechen Monastery in Nepal in 1980. For the history of Shechen Monastery in Nepal, see Dilgo Khyentse (2008: ch. 17)

20 On the history of Pemacholing, see https://bhutanculturalatlas.clcs.edu.bt/950/culture/sites-structures/monasteries-temples/pema-choling-nunnery/, accessed October 7, 2019.

21 The map was created by the Bhutan Nuns Foundation and used in their annual report of 2016/17. An interesting exception to this dual Nyingma/Drukpa Kagyu landscape is Kunga Rabten, which is officially Karma Kagyu and closely connected to the Karmapa in India.

22 See Schuelka (2012) and Schuelka et al. (2016).

23 On the effect of policies implemented to address gender inequality, see "Gender Policy Review Report: Enhancing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Bhutan" (National Committee for Women and Children, 2015). http://ncwc.gov.bt/publications/1553763531.pdf, accessed June 16, 2019.

24 We have already written about the process of introduction of the commentarial curriculum in Bhutan in the 1980s and its transformation by Drukpa Kagyu and Nyingma institutions alike in order to adapt to the historical and religious context of Bhutan in the later 20th and early 21st century, so we will not

repeat our findings here. See Gyeltshen and Lopez (forthcoming); also see Phuntsho (2000); Denman and Namgyel (2008); Dukpa (2016).

25 The thirteen texts are: 1) *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* (Tib. ’Dul ba mdo), 2) *Vinaya Sūtra* by Guṇaprabha (Tib. So sor thar pa’i mdo), 3) *Abidharma-samuccaya* by Asaṅga (Tib. Theg pa chen po’i chos mngon pa kun las btus pa’i mchan ’grel Nor bu’i me long), 4) *Abhidharmakośa* by Vasubandhu (Tib. Chos mngon pa’i mdzod kyi tshig le’ur byas pa’i mchan ’grel Shes bya’i me long), 5) *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* by Nāgārjuna (Tib. dBu ma rtsa ba’i tshigs le’ur byas pa shes rab zhes bya ba’i mchan ’grel), 6) *Madhyamakāvatāra* by Candrakīrti (Tib. dBu ma la ’jug pa zhes bya ba’i mchan ’grel), 7) *Catuḥśatakaśāstra* by Āryadeva (Tib. bsTan bcos bZhi brgya pa zhes bya ba’i tshig le’ur byas pa’i mchan ’grel), 8) *Bodhisattvacaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva (Tib. Byang chub sems dpa’i spyod pa la ’jug pa zhes bya ba’i mchan’grel), 9) *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* by Asaṅga (Tib. mngon rtogs rgyan), 10) *Mahāyāna Sūtrālamkāra* by Asaṅga (Tib. Theg pa chen po mDo sde rgyan zhes bya ba’i mchan ’grel), 11) *Madhyāntavibhāga* by Asaṅga (Tib. dBus dang mtha’ rnam par ’byed pa’i tshig le’ur byas pa zhes bya ba’i mchan ’grel), 12) *Dharma-dharmatā-vibhāga* by Asaṅga (Tib. Chos dang chos nyid rnam par ’byed pa’i tshig le’ur byas pa’i mchan ’grel), and 13) *Mahāyānottaratantra* by Asaṅga (Tib. Theg pa chen po rGyud bla ma’i bstan bcos zhes bya ba’i mchan’grel). Adam Pearcey has written an excellent article outlining the history of the Khenpo Shenphen’s curriculum and its recent adaptations in monasteries in India, such as Namdroling and Sakya College. As Pearcey writes in the article, the history of the commentarial curriculum as designed by Khenpo Shenga could be traced even further back to the establishment of Śrī Simha Shedra at Dzogchen Monastery by Gyalse Zhenphen Thaye (Tib. rGyal sras gzhan phan mtha’ yas) in 1848, although there is little doubt that the content and structure of the curriculum was mostly developed by Khenpo Shenga. Also see Bayer (2019).

26 Khenpo Shenga first taught the curriculum at Śrī Simha Shedra (Tib. shrI simha bshad grwa) at Dzogchen Monastery (Tib. rdzogs chen), a key Nyingma institution in Kham, and then was invited by Tai Situ Wangchuck Gyalpo (Tib. Ta’i sit u dbang phyug rgyal po, 1886–1952) to institute the same curriculum at Palpung (Tib. dpal spungs), a central Kagyu institution, which he did between 1910 and 1918. In 1918, he founded the Khamje Shedra (Tib. khams bye) at Dzongsar (Tib. rdzong gsar). The curriculum was also accepted by the Sakya school, although they added five Pramāṇa texts, becoming the Eighteen Texts of Great Renown (Tib. grags chen bco brgyad) to it, becoming a sort of compromise between the commentarial emphasis of the non-sectarian movement, and the emphasis on logic and debate of the Gelukpa school

27 Personal interview, June 23, 2018.

28 They do study, though, the Three Vows (Tib. sdom gsum), which includes discussion of monastic vows. On the Three Vows, see Buswell and Lopez (2017).

29 Although it is important to note that a khenpo was present during our visit to the monastery, he made clear that he was only there in an advisory role, since nuns have now full control for the nunnery. Personal interview June 23, 2018.

30 We have changed the names of the nuns interviewed to protect their anonymity.

31 Personal interview, June 6, 2019.

32 On the issue of *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, see Thea Mohr and Ven. Jampa Tsedroen (2010). For a critical approach to the use of feminist discourse to advance the issue of *bhikṣuṇī* ordination, see Salgado (2013); Langenberg (2018).

33 For a detailed outline of the topics discussed in that conference, see www.bhutannuns.org/1st-international-buddhists-nuns-conference-in-bhutan/, accessed September 3, 2019.

34 The organizers stated as their main goals “providing a platform for discussing roles and responsibilities of nuns in the post-modern world: exchange ideas and best practices around the world, inspire and empower the nuns, especially Bhutanese Nuns, in order to increase their informed and active participation in both their religious and civic life.” The topics proposed for possible panels were roles and responsibilities of nuns in the post-modern societies, education and health, opportunities and challenges faced by nuns, gender equity, pilgrimage and spiritual well-being, nunneries and community life. See www.bhutannuns.org/1st-international-buddhists-nuns-conference-in-bhutan/, accessed September 15, 2019.

35 For a description of the ceremony, see www.bhutannuns.org/first-getsulma-ordination-in-punakha/, accessed July 21, 2019.

36 On the Karma Kagyu tradition (Tib. Kar ma bKa’ brgyud) see the entry in Buswell and Lopez (2013).

37 The mission statement can be found at BNF’s website: www.bhutannuns.org/, accessed July 21, 2019.

38 On Tzu Chi and their approach to engaged Buddhism, see Yao (2012).

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23

REGRESSING FOR PROGRESS

Maldives embraces a Salafi future

Azra Naseem

On the night of 21 November 2019, about 80 kilometres from Male', the capital of Maldives, a man on a fishing boat slashed the throat of another and threw him to the mercy of the Indian Ocean. The critically injured man, Ismail Hammadh, 26, swam to the nearest island of Maalhos and collapsed outside the house closest to shore, begging for help. People of the island provided emergency healthcare and saved his life.

Hammadh, subsequent media reports revealed, was a member of a separatist religious community on the island of Maduvvari in Raa Atoll, situated over 100 kilometres from Male'. Members of the separatist community refused to maintain any social contact with the rest of the island's small population of about 2000 people, prayed in a separate congregation, and did not subscribe to any structures of modernity such as mainstream schooling, healthcare, or the judicial system based on the rule of law. It was also reported that Maldivians from all over the country had been making Hijrah (emigration for religious reasons) to Maduvvari, staying for short periods of time to live with the community and receive religious instruction from its leaders. The community also believed girls were marriageable from puberty, however young. Hammadh was, as it turned out, one among several men 'married' to children, with the full knowledge and consent of their parents. Hammadh's 'wife' was a 13-year-old girl who, while he was under arrest in connection with the stabbing, gave birth to a child he had fathered. It also came to be known that Hammadh was not the first man the young girl had been 'married' off to by her parents.[1]

Further investigations into the stabbing incident also revealed that it was common practice for groups of men to traverse the ocean at night and, under the guise of sea-cucumber fishing, rob luxury resort islands. The men subscribe to the belief that property belonging to 'Infidels' is 'fair game' or 'spoils of war', to which—as 'defenders of Islam'—they have every right. Proceeds from the robberies are used to fund operations by terrorist groups.[2]

The incident exposed a truth about modern Maldivian life little known to the world: ultra-conservative religious beliefs are increasingly dominating society and permanently changing how life is lived on the islands. While communities such as that found on the island of Maduvvari are not yet an ordinary occurrence, the religious philosophy from which these extreme beliefs emerge—Salafism—can be accurately described as the Maldives' new normal. This chapter provides a history of how religion in the Maldives arrived at its ultra-conservative present.

Islam in the Maldives: a brief history

The Maldives was a Buddhist kingdom for over 1000 years before it embraced Islam in the 12th century. While the most popular narrative of how the nationwide adoption of Islam came about insists that the conversion happened overnight by royal decree in 1153, less popular versions have asserted that the change occurred slowly over a long period of time (Maniku 1986). Regardless of which version is more accurate, it is a fact that there is no record of any religion other than Islam being practiced in the Maldives since the 12th century. This uninterrupted religious homogeneity has made possible the construction of a national identity centred around the status of being a '100 percent Muslim country'. Several key factors have facilitated the successful maintenance of the status: (a) the geographical isolation of the country and the isolation of small island communities from each other within the already isolated whole; (b) the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural homogeneity of the population; (c) centralised power and governance; and (d) stringent legislation.

Geographically, the Maldives is one of the most dispersed countries in the world. Ninety-nine percent of its 90,000-square-kilometre territory is the sea. A population of roughly 500,000 people live on 120 of 1192 islands scattered across the ocean. Over 100,000 of the population live on the capital island Male', where political power as well as all basic services—education, health, and employment—are concentrated. The second-largest population after Male' is on the island of Fuvahmulah, which has just over 11,000 people. Islands with a population of a few thousand or a few hundred are the norm. Before the motor engine, travelling between islands took weeks, and coral reefs surrounding the islands made navigation and docking at various islands a challenge. Even the 21st-century Maldives lacks a transport infrastructure that makes travelling between the islands easy or regular, leaving various island communities still relatively isolated from each other. Given the size of the population—which remained well under 100,000 until the mid-1960s—and the isolation from the rest of the world for centuries, it is easy to see how geography has contributed to its lack of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity.

Governance—from Buddhist kings through centuries of rule by Muslim monarchs to republican dictators and democratic presidents—has remained centralised with Male' as the focal point of all political and socioeconomic power. Beginning from the 12th-century King Kalaminja's decision to convert to Islam and the subsequent conversion of the entire Buddhist population, religious policies have always been decided by the central government in Male'. Another continuing tradition with roots that date back to the time of conversion is the central role given to religious scholars within government. Historical narratives left by both Maldivians and foreign travellers show that the newly Muslim Maldivian population, although generally suspicious of foreigners, not only welcomed travellers with Islamic knowledge but gave them pivotal roles to play within the inner circles of governance (Ibn Batuta 1882; Pyrard 1887; History Committee 1990). Several were made King's counsel, while most were placed in the position of preacher or magistrate. One famous traveller, Ibn Batuta, who visited the Maldives in the 14th century, recounts how he was 'invested with the dignity of Kází' against his own wishes, attempted to reform the justice system, and was allowed to take several women as wives before being banished from the country after relations between him and chief courtiers soured (Ibn Batuta 1882). Ibn Batuta's account of his stay in the Maldives also provides some insight into the form of Islam practiced in the country at the time—one in which local customs and culture took precedence over the Islamic knowledge imparted by visiting scholars. It was a 'marvel', he wrote, 'they have for their Sovereign a woman" (Ibn Batuta 1882: 16), and neither she nor other women covered their heads (Ibn Batuta 1882: 11). Ibn Batuta met with success in reforming several Maldivian Islamic practices so they aligned with his own knowledge, but, as he wrote

woefully, he failed when it came to the women: 'I essayed to make the women dress themselves, but in this I did not succeed'. He described the people as 'honest and pious . . . sincere in good faith and of strong will', with 'no aptitude for combat or for war, and their arms are prayers'. Even the pronouncement of violent Shari'a punishments such as cutting off hands for robbery met with shock so great 'many of the natives . . . fainted away' (Ibn Batuta 1882: 7).

The importance given to the tradition of seeking of Islamic knowledge from abroad, placing such knowledge—and those who possessed such knowledge—at the centre of governance, continues to this day, as this chapter further demonstrates.

Throughout history, legislation has been a powerful means of maintaining religious uniformity and conformity. Islam played a central role, for example, in the drafting and passing of the first-ever Constitution of the Maldives in 1932. Having elected a special committee of learned men from his court to draft the country's first-ever written Constitution, Sultan Muhammad Shamsuddhin III assigned them the task of drafting a Constitution that first and foremost, 'does not contradict the religion of Islam' (Amin 1951: 2). On 22 December 1932 (23 Shaban 1351H), a colourful ceremony was held in Male' to announce the first written Constitution of the Maldives. At a purpose-built convention centre, Chief Justice Sheikh Hussein Salahdeen introduced the Constitution, describing it as the beginning of governing the Maldives according to the Qur'anic principle of '*Amruhum Shūrá Baynahum*' (*The Qur'an* 42:38) [their affairs are based on consultation among them] (Amin 1951: 35).[3] Seven centuries after the conversion, Islam was still at the centre of governance.

It was not until the democratic transition in 2008, however, that it became a constitutional stipulation that only a Muslim can become a Maldivian citizen (Article 9). The Constitution also states that 'the religion of the State of the Maldives is Islam', Islam should be one of the bases of all laws of the Maldives (Article 10a), and 'no law contrary to any tenet of Islam maybe enacted in the Maldives' (Article 10b). It is also a constitutional requirement that the president, judges, and members of parliament be Sunni Muslims. Although the Constitution does not specifically state that all ordinary citizens, too, are required to be Sunni Muslims, this is generally accepted to be the case. It is also a strictly imposed assumption tied to this clause of the Constitution. Maldivians who openly express a desire to practise, or even speak in admiration of, any other denomination of Islam come under attack from religious clerics and conservative Sunni Muslims or from violent religious extremists, as will be discussed later.

All the democratic freedoms and civil and political rights such as freedom of thought and expression guaranteed by the 2008 constitution also come with the caveat that citizens can enjoy them as long as they 'do not contradict any tenet of Islam'. Several other pieces of legislation, which have these constitutional requirements as their base, have since been drawn up. The first such law, the Religious Unity Act (1994), which preceded the present Constitution, was brief, with only eight clauses in total, and focused solely on who had the authority to provide religious instruction to Maldivians. The First Amendment to the Religious Unity Act (2014), however, added several clauses to the original, making it compulsory for the state's chief educational authority to fashion curricula in a manner that 'incites love for Islam and decreases differences in jurisprudence among all children'. The law also made it incumbent upon the educational authority to make Islamic studies a compulsory subject from primary through to secondary levels. It further explicitly forbids 'inciting love in the hearts of students for any religion other than Islam' and states 'no religion other than Islam should be taught as a subject in any Maldivian school'. The First Amendment also prohibits the promotion and practice of any other religion in the Maldives and bans the importation or circulation of literature and all insignia representing any religion other than Islam. A Second Amendment to the Religious Unity Act was passed in 2016, establishing a Supreme Council for Fatwas tasked with issuing

religious rulings to decide any disagreements or disputes that arise in matters of religion. The Council, which was to operate under the aegis of the Islamic Ministry, now has the final say in all religious matters in the Maldives.

The laws effectively made the Islamic Ministry, established in 2008, the ultimate authority in all matters of religion in the country. Such legislation, combined with other factors discussed previously, allows the Ministry to maintain by force of the law and punitive measures when necessary the coveted '100 percent Muslim' status of the Maldives.

Islam and modernity

While the tradition of welcoming religious scholars, both foreign and local, into the inner circles of political power still continues, other age-old rituals that characterised the almost syncretic Islam that had evolved over the centuries began to be slowly phased out from the 1980s. The changes in religious practices coincided with the beginning of the end of isolation as the country opened up to tourism—and the rest of the world—at the end of the 1970s. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, who, like many other Maldivian rulers in history, had spent over a decade gaining education in Islamic countries, was elected president in November 1978. Gayoom was a graduate of Al Azhar University in Egypt. He spent 12 years as a student in Cairo and was keen to put into practice the knowledge he had acquired during the time (Ellis 1998). Unlike previous rulers, however, Gayoom was quick to converge all religious powers in his own hands rather than leaving it to the chief justice or religious scholars, as had been the case for centuries. During his 30-year-rule, Gayoom embarked on a form of religious revivalism that included building a large number of mosques across the length and breadth of the country, publication of a plethora of religious literature, introduction of Islamic studies to secondary school curricula, invitation of selected scholars from the Middle East for religious revival programmes, establishing a supreme council for Islamic affairs, and penning a weekly newsletter disseminating religious advice to the general public.

Gayoom's absolute control of religious thought and practices of the Maldivian population first came under serious threat in the 1990s. Until then, religious learning had been the exclusive right of the ruling elite, a tradition which dated back to the early days of Islam when, by law, only royals and their nearest and dearest were allowed to receive religious instruction. In the 1990s, a new type of scholar, also educated abroad, emerged in Maldivian society whose beliefs were vastly different from what Maldivians were familiar with. Known then as 'fundamentalists' or 'Wahhabis', the new scholars sought to end Gayoom's supremacy over religion; began to call for an end to various traditional religious practices, dismissing them as bid'a (heretical innovations); and sought to replace them with what they described as 'true Islam'. Although not known as such at the time, it was the beginning of the currently predominant form of Islam in the Maldives: Salafism.

Gayoom's modernising agenda was fundamentally at odds with that of Salafism, 'a philosophical outlook which seeks to revive the practices of the first three generations of Islam' (Maher 2016). As a dictatorial ruler, he used all state powers at his disposal to suppress the movement. In 1994, he introduced the Religious Unity Act, which effectively banned the new preachers from proselytising by making prior approval from the president or from a body authorised by the president a precondition for such activities. He jailed dissenters who were then tortured in prison, driving the remaining Salafis underground.

Shortly after the start of the new millennium, two key events on a global scale combined with political turmoil on the domestic front helped revive the suppressed movement: the War on Terror launched by the United States in 2001 and the tsunami of 2004. As President George

Bush attacked Afghanistan in following the 9/11 terror attacks, religiosity and piety increased across the world (Healey 2005). The now-familiar narrative behind the subsequent global 'Jihad'—the West is at war with Islam—emerged from influential Salafi Jihadhists, urging all Muslims to become Soldiers of Allah (Turner 2010). At the same time, wealthy Salafi actors in Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region increased their funding of the Salafi movement in Muslim communities across the world (Moreno 2017). As a '100 percent Muslim country', Maldives was seen as fertile ground for sowing the seeds of Salafism. New local businesses, especially fabric and clothes shops, began to open up in large numbers across the country, manned by Salafists eager to proffer the Da'wah. Newspaper reports have since provided details of how the shops acted as community hubs for proselytising. Maldives was, at the time, also enduring a heroin epidemic which saw at least one member of almost every household succumb to addiction. The government's policy was to regard addiction as a religious transgression to be punished by imprisonment rather than a sickness that needed rehabilitation. Several key Salafi figures who had been imprisoned by the Gayoom regime earlier conducted a highly successful programme to convince the inmates to embrace Salafism as a way out of their predicament—walking the path of the pious ancestors offered not just a way out of addiction and prison but eternal salvation. Inmates let out of the prison were largely unemployable due to their criminal record, a fact which Salafi actors turned to their advantage by offering them employment in their various businesses and also by involving them in community development and charitable projects. The 2004 tsunami created further opportunities in this regard, as several islands were completely destroyed and made uninhabitable, leaving thousands of people homeless and in need of assistance. Seeing islands being 'swallowed up' by the sea left most of the low-lying island nation's population extremely frightened and in a vulnerable state. Once again, Salafi actors were quick to offer solace through a return to 'true Islam', portraying the natural disaster as punishment from God for deviating from the path of the glorious predecessors.

The political landscape was getting increasingly volatile at this time as the clamour to end Gayoom's dictatorship grew louder. The prison population now included not just key Salafi actors and drug addicts but also a large number of opposition political leaders and activists. All four elements joined together to form a strong force against Gayoom. Working with each other and with the international community, they were able to pressure Gayoom into making various concessions such as loosening his control over freedom of expression. After years of street protests and serial uprisings, the first democratic elections in the country's history were held in 2008. Gayoom lost, and a coalition led by the Maldives Democratic Party came to power.

Democracy and Salafism

The shared wisdom that democracy is an antidote to radicalisation proved wrong in the Maldives. Collaboration between democracy activists and Salafi actors to bring an end to Gayoom's dictatorship meant that, once in power, the coalition had to make several concessions to the Salafi agenda. The new president, Mohamed Nasheed, established a Ministry of Islamic Affairs and gave control of it to the Adhaalath Party, which represents the political arm of Maldivian Salafism. To this day, the Islamic Ministry is staffed from top to bottom by key figures from the Adhaalath Party. Although electoral success has evaded members of the Adhaalath Party, with little or no representation in parliament, as is the case in the current term, the party's influence in affairs of the state has grown through its control of the Islamic Affairs Ministry and through appointment of leading party figures to powerful positions in government. In addition to handing over the Islamic Ministry to Adhaalath, the democratic government in 2010 also freed[4] Salafi actors jailed by Gayoom, including the terrorists who exploded a homemade bomb in

2007 in one of the busiest thoroughfares in the capital city, Male', in the first terrorist attack on Maldivian soil (Niyaz 2010). As an ardent champion of free speech, Nasheed also refused to curb any Salafi activities, insisting on the followers' right to exercise their beliefs, and allowing widespread proselytising by domestic and Salafi preachers, even by those who had been banned in other democracies for inciting hatred.[5] This policy contributed largely to the government's undoing and to its premature downfall.

In September 2011, the Adhaalath Party left the ruling coalition with Nasheed's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), citing its failure to heed Adhaalath's advice—mostly on religious matters—which, it said, had left it with no choice but to take to the streets to protect the country's religion and sovereignty.[6] Adhaalath became a leading member of an anti-government coalition instead, providing religious justifications for any and all opposition activities. On 23 December that year, Adhaalath co-ordinated the largest religious gathering in the country's history, in which leading members of the party accused President Nasheed and the MDP of being enemies of Islam and of working to undermine and eradicate Islam from the Maldives. Thousands of people travelled to the capital to participate in the gathering, which saw raucous speeches by Adhaalath leaders calling for the resignation of Nasheed and labelling him La-Dheenee (literally, no-religion) with 'a cunning plan' to secularise Maldives.[7] Adhaalath Party, working with various other members of the political opposition, participated in similar smaller protests in Male' on a nightly basis for the next two months, inciting hatred against MDP and Nasheed on the basis of his alleged irreligiosity. The protests only ended on 7 February 2012 when President Nasheed resigned amidst a police mutiny and the threat of a public lynching by an outraged mob whose anger and hatred had been stoked by Adhaalath's repeated narrative of Nasheed as a La-Dheenee enemy of Islam.[8]

Salafism, which emerged in the Maldives towards the end of the 1990s as a minority belief, gained traction following the War on Terror and the 2004 tsunami, took root during the first three years of democracy, and began to flourish and bloom in the years that followed the end of President Nasheed's rule. With the premature end to President Nasheed's government, the country entered a period of unprecedented political turmoil which permeated all levels of society.[9] Street protests and their violent repression by security forces were commonplace. Opposition leaders and activists were jailed in large numbers, and any gains made in civil and political freedoms were lost as a new authoritarian government led by former dictator Gayoom's brother, Abdulla Yameen, came to power in November 2013. Amidst the upheaval, and during Yameen's subsequent five years in power, Salafi actors both in and out of government consolidated their official and unofficial sociopolitical power.

Maldivian island communities, though still geographically isolated, are now well connected via the Internet and fast mobile communications. The country has the largest number of Internet users per capita in South Asia, and 80 percent of the population is reported to be on Facebook. Islanders living even in the remotest communities have 3G coverage, and there are more mobile phone accounts than there are people. Salafi actors made full use of modern technologies to propagate their messages. Several clerics and other 'social influencers' became 'public figures' who were Internet savvy and knew how to take full advantage of the various media platforms at their disposal. All such 'public figures' had a Facebook profile and a YouTube presence as well as Telegram, Viber, and WhatsApp channels through which they kept their followers informed on how exactly they should conduct themselves as 'true Muslims'. These internet messages were supplemented by dedicated programmes on mainstream television and radio channels, as well as offline activities such as Dha'wa and prayer camps and educational activities conducted nationwide (Maldivian Democracy Network 2015). Salafi actors at the helm of the Islamic Ministry protected and supported their activities, allowing

and aiding the ascension of Salafism as the predominant religious philosophy subscribed to by Maldivians.

Just as events of global significance such as the War on Terror and the tsunami of 2004 aided Salafism in its initial phase in the Maldives, international events helped strengthen its appeal among the Maldivian population beleaguered by chaotic domestic politics. As the Islamic State declared by al-Baghdadi in Iraq in 2014 strengthened the global Jihadi movement, Maldives became a recruitment hub for fighters to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Although the government of Yameen continued to deny that among the large percentage of the Maldivian population subscribing to Salafism were also Salafi Jihadists,[10] international research into the phenomenon of 'radicalisation' revealed that Maldives had become the second largest per capita supplier of foreign fighters to the conflicts.[11] Maldivians fighting in Syria also established their own Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media platforms which chronicled their lives and deaths as soldiers of Islam in Syria and Iraq, their accounts sharply contradicting the official policy of denying Salafi Jihadists existed in the Maldives.[12]

Salafi-Jihadist terrorism of the sort made familiar by the ISIS began to occur more regularly five years after the bomb detonated in Male' in 2007. They began shortly after the events which ended President Nasheed's government in February 2012. In June of that year, a renowned journalist and openly gay blogger Ismail Hilath, who, in addition to being homosexual also publically discussed a desire to become a Sufi, was attacked outside his home on 5 June 2012. The assailants attempted to murder him, slashing his throat open with a knife. He barely escaped death and now lives in exile at an undisclosed location.[13] The perpetrators of the attack have never been brought to justice. In October 2012, a leading religious scholar and member of Parliament, Dr Afrashim Ali, was murdered outside his home. He too had his throat cut, and suffered multiple stab wounds.[14] At the time, he was involved in a disagreement over a religious issue with members of a leading Salafi non-governmental organisation (NGO), Jamiyyath Salaf. Two years later, in August 2014, shortly after the Islamic State was declared in Iraq, journalist Ahmed Rilwan was abducted from outside his home in the middle of the night and remained a disappeared person for the next five years.[15] In April 2017, satirist blogger Yameen Rasheed, known for his criticism of intolerance in the name of religion, was murdered outside his home in the middle of the night. He, too, was attacked with a knife and suffered multiple stab wounds.[16] Despite the common modus operandi in all the attacks, and the victims' shared history of disputes with Salafi actors, the government refused to acknowledge the connections and deliberately neglected—sometimes obstructed—proper investigations into the crimes. It was only in 2019, after a new coalition government led by MDP's Ibrahim Mohamed Solih came to power in September, that details of the perpetrators behind the killings were shared with the public. The murders, a special commission set up by the President revealed, were carried out by local cells affiliated with Al-Qaeda in the Maldives.[17] They were killed for holding beliefs that did not conform with the views espoused by certain Maldivian Salafi actors.

From '100 percent Muslim' to 100 percent Salafi?

The global Salafi community is broad, and major differences exist among its adherents on the method or *manhaj* by which to realise the Salafi vision of reviving the Islam practised in its first three centuries (Maher 2016: 8). Thus, existing literature discusses several typologies of Salafism (Wiktorowicz 2006; Hafez 2007; Brachman 2009), of which Quintan Wiktorowicz's Anatomy of the Salafi Movement has been most popular (Wiktorowicz 2006). Building on the Wiktorowicz typology, Maher provides a more detailed breakdown of the various types of Salafi actors: (a) quietist-advisors—who eschew public dissent in favour of private counsel;

(b) activist-challengers—who publicly disagree with the government and call on it to reform; (c) violent-challengers—who, while having taken up arms, have yet to reject the entire domestic or international order; and (d) violent-rejectionists—who regard the nation state itself as 'a heterodox affront to Islam whereby temporal legislation usurps God's sovereignty' (Maher 2016: 9–10). The last category are the Salafi-Jihadists. All types are represented in the Maldives of today. Given its violence, it is the Salafi-Jihadists who have drawn most concern worldwide.

In the Maldives, however, it is the less violent among the Salafi community and the quietist-advisors and the activist-challengers who have been largely responsible for affecting the revolutionary social and religious changes Maldives has undergone in the last decade. Their relentless work to 'purify' Maldivian society in accordance with their teachings—and an important goal for followers (Haykel 2009)—is strengthened by the activities of the violent-challengers who, although striking with less frequency, instil fear in the population and drive them to accept Salafi teachings, or at least refrain from challenging them. This can be seen, for example, in the Maldivian population's failure as a whole to rise up, or speak out, against the violent-challengers who brutally murdered the scholar and writers who did not agree with the teachings of the quietist-advisors and the activist-challengers. These killings, among other key events, have demonstrated how actions by the different categories of Salafis complement each other in bringing about the desired religious and social changes so that the population—even those who do not subscribe to their teachings—can be brought in line and a more 'pure' Muslim society can be created.

In the case of all three murders by the violent-challengers, for example, the less violent activists identified the individuals as anti-Islamic for disagreeing with or being critical of various Salafi teachings. The quietists disseminate the teachings, and the activist-challengers identify those who publicly refuse to accept them. This is often done using the Internet and social media, where said individuals are portrayed as anti-Islamic, without religion (La Dheenee), or apostates. The activist-challengers then launch on- and offline campaigns using social and mainstream media as well as lectures in public and private gatherings that incite public outrage and hatred against the individuals so marked. It is then left to the violent-challengers to kill the targets, after which the quietists and the non-violent challengers (within and outside government) work together to ensure the killers evade justice. If the marked individuals cannot be killed, they are forced outside of society. As previously mentioned, this process can be seen at work in the murders of Dr Afrasheem Ali, Ahmed Rilwan, and Yameen Rasheed. The ongoing measures against a human rights NGO, the Maldivian Democracy Network (MDN), provide an example of the latter, as discussed subsequently.

In early 2015, the MDN published a report, *Preliminary Assessment of Radicalisation in the Maldives*,[18] which named several clerics at the forefront of Salafi activism and critically reviewed school textbooks and religious sermons which helped spread the philosophy in the Maldives.[19] In September 2019, MDN was also at the forefront of efforts to reform domestic terrorism laws to criminalise not just joining, recruiting, and funding Maldivians for 'Jihad' in foreign wars but also to express support for it. The government was preparing to publish the findings of its investigations into the three murders. At this critical juncture, Jamiyyath Salaf, the most active and influential Salafi NGO in the Maldives, joined forces with other key Salafi actors to coordinate a nationwide campaign to abolish MDN based on its 2015 report. Much of the Salafi campaign was conducted on social media, mostly Facebook and Twitter, using the hashtag #BanMDN. In the space of three months (October, November, and December 2019), the campaign had generated over 200,000 Tweets. An analysis of a sample of 30,000 Tweets randomly selected from a total of 200,000 shows that initially, the focus was on condemning the MDN report's

examination of the online content produced by a number of named Salafi clerics and NGOs for views that encourage or support Jihad or 'radicalisation'. These early Tweets accused MDN of attempting to discredit 'the country's most high-heeled clerics' by describing them as extremists, an act intended to discredit Islam itself. MDN was accused of attempting to use the upcoming legislation to jail all the clerics, the intention being to undermine Islam. At the end of September, however, the focus of the Tweets changed from defending local clerics to accusations that the report mocked Islam. Although the contents of the report had been shared with the Ministry of Education as well as other relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in 2015, its alleged mockery of Islam had not been raised as an issue until the campaign was launched and started gaining momentum. With Tweets being sent out from across the country by the thousand on a daily basis, its Salafi coordinators were able to pressure the coalition government to have the report removed from MDN's website.

Once the report was removed from the public domain, Jamiyyath Salaf said it was incumbent upon the organisation to ensure that every single Maldivian was aware of the contents of the extreme danger contained in the report, the purpose of which was to 'wipe Islam from the Maldives'. In a statement issued on 7 October, it provided a 25-point list of why the 'MDN Report' posed the most extreme danger to Islam in the Maldives and why everyone should unite behind the clerics to have it banned. These included attempts to create doubt about Allah's nature and existence and about Prophet Muhammad and his hadith; false allegations against Prophet Muhammad; saying criticism of the Prophet should be allowed; criticism of extra-marital sex being *haram in* Islam; encouraging interfaith dialogue; expressing concern about the requirement to love Prophet Muhammad above self; stating that instead of forcing students to learn only Islam they should be encouraged to choose their own faith; expressing concern over the fact that only Sunni and no other form of Islam is taught in school; expressing concern about anti-Semitism; criticising claims that Islam provides the most perfect framework for human rights; objecting to the claim that Islamic Shari'a is better for humanity than democracy; criticising lessons (in the reviewed textbooks) that teach capital punishment and other shari'a penalties; implying, by its tone, throughout the report that Islam is not a religion of peace; criticising sermons that instil fear by referring to hell and other depictions of the hereafter; framing the entire report to portray Islam to be as false as any other religious ideology; and attempting to portray Allah and Prophet Mohammed as entities that are not sacred. Without a doubt, Jamiyyath Salaf said, the report was proof of the continuing efforts to 'wipe Islam from the Maldives' and introduce a secular government (Press Release, Salaf 2019).[20]

Once the statement was published, the #BanMDN Tweets grew in number. A petition to #BanMDN was created on the online platform Change.org:

> calling on President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih to abolish La Dheenee (irreligious) which criticises the Qur'an, mocks Prophet SAW, and belittles Islam. MDN has violated the Constitution, the Religious Unity Act, the Penal Code, and the Law on Forming Association. Not banning the organisation is to provide opportunities for other illegal organisations.
>
> (#BanMDN, Change.org)[21]

Over 15,000 people signed, providing as their reasons echoes of Salafi descriptions of the report and MDN: the report mocked Islam and the Prophet, it posed a grave and imminent danger to Islam in the Maldives, and it had a nefarious agenda to replace Islam with secular governance.

In addition to Jamiyyath Salaf, all other Salafi clerics quickly formed a union, "Association of the Most Learned", to join the #BanMDN campaign. Like Jamiyyath Salaf, it too warned that the government needed to ban the association if it were to prove its commitment to upholding and protecting Islamic values. In addition to taking the necessary steps to dissolve MDN, the government was also to immediately stop any and all crimes against religion, show no hesitation in punishing such crimes, cooperate in any activity conducted to uphold Islamic values, and resolve public unease. Only by banning MDN could the government prove willingness to swiftly stop any and all crimes against religion. Just as Jamiyyath Salaf's statement was reflected in the tens of thousands of Tweets sent out in the #banMDN campaign, the contents of the Salafi clerics' statements were reflected in the #banMDN Tweets sent out from that day forward. Within days, joint action by the Salafi activist-challengers enabled, and encouraged, protests across the country, with men, women, and children coming out on the streets calling for the 'anti-Islamic' organisation to be abolished.

On 5 November 2019, the government gave in to the demands. After an 'investigation' of the report by the Maldives Police Service and the Islamic Ministry, which confirmed the report indeed mocked Islam, the NGO was altogether abolished on 19 December 2019 (Press Release, Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment).[22] The online campaign, however, did not come to a halt.

The focus of #BanMDN since the NGO was abolished has focused chiefly on demanding 'just' punishment for the report's authors. Campaigners have labelled them apostates and enemies of Islam. A widely expressed sentiment is that there is no room in the Maldives for such people: that is, those who have failed to live up to the standards of 'true Muslims' as laid out by Salafi actors. As is the case with many activities conducted to maintain 'religious unity' in the country, these statements and demands are backed by legislation. The 'Procedures to Deal with People Who Participate in Activities Related to Religious Freedom, Mocking Religion, Going to War, Violence in the Name of Religion, and Assisting War Efforts',[23] published by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs in April 2018, identifies citizens 'leaving Islam (even if few in number)' as one of the key threats the Maldives faces at present (Ministry of Islamic Affairs 2018). Leaving Islam, it noted, is not a crime defined in Maldivian law. Asserting that 'the 100 percent Muslim status' of Maldives must, however, be maintained, it outlines measures to be taken if a Maldivian leaves Islam. First, such a person is to receive counselling and the opportunity to repent and revert; if the person insists on remaining an apostate, a court of law—judging according to guidelines provided by the Supreme Fatwa Council—will decide on the status of the person's belief. If the court finds the person guilty, they would be isolated from society for a set period of time, exempt from parole or clemency. Those who are found to mock Islam, meanwhile, are to be charged with the criminal offence of hate crime and, if living abroad, legal arrangements have to be made to have them returned home via Interpol or similar international arrangements. In addition to criminal measures, such offenders are also to be subjected to a range of civil punishments, such as being made ineligible for all state-funded benefits other than the most basic services.

In addition to the stated punishments and restrictions listed in regard to those who deviate from the new Salafi norms, the violent-challengers pose an existential danger to offenders. A large share of the #BanMDN Tweets included the threat that the authors of the report would be killed. Like scores of other Maldivians who openly challenge the Salafi definition of how Maldivians should live their lives, the report's authors have been forced into exile, a majority forced to become refugees in foreign countries. In present-day Maldives, the choice is stark: conform, or lose the right to be a member of the society or the right to live.

Conclusions

Maldives has remained a '100 percent Muslim' country for centuries. Islam, since the 12th century, has remained central to all social and political activities. Factors that allowed this religious homogeneity—geography, lack of linguistic and cultural diversity, centralisation of political power and legislation—also largely remain the same despite the trappings of modernity. What has drastically changed, however, is the *type* of Islam that is practised in the Maldives and the increasingly oppressive and violent steps being taken to maintain the '100 percent Muslim' status. For most of its recorded history, Maldivians practised an almost syncretic Islam that co-opted its Buddhist traditions and peaceful island culture which shunned violence in the name of religion and embraced a quiet piety that permeated society at all levels without much need for interference and enforcement from the top. Religious homogeneity, then, was an integral part of society that arose from people's beliefs and which the country's politics and legislature reflected. Presently the homogeneity is enforced by the use of increasingly stringent laws, the threat of violent punishments by the state, and actual violence by non-State Salafi actors. A future in which democratic advances are forced to retreat to facilitate 'progression through regression' as envisaged by influential Salafi actors is not difficult to foresee.

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24

FESTIVALS IN SOUTH ASIA

Celebrations of local communities

Ute Hüsken

Festivals are an integral and important part of South Asian public and domestic cultures. They are so ubiquitous in daily life that one of my students from India says, "We have so many holidays it does not matter whether you are Hindu, or Christian, or Muslim. How will people get work done?"[1] This ironic statement refers to the specific situation in India, where the holidays and festivals of many religious communities are celebrated—not just by the members of these specific communities but more often than not with the participation of all local residents. Thus, the mostly non-Muslim South Indian village Gugudu is crowded every year during Muḥarram by Shi'i Muslim pilgrims who visit the local Hindu saint, called Kullayappa (Mohammad 2013); the annual pilgrimage to Shabrimala in Kerala, where Vavar, the Muslim friend of the local deity Ayyappan, is venerated by Hindus and Muslims; and the annual festival for the local form of Mary (Arokiya Mātā) in the Catholic pilgrimage centre Velankanni in South India is frequented by Christians, Hindus, and Muslims alike (Frenz 2004). While festivals in this way can and do contribute to positive intercommunal connections, festivals at the same time are often used as an occasion for public statements of hostility towards other communities that share the same space or are in other ways perceived as a threat. Here, processions as public marking of space often play a crucial role (Jacobsen 2008). For example, starting in the 1980s, when the festival Gaṇeśacaturthī was adopted on a large scale as a public festival in Chennai (India), the processions often would purposely stride through Muslim areas, inciting conflict between celebrating Hindus and resident Muslims.[2]

Thus, in South Asia as elsewhere, even those festivals that are explicitly joyous and celebratory[3] always inhere the potential of danger and unpredictability due to a loss of control—a characteristic which for many celebrants adds to the attraction of festivals, especially those with massive public participation. In India, it often happens that some people lose their lives during big festivals, be it in stampedes or simply because help during medical emergencies often is difficult to reach. While this is a characteristic that South Asian festivals share with many festivals celebrated in other parts of the world, by looking at specific South Asian festivals, this chapter aims to bring out features that are not just specifically "South Asian" but also unique to the specific local and historical setting. Any festival that is celebrated by people in a specific place is always also characterized by aspects that one finds only on this ground. This chapter explicitly does not aim to provide a list of the "most important" festivals in South Asia. Instead, I choose to discuss a variety of festivals that allow us to address some issues of

special relevance in South Asian settings. While doing so, I inevitably leave out many aspects that are of equal importance.

Categories of festivals

Most traditions provide their own categorization of festivals. In medieval Sanskrit texts dealing with Hindu temple festivals (e.g. *Mahotsavavidhi* by Aghoraśiva[4]), the frequency of festivals is an important factor for their categorization. Thus, *nityotsava* is celebrated daily, *pakṣotsava* is celebrated every two weeks, *māsotsava* is celebrated once per (lunar) month, *kāmyotsava* is celebrated according to one's wishes, and *naimittikotsava* is a festival celebrated occasionally, not at regular intervals. While all festivals fall under one or the other category mentioned, they at the same time bear their own names, which do not necessarily reflect the time or frequency of their performance. Thus, a festival that celebrates the re-installation of the divine power after a major temple renovation falls under the category *naimittika*, as these renovations take place occasionally, but the name of this festival is Mahāsaṃprokṣaṇa, "Great Ablution". Some festivals take place at very long intervals. Thus, the Mahāmastaka Abhiṣeka, the "Great Ablution of (Bāhubalī's) Head", is a Jain festival that takes place every 12 years in Shravanabelgola, a small town in the South Indian state Karnataka. During this festival, for weeks, water perfumed with sandalwood and coloured with turmeric and vermillion, milk, sugarcane juice, and other liquids are poured over the monolithic 10th-century statue of Gomateśvara Bāhubalī, which is 17.5 meters high.[5] An even longer interval lies between Āti Varatar Vaipava festivals: only every 40 years is the original wooden statue of Viṣṇu as Varadarāja in the South Indian city Kāñcipuram taken out of the water of the temple tank and displayed to the public for a cycle of ca. 45 days. After this period, the statue is immersed in the temple tank again and remains there for another 40 years.[6] Such festivals which take place after long intervals usually attract many visitors, and otherwise rather quiet towns become buzzing mega-cities for a limited time, often posing huge challenges for those in charge of the infrastructure. One of the best-known festivals that occasions the establishment of a temporary mega-city is the Kumbh Melā ("pot-meeting"), which is celebrated once every 12 years. This festival is today considered the biggest religious gathering worldwide. It is connected to the myth of the churning of the milk ocean (*samudramanthana*), which produced the nectar of immortality (*amṛta*).[7] Every 12 years, millions of pilgrims—and especially the associations of ascetics, *akhāṛās*—meet at Prayag, Haridvar, Ujjain, or Nashik (each of the places has its own Kumbh Melā with its own cycle of 12 years) to take a dip in the water at the confluence of rivers there, seeking to wash off their wrong-doings and secure immortality.[8] The popularity of this festival grew steadily: for the 2019 Kumbh Melā in Prayag, the organizers expected 150 million visitors.[9]

Festival times

Both the intervals between the Kumbh Melās and the specific moment of their beginning (*muhūrta*, the auspicious moment) are determined by calculations based on the science of astrology (*jyotiṣa*) and follow the luni-solar calendar. In Hinduism, not many festivals are calculated according to the solar calendar alone, with notable exceptions, such as Makarasaṅkrānti (January 12th and 13th), when the (solar) month Māgha begins and the sun enters a new zodiac sign. This marks the beginning of the "bright half of the year", *uttarāyana*, which is considered especially suited for auspicious occasions such as festivals. Only a few festivals are celebrated in the "dark half of the year", *dakṣiṇāyana*.[10] For the calculation of the "right moment" (*muhūrta*) to start a festival, the influence of the "planets" (*graha*) has to be taken into account.[11] Festivals

thus have their specific, precisely defined place in time, yet they are at the same time important means to structure time: the annual cycle and the harvest cycles are marked by festivals, festivals celebrate and remind us of historical and mythological events, and more often than not, they are a mixture of all these elements and more.

Festivals of new beginnings

Festivals structure time. This is most evident in those celebrations that explicitly relate to beginnings and ends. The beginning of the year is celebrated almost everywhere in South Asia, although the dates and the ways this event is celebrated differ considerably, yet in many places, we find a connection to the harvest. In the Indian state of Kerala, Onam is celebrated in the month Chingam (*ciṅṅaṃ*; August/September) and encompasses many different celebratory activities: boat races, tiger dance and other masked dances, music, intricate flower patterns are strewn on the ground, and so on. In Tamil Nadu, the beginning of the year, called poṅkal, coincides with Makarasaṅkrānti, when the sun enters the Capricorn (*makara*) zodiac constellation. Poṅkal is normally held on the 14th of January. It marks the end of the cold winter and the paddy harvest. This festival is celebrated for four days. On the first day, the old is chased out: the houses are cleaned and painted, and old and broken household materials are thrown into a bonfire. On the next day, sweet boiled rice (*poṅkal*) is boiled until the milk and rice actually spill over. This sweet rice is offered to the sun before it is consumed by the family. The third day is called *māṭṭu poṅkal*. This is a cattle feast, often including a "bull taming" contest (*jallikattu*). On that day, farmers worship and decorate their cattle and walk through villages, collecting donations. On the fourth day, calves are fed. In Maharasthra, Guḍhī Pāḍva is celebrated at the beginning of the month Caitra (March/April). In big cities such as Mumbai, people get up early in the morning, dress up in traditional attire, and attend huge processions. This however, seems to be a rather recent practice which was started with the intention to revive traditional customs by combining tradition and innovation. One would see, for example, women wearing the very traditional (considered old-fashioned) nine-yard saris while riding on motor bikes and wearing sunglasses. The streets are decorated with intricate patterns of coloured powder (*raṅgoli*) which take hours to make. Traditionally, the households set up sticks with upside down *kalaśa* (pot) at the top, with sweets, a flower garland, and a shiny piece of cloth tied to it. This Guḍhī is placed outside the door or window, while sweets are prepared in the households. After one day, the Guḍhī is removed, the sweets are distributed, and the flowers are spread across the house in different corners to invite prosperity into the house.

Festivals ending the ritual year

While some of the New Year festivals start with the abandonment of the old and broken, the end of the "rainy season" is especially suited for "atonement" festivals.

Pavāraṇā and Kaṭhina

For Buddhists in Sri Lanka, the Pavāraṇā ceremony marks the conclusion of the residential period of the monastics during the three-month-long rainy season (*vassa*). Then, the monastics perform a specific confession ceremony, which "clears the air" between them regarding inappropriate behaviour during the residential period of three or four months—the period they just spent living together in one monastery. During the Pavāraṇā day, lay Buddhists gather in the temple and take upon themselves the five or eight precepts for the day to chant; pay homage to

the Buddha; and offer flowers, food, incense, and so on. Before noon, they serve a meal to the monastics. In the afternoon, the monastics will give Dhamma talks, often about the significance of Pavāraṇā. In the end, the accumulated religious merit is ritually shared with all beings. In some Theravāda settings, the evening following this ceremony is marked by further festivities. For example, "sky lanterns" are launched (called *fanush* in Bangladesh). The celebrations are concluded by Kaṭhina, a festival that provides the occasion for Buddhist lay people to gift the monastics with new robes and other utensils necessary for monastic life. In the evening before the Kaṭhina ceremony, lay people bring white cloth to the monastery, which the monastics cut, colour, and sew overnight. The fabrication of the robe is the only monastic act throughout the year which is performed in cooperation between the monastic and lay communities. Since lay and monastic communities spend this festival together at the temple and work together, this festival is specifically valued as a celebration that strengthens local community bonds. The next morning, the finished robe (called *kaṭhina cīvara*) is carried in a grand procession through the village to the temple, where it is offered to one specific monk who was selected by the monks' community (*saṃgha*). This chosen monk will then have a special status and some easing of monastic rules throughout the coming year. Both being the main lay donor and being the monastic who receives the *kaṭhina cīvara* are considered special honours.

Pavitrotsava

In many South Indian Hindu temples, one annual festival, called Pavitrotsava, is celebrated in August/September. This festival serves to purify the temple and the deities worshipped therein and to rid the ritual performers from the evil effects of ritual mistakes or omissions they might have committed during the preceding ritual year. The deities are decorated with cotton and silk necklaces that resemble strings of pearls, signifying the regular and seamless succession of the rituals during one year. Often this festival is celebrated for up to ten days, with several sacrificial fires lit simultaneously. The main deity is invoked in the water of several pots (*kumbha*), in a huge lotus-maṇḍala in the centre of the sacrificial fires, and in the metal statue called *utsavamūrti* (Hüsken 2006).

Paryuṣaṇ

This is a festival celebrated by Jainas at the end of the rainy season, which the Jain monastics spend in residence. It is celebrated for eight (Digambara) or ten (Śvetāmbara) days in the bright half of the month Bhadrapada. The celebration encompasses fasting, the reading and recitation of holy texts, and processions to Jain temples and ends with a mutual asking for forgiveness for wrong-doings committed during the preceding year. Due to the importance of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) in Jain theology, some states with a significant Jain population close slaughterhouses for some days during this festival.

Festivals as local events

With the example of the Kumbh Melā, we can see that festivals can be seen as contact zones between the human and the divine worlds, as the activities of the gods (their struggle over the nectar of immortality, spilling some drops) occasions and instantiates corresponding activities by humans (the Kumbh Melā, during which people seek to partake in the gods' immortality). Yet these contact zones between the world of the gods and the human world are, as festivals in general, always localized: they take place in a specific location which is characterized by very specific features that can only be found there, nowhere else.

Mahotsavas at Brahmanic South Indian temples

Many festivals in South Asia celebrate local deities. Although these deities might be considered a form of transregional deities, the focus of the celebration is on the deity's specific local form. Such temple festivals are celebrated annually and attract local participants as well as pilgrims coming from further away. Especially those festivals that include processions of the deity through town draw many visitors. They are especially attractive, as the everyday relation between deity and devotees is reversed in these processions: the deity is placed on different 'vehicles" (*vāhana*, often mythological beings, made of wood) and carried through town. While everyday interaction between devotees and deity implies that the devotee approaches the deity, who resides in his/her statue/icon in the centre of the temple, during these processions, the deity comes to the devotee. Today, many of these festivals last ten days or even longer, and there are always specific festival days which attract more outside visitors than others. In the case of the Varadarāja[12] temple in the South Indian town Kāñcipuram, for example, this is the procession called *garuḍasevā*, when the deity is taken on the man-eagle Garuḍa through wide parts of town. One specific moment is especially attractive: legend has it that when the deity leaves his temple and passes the temple tower (which frames the temple entrance), Varadarāja disappears for a brief moment. He does so since a devotee who used to come for the *garuḍasevā* procession each year once had fallen ill and could not come witness this moment. Varadarāja then came to *him* for a brief moment and granted him his vision (*darśana*). This moment is reenacted every year and epitomizes the idea that the deity by his grace grants vision to everyone, even to those who cannot actually be present. In South India, regular performances of such temple festivals already took place during the Pallava rule (9th century CE) but expanded dramatically during the reign of the Coḷa dynasty (10th to 13th centuries; Davis 2010: 17). For those religious traditions with strong ties to royal courts, this expansion went hand in hand with the establishment of a transregionally similar pattern for these festivals (Younger 2002: 60). As Davis points out (2010: 17ff.), another important factor for the establishment of transregional patterns were prescriptive works in Sanskrit which articulate the Brahman priests' vision of an ideal festival.[13] Therefore, although these festivals always focus on the specifics of local forms of the deities, their general pattern (for example the sequence of *vāhanas*) is similar across regions.

Pāṭaikavaṭi Thiruvizhā

The situation is different with regard to those deities in the same regions that do not rely on or refer to a standardized textual tradition. These are mainly local, unmarried female deities who are worshipped by non-Brahman communities. Festivals pertaining to these goddesses are much less standardized and therefore differ widely with regard to their central elements. Thus, the main feature of the festival Pāṭaikavaṭi Thiruvizhā in Valangaiman,[14] a village near Kumbakonam in South India, is an annual festival honouring the local goddess Pāṭaikatiya Māriyamman. It takes place in the month Paṅkuṇi (March/April)[15] and lasts for three weeks. The entire village is involved in the diverse festival procedures, united through the ritual division of labour which is largely hereditary and hierarchically determined. Apart from sacrifices, possession, and processions, many of the celebrants come to Valangaiman to perform "mock funeral processions" there, which end with the reviving of the people on the stretchers by the goddess Pāṭaikatiya Māriyamman through her priests, who place *vipūti* (sanctified ash) on the mouth of the devotees to revive them. The priest then taps the devotee on the shoulder or the chest, signalling him or her to wake up. Some people undergo this ritual since they recovered from severe illness and thank the goddess through this performance. Others hope to recover

from illness, and again others undertake this ritual for someone else whose health they wish to restore. Prabhakaran reports that this festival has become very popular in the last 10 to 15 years and today attracts thousands of worshippers over several weeks. The ritual is believed to appease Pāṭaikatiya Māriyamman and her two sisters, who are the dominant female deities in the village, and is based on the goddess's mythological origin: she was taken as an orphan into the village yet died of pocks at a tender age. This background story that informs the actual performance is locally specific and only to be found in this village, even though Māriyamman in her diverse local appearances is usually connected to illness, which she inflicts but also takes away (Ferrari 2010).

Ambedkar Puṇyatithi

Every year around December 6, Mumbai is crowded with Buddhists from all over Maharashtra, who commemorate the death anniversary of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Throughout his political career, Ambedkar, a lawyer, politician, social reformer, and India's first law and justice minister, campaigned for the rights of untouchable (Dalit) communities and advised them to leave Hinduism altogether. In 1956, he himself converted to Buddhism, along with ca. 500,000 Dalits. Six months later, he died and was cremated in a Buddhist ceremony in Mumbai. This event is commemorated during Ambedkar Puṇyatithi. At that time, thousands of Buddhists, mainly from Maharashtra, gather at Caitya Bhūmi, the memorial of Ambedkar's death in Mumbai, near the Shivaji park and have darshan of the memorial. The Buddhists convening all wear white cloth, most of them with a blue border, a colour combination specifically worn by converted Buddhists.[16] The government organizes a camping site with tents in the huge Shivaji park, where the attendees get together and sing songs composed for that occasion. This celebration is very specific for Ambedkar-Buddhists, most of whom come from Maharashtra.

Festivals as localized events

While there are numerous such locally specific festivals celebrating, for example, local deities and historical personalities, there are equally many festivals that are not local in character but celebrated over a wider region or even globally. These festivals, too, are celebrated in locally specific ways.

Muḥarram

Since the 7th century, Shiism has developed ritual practices to commemorate the martyrdom of the third Imam, Abū ʿAbd Allāh Ḥusayn Ibn ʿAlī (626–680 CE), in the battle at Karbala (Flaskerud 2016: 109). In India, the tenth day of Muḥarram is a bank holiday with large meetings and processions. Apart from several days of fasting, a major festival practice is a public procession in which participants beat their chests as sign of mourning, sometimes even including bloody self-flagellation. Especially in South Asian Shi'a societies, male participants may flagellate themselves using knives or razors swung upon chains. While the observance of Muḥarram is a Shi'a practice across the globe, again, local traditions are equally influential. In Kerala Shia communities, in addition to the mourning processions, participants perform *pulikkali* ("tiger dance"), in which they wear masks and use body paint to look like tigers. This specific practice is on the one hand a Keralite folk-art and at the same time alludes to the fact that Muslims regard Ali as the "tiger of Allah".

Eid-ul-Adha

For Muslims, the festival Eid-ul-Adha (ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā), or "feast of the sacrifice", ends the Hajj (pilgrimage) month Ḏū al-ḥiǧǧa. The festival refers to Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, following Allah's command; the son was then, however, replaced by a goat by Allah. Emulating this, an animal is sacrificed during this festival, which lasts for three days. On the first day, the celebration is within the inner circle of the family, the second day is for the extended family, and the third day is a general celebration. In cities, this sacrificial animal is often purchased in the market and butchered by specialized butchers. Then the animal is divided into three parts: one for oneself, one for family members, and the third part is given to people in need—often these parts are distributed through mosques.

Ramzan and Eid-ul-Fitr (ʿĪd al-fiṭr)

During the fasting month Ramadan, daily recitations of the Qur'an are held, and within Ramadan, a few smaller festivals are celebrated. One celebrates the beginning of the sending down of the Qur'an, called Lailat ul-qadr, when Allah sent the first part of the Qur'an. This event also marks the first encounter of the prophet Mohammad and the angel Gabriel. Throughout the entire night, the Qur'an is read out to the congregation in the form of prayers. This festival is said to be introduced by Mohammad himself. The daily breaking of the fast in the evening, after sunset, is called Aftari,[17] and Eid-ul-Fitr is the day after the final breaking of the fast at the end of Ramzan (Ramadan). Eid-ul-Fitr lasts for three days. In Lahore, families meet and consume a lot of sweets, starting with three dates followed by a dish with sweet milk noodles (Sevya or Savaiya) and meat dishes. In the evening, the streets are full of food markets. In Mumbai, the Mohammad Ali road, close to Muslim quarters, is famous for being completely packed during the evenings and nights of Ramzan, frequented by people of all religious affiliations. The food, which is considered essential during this feast, differs according to region.

Durgāpūjā

Even specific South Asian festivals which are celebrated all over a wide region take locally distinct forms. The autumnal Durgāpūjā festival—also called Navarātri, Dassehra, or Dasaĩ—is a nine-day-long festival in honour of the goddess Durgā, which ends on the tenth day with a celebration called "the victorious tenth" (*vijayadaśamī*). When looking at the diverse ways this festival is celebrated in different regions of South Asia and in the South Asian diaspora, and looking at the vastly diverse meanings it has for the participants, we need to acknowledge that in each setting, Durgāpūjā has specific character, even though some key elements remain recognizable. Simply looking at the diverse modes and ways of celebrating this festival in different regions, one is forced to recognize that this festival is one festival and many different festivals at the same time (Simmons and Sen 2018; Hüsken et al. forthcomning).

Navarātri in Tamil Nadu

Navarātri is Tamil Nadu's Durgāpūjā and is mostly celebrated in private houses. Many families choose to "keep *kolu*" during this time, which means that they set up elaborate doll displays on stages for the entire duration of the festival. Among these dolls, the goddess is also ritually installed (usually in a *kalaśa* pot filled with water and closed with mango leaves and a coconut). In the evenings, the houses open the doors to visitors, mostly women and children, who admire

and worship this setup, sing devotional songs in front of the *kolu* display, and receive gifts from the hosting family, before they move on to the next house with *kolu* set up. While Navarātri is also celebrated in temples, and especially in goddess temples, where often the killing of the buffalo-demon by goddess Durgā is reenacted, the main focus of the festivities is on the rituals performed in the houses, which are mainly in the hands of the women of the house (Ilkama 2018; Wilson 2018).

Dasaĩ in Nepal

In contrast, in Nepal as well as in many other regions of South Asia, goddess Durgā's fight and victory over the buffalo-demon Mahiṣāsura takes centre stage during the autumnal festival Dasaĩ (the local name for Durgāpūjā or Navarātri). For the outside observer, the most striking (and gruelling) characteristic of this festival is the public slaughter of thousands of buffalos (Zotter forthcoming). In Nepal, the festival became the seasonal ritual affirming kingship/sovereignty *par excellence* (Dirks 1987; Stein 1980; Sarkar 2017), based on the idea that a king's sovereignty is grounded in *śakti*, a female power that has to be worshipped and pacified in order to secure and increase the prosperity of the king's domain and its inhabitants (Gupta and Gombrich 1986).[18] In Nepalese royal traditions, Dasaĩ played an important role for the establishment of Nepal's nation state in the "long 19th century" (1768–1950) and even became Nepal's state festival (Gellner 2005; Pfaff-Czarnecka 1993). As a result, this festival today is celebrated by almost all ethnic and social groups and plays an important role in perpetuating Nepalese identity, both in the country and in the diaspora (Zotter 2018, forthcoming). Based on the specific local and historical background, this religious festival is closely interlinked with political identity.

Gaṇeśacaturthī

The festival *Gaṇeśacaturthī* historically has similarly served political ends. The ten-day-long festival is celebrated on the fourth day of the bright half of the month Bhadrapada (August/September), by tradition mainly in the Indian states Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and more recently also Tamil Nadu.[19] If *Gaṇeśacaturthī* can be celebrated smoothly, this indicates that the god is pleased, and it is considered an auspicious sign for the ensuing ritual year. As with most festivals celebrated in different parts of India and beyond, there are huge local variations in festival practices. In Maharashtra, people buy statues of the elephant-headed deity Gaṇeśa in the market and take them home, where they are ritually installed (*prāṇapratiṣṭhā*, often by a priest). From then onwards, daily worship is performed. Since the start of this worship obliges the family to continue throughout the festival (similar to Navarātri), many families choose not to maintain a Gaṇeśa statue in their house but rather attend some neighbours' *pūjā* for the morning or evening worship. At that time, everybody will sing songs together, and people often visit more than one house for these *pūjās*. Apart from this domestic version of the festival procedures, huge Gaṇeśa statues are commissioned and maintained communally by neighbourhoods. These statues are up to four metres high and are ritually served by priests in makeshift temples (*paṇḍal*) in the public space. These *paṇḍals* also host many more communal cultural activities, such as singing, dancing, or theatre performances. Both at home and in the public spaces, Gaṇeśa is fed daily with *modak*, a sweet dish said to be his favourite food. On the last day, the statues are carried to nearby water bodies—often rivers—and immersed there. The huge public Gaṇeśas are taken to the water in big processions, in which people dance and shout: "Hail to the Gaṇapati, please come soon next year". The immersion of the many statues, which are often made of fibreglass or plaster of Paris, causes increasing environmental

concern.[20] Therefore, in Pune, for example, separate water tanks near the river bank are used for the immersion of the smaller domestic statues. At the end of the 19th century, the festival *Gaṇeśacaturthī* was strategically used by the freedom movement: after 1870, fearing seditious assemblies, the British colonial rulers had banned public assemblies of more than 20 people in British India. Yet due to pressure from the Indian Muslim communities, religious assemblies—such as the Friday mosque prayers and even the annual gathering and procession by Shia Muslims on Muḥarram—were exempted from this ban. The latter processions also included the immersion of *tazia*, a replica of the tomb of Husain, into a river or the ocean. In 1894, especially, independence activist Bal Gangadhar Tilak transformed the *Gaṇeśacaturthī* celebrations, which had until then been largely domestic affairs, into grand public events, thus circumventing British colonial law against public assemblies. To today, *Gaṇeścaturthī* processions especially in larger cities in Maharashtra, have (Hindu) nationalistic overtones. In South India, Vināyaka Caturthī (as *Gaṇeśacaturthī* is called there) into the 1980s was not a public event but celebrated privately. However, in 1983, a small group of Hindu activists installed a huge Vināyaka statue in a public place near a temple in West Mambalam in Madras and later carried it in a procession to the beach for immersion. Already the following year saw a growing number of public Vināyaka *paṇḍals*, and in 1990, the attendant processions incited violent clashes between Hindus and Muslims near the Ice House Mosque in Triplicane. In South India, Vināyaka Caturthī thus has become an important instrument of "Hinduization" and of Hindutva ideology, requiring police presence to keep peace, especially if the processions collide with the call for prayer in the mosques (Fuller 2001).

National festivals

Several countries in South Asia celebrate those days that are closely connected with their national independence and autonomy. India and Pakistan celebrate their independence of the British Raj in August as public holiday, though on different dates. While the official handing over of legislative sovereignty took place on August 15, 1947 (this is the date of India's annual celebration), Pakistan celebrates the country's independence on August 14, as Mountbatten administered the independence oath to Jinnah on the 14th and conducted the same ceremony in India on the 15th. Both countries celebrate this day with flag-hoisting ceremonies and generally displaying the national flag everywhere, singing the national anthem on various occasions, speeches of political leaders, military parades, sports competitions, special TV programs, public fireworks, special sales, and a variety of social and cultural activities such as children's shows and art exhibitions. In Pakistan, the mausoleum of the founding father of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, in Karachi is an important centre of activity. Bangladesh celebrates the declaration of independence from Pakistan each year on March 26.[21] This declaration started the war for independence from Pakistan, which ended on December 16 (1971) with the defeat of Pakistan's army. Here, the celebrations also include parades, speeches, concerts, patriotic songs, display of the national flags, special broadcasts on TV, and since 1977 an independence award for Bangladeshi citizens in several academic fields. Closely connected to the struggle for independence from Pakistan is another national holiday in Bangladesh, the *bhāṣā āndōlan dibas*, the "Language Movement Day". When Urdu was declared the state language in Pakistan (East and West) after the partition in 1947, which implied that Urdu was to be the language of education and in the media, strong student protests on February 21 and 22, 1952, in Dhaka resulted in the death of several students. Due to ongoing resistance, in 1956, Bengali became the second official language in Bangladesh. The festival *bhāṣā āndōlan dibas* commemorates this language movement and those who were killed during the unrest. On this day, Bengali language seminars and readings are organized,

and the *Shohid Minar*, a monument remembering those killed as martyrs, is visited. Moreover, a month-long book fair is held in conjunction with this day.

Gendered festivals

Navarātri, mentioned previously, is often described as a "women's festival", since the goddess is at the centre of the celebrations and in many versions of the festival, women are the main ritual performers and celebrants (Ilkama 2018, but see Saul forthcoming). This is, however, not the only gendered[22] festival celebrated in South Asia.

Ṛṣipañcamī in Nepal

The festival Ṛṣipañcamī[23] is a *vrata* (religious vow) observed by girls and women in Nepal who belong to Brahman castes. The main goal of this *vrata* is for women and girls to get rid of the sin of knowingly or unknowingly touching somebody or something during their menstruation. The idea that a woman's menstrual blood is extremely impure, and that this impurity is contagious, is very widespread, not only in South Asian settings. In many rural parts of Nepal, women and girls are therefore sent to a specific hut outside the house, where they spend the first three days of their menstrual cycle isolated from the rest of the family. Ṛṣipañcamī is celebrated in the bright half of the month Bhādra (August/September). The women take a ritual bath in the morning, and the *vrata* ends with a *pūjā* dedicated to seven Ṛṣis and Arundhatī. Thereafter the women are supposed to "eat like Ṛṣis do"; that is, they consume no meat and only certain types of vegetables.

Festivals at the Ādiparaśakti temple

Unlike in most other Hindu temples in South Asia, in the Ādiparaśakti temple in Melmaruvattur (Tamil Nadu), menstruation is not considered impure or polluting. There, women are welcome to attend to sacrificial fires and enter the temple at their will. On the website of the temple, it is explicitly made clear, that "all the festivals are celebrated in accordance with AMMA's Oracle and not based on traditional methods".[24] Arul Thiru Adigalar is considered an incarnation (*avatāra*) and oracle of the supreme goddess Ādiśakti. The goddess ordained through him that "RED is the pigment of blood, which is common to all human beings on this Mother Earth, irrespective of caste, creed, gender, religion or any other discrimination" and "devotees (including women) are allowed to perform Archanas and Abishekams themselves. . . . Women are even allowed during their menstrual periods to perform regular prayers at the Sanctum Sanctorum".[25] Accordingly, during the major festivals celebrated in Melmaruvattur, women clad in red throng the place and perform all major ritual duties there.

Pilgrimage to Shabrimala

In contrast, another pilgrimage-festival in South India has until recently been entirely inaccessible to women of reproductive age, specifically between the age of 10 and 50 years. Especially on January 14, when the main deity Ayyappan manifests as the star Makara Jyoti and appears as divine light to bless his devotees, thousands of pilgrims come to the hill temple of Shabrimala. Ayyappan, the main deity residing on the Shabrimala hill in Kerala, is the son of two male deities and considered an eternal bachelor. This, and the perception that the ascetic restrictions applicable to those who take the pilgrimage cannot be observed by menstruating women, led to

the strict exclusion of potentially menstruating women from this place of worship. This originally very local deity has become the focus of both state and masculine identity. Only recently (2018) has this ban on women of reproductive age been challenged and subsequently lifted by a court order; this new regulation is, however, yet to be implemented on a day-to-day basis.[26]

Karva Chaut/Teej/Vata Pūrṇima

Karva Chaut, Teej, and Vata Pūrṇima are North Indian festivals in which a wife observes a fast and prays for the long life of her husband. For Karva Chaut, this is combined with practices that strengthen the bonds between unrelated women. Karva is a clay pot, which the participating women decorate and fill with sweets and other attractive items. When the women visit each other, they exchange these Karvas. During the day, the women fast, wear special dresses, and pass time meeting friends and relatives. During these women-only gatherings, the story of Karva Chaut is told and the women sing songs together. The breaking of the fast is an important aspect, and here the husband is involved: when the moon rises, he gives his wife the first drop of water, which breaks the fast. This procedure also has romantic connotations, amplified by movies and media coverage. In Maharashtra, this festival is called Vata Pūrṇima. Here, the women go to a Banyan tree, which they worship. They tie a white thread around the tree and circumambulate the tree with the thread in their hand. This practice relates to the well-known story of Satyavat and Sāvitrī, according to which Sāvitrī saved her husband from death through her penance under a Banyan tree. The festival Teej is dedicated to goddess Pārvatī and is celebrated in many states of North India and in Nepal. The celebrants are mostly girls and women, who pray for the long life of their husband. Here again, dancing, singing, prayer, story-telling, and sharing specific food items as well as fasting are important elements in these celebrations.

While the meanings attributed to these "gendered festivals" stem from a patriarchal context and in this sense reconfirm the ritually and hierarchically low status of women, it needs to be acknowledged that these festivals and vows provide occasion for female bonding and are as much sites of resistance as they are sites of complicity with patriarchal norms and attitudes. Yet especially through looking at festivals as gendered events, it is evident that what a festival is, or can be, depends on one's individual position in the social fabric at large.

Conclusion

Festivals, as understood here, are communal, public, and congregational in character, attracting locals and outsiders (tourists, pilgrims) alike. Festivals provide occasion for intensified material transactions. Festivals evoke exceptional, expressive, extraordinary experiences—anticipated with heightened expectations. Yet explaining what a festival "is actually about" is a complicated, if not impossible, task. Festivals, in South Asia, as elsewhere, are public events which, even if they are organized around a central motive, link the local with the universal—and more often than not, the local takes priority. Many of the festivals discussed here are localized in their actual performance and thereby constitute important aspects of local identity. The question is not so much whether one celebrates a festival like Durgāpūjā, but the important question is *how* one celebrates it. Everyone fond of a festival celebrated "at home" will know the feeling of familiarity mixed with strangeness when celebrating a festival away from home, even if it's just a festive dish that is cooked according to a slightly different recipe than one grew up with. Clearly, festivals are embodied experiences. This embodiment is both individual and collective, and it matters greatly.

Yet most of the time, the overall narrative is identical—be it about Abraham's sacrifice, Durgā's victory over the buffalo demon, the Buddha's birth story, or the birth of a nation. These standardized narratives are transmitted in (canonical) texts and are referred to when answering the question what a festival "is about". Yet these normative (textual) narratives highlight only one perspective on festivals, even though this perspective might be a common frame of reference. This frame of reference is, however, actualized in innumerable and considerably different ways. And also, the experience and performance of one and the same festival differs fundamentally whether you are a woman or a man, a young child or a grandparent, the head of a family or an unmarried girl.[27]

Grimes, in his *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, distinguishes six *modes of ritual sensibility* (embodied attitudes). One of these is "celebration", a mode that Grimes defines as "excessive play", characterized by detachment from pragmatic and ordinary matters (Grimes 1982: 48). This playfulness and detachment are the result of the clear limitations, the marked beginning and end of a festival. Within this frame, playfulness, a heightened sense of community, revolt, subversion, and excess are possible and permissible. Yet this limitation does not render the "otherness" of festivals meaningless or ineffective. As MacAloon says: "cultural performances are more than entertainment, more than didactic or persuasive formulations, and more than cathartic indulgences. They are occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others" (1984: 1). Festivals are in fact "phases of social relations", as Victor Turner phrases it (1984). While the festivals that informed the theorizing of these scholars were not from South Asia, their results apply to South Asian festivals as well: festivals accomplish important social work.

This becomes especially evident when looking at South Asian festivals celebrated outside South Asia. When people move and make new homes, they tend to take their social and cultural practices with them, including festivals. These festivals remain a major connecting link between the new and the old home. Yet when celebrated in new homes, these festivals take on new identities, relating as much to what people left behind as to their new setting and communities. Alongside the establishment of new communities, new styles of celebrating are created which are specific to the location, with its perceived opportunities and shortcomings. Navarātri in the United States, for example, is often celebrated in a style that combines many different local Indian traditions: *garbo* dances, *kolu* setups, and Durgā *paṇḍal*s together constitute a new way of celebrating this festival, specific to the location in the United States and its community, while at the same time relating to the multiple old homes of the celebrants and the normative narrative(s) in the background. Similar to some "moderate" celebrations in Pakistan, Muḥarram is celebrated in Oslo (Norway) with blood donation camps rather than bloody self-flagellations of the participants in the processions (Madsen and Hassan 2008; Flaskerud 2016).

As festivals are multilayered occasions with overlapping performative genres, knowledge about festivals is largely transmitted orally and through practice, both for celebrants and organizers. At the same time, the festivals themselves are important means to transmit local cultural knowledge and thus reach and involve not only the "cultural elite" but all celebrating segments of society. The ritual of *garuḍasevā* as performed at the Varadarāja temple in Kāñcipuram exemplifies this: while written sources about Viṣṇu visiting his sick devotee are hardly known, the memory of this mythological event is kept alive through its annual public reenactment.

In short, a festival has many ingredients; agendas or purposes; agents and participants with differing degrees of agency; and a temporal, spatial, historical, and social setting in which it takes place. Exceptional resources are mobilized for festivals, human and otherwise, and out-of-the ordinary transactions take place during festivals. All these ingredients add to the general "festival" recipe and influence each other, making festivals important and efficacious cultural

performances. As stated in the beginning, the number of festivals and of traditions in pluralistic societies of South Asia is legion, and the participation in these festivals often transcends social and religious boundaries. Communities publicly perform their identities in and through festivals; festivals are a society's reflection about itself (MacAloon 1984: 1). All South Asian communities are locally specific, and so are their festivals, as can be seen from the importance of specific festival food for individual participants. Therefore, looking for a commonality specific to "South Asian" festivals is asking the wrong question. The celebrations of local communities tell us much more about their local groundedness and dynamics than about their belonging to an abstract regional, national, or even "South Asian" identity.

Notes

1 I would like to thank my colleagues and students at the South Asia Institute (Heidelberg University), who walked me through some of the festivals mentioned here that I do not know from own experience. I especially thank PhD candidate Shefali More for interesting conversations on the topic. I also thank my colleagues Arian Hopf, Mudagamuwe Maithrimurthi, and Knut Jacobsen for their critical reading and helpful input.

2 Before that time, in India's South, this festival was primarily a domestic celebration (see Fuller 2001).

3 The Sanskrit term *utsava* that I translate as "festival" fits the idea that a festival is a joyous occasion. *Utsava* is derived from *ut + su* (Gonda 1975) and is related to joy and the removal of misery. In this sense, the semantic field of *utsava* corresponds roughly with that of *fest, festival*, and *festus* (Hüsken and Michaels 2013: 13).

4 See Davis 2010.

5 On Mahāmastakābhiṣeka, see Jain 1997.

6 For a preliminary report, see Rajarajan 2019.

7 During the back and forth between gods and anti-gods over the pot with this nectar, four drops fell on the ground. Henceforth, in these four places, a Kumbh Melā is celebrated (Bechler 2013).

8 On the history of this festival, see Bechler 2013.

9 See www.financialexpress.com/india-news/kumbha-mela-2019-whopping-150-million-expected-to-attend-greater-than-population-of-100-countries-combined/1417572/; date of last access: 19.12.2019. Especially for the festivals that take place only once in a while, the strong interconnection between the South Asian ritual practice of pilgrimage and festival is evident.

10 The year is subdivided into an auspicious and an inauspicious half, and a month comprises a "dark" and a "bright" half. Similarly, the week encompasses auspicious and inauspicious days, and the day has auspicious and inauspicious times.

11 These precise astrological calculations are in the hands of professionals, the astrologers, who are also in charge of interpreting horoscopes, an important part of match-making.

12 Varadarāja is a local form of the Hindu deity Viṣṇu; for details, see Hüsken 2007, 2013.

13 Examples for these prescriptive works are Aghoraśiva's *Mahotsavavidhi*, or the *Kriyākairavacandrikā* by Varahaguru, seeking to establish a unified ritual program.

14 I thank PhD researcher Sona Prabharakan (Heidelberg University) for sharing with me details on this festival, which is the topic of her PhD research project.

15 Here, the festival deviates from other festivals for non-Brahman local female deities, as these celebrations usually take place in the month Ādi (July/August).

16 The blue is that of the wheel in the Indian flag.

17 The exact moment of the breaking of the fast differs according to location and religious affiliation, and usually the mosques announce the appropriate moment.

18 Importantly, *śakti* manifests in a variety of forms: as family goddess, as village goddess, as goddess of the kingdom, as queen, but also as prepubescent girl (*kumārī*) or as a plant.

19 In Maharashtra, the popularity of Gaṇeśa is based on the fact that he is/was the guardian deity of the Maharashtrian Peshwas since 1740. With the emigration of Maharashtrian Brahmans, this deity's cult was spread, for example, to Vārāṇasī and to the South of India.

20 A connection of the festival to the harvest is enacted when, after the clay figure is thrown into a tank or river, a handful of clay or sand is brought in the tray or on the stool that had been used for carrying it. Back home, this sand is then deposited in the room in which provisions are stored.

21 For this section on Bangladesh, see Heitzman and Worden 1989.

22 It is understood here that most human actions are inescapably gendered. However, in this section, I deal with some festivals in which the gender of the celebrants is *explicitly* decisive for the way they can, should, cannot, or should not celebrate the festival.

23 I thank MA candidate Marija Grujowska (Heidelberg University) for sharing with me details on this festival, which is the topic of her MA research project.

24 See www.sakthipeedam.org/festivals.html; last accessed 29.1.2019.

25 See www.omsakthiamma.org/siddhar_peedam/uniqueness_of_the_place/; last accessed 29.12.2019.

26 For details, see More (forthcoming).

27 This becomes especially evident when looking at one and the same festival in different regions and from different perspectives, as is done in two SUNY volumes on the Indian festival Navarātri (Simmons and Sen 2018; Hüsken et al. forthcoming).

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25

INDIAN RELIGIONS IN THE UNITED STATES[1]

Prema Kurien

There are currently over 4 million individuals of Asian Indian ancestry in the United States. The majority, 69 percent, are foreign born (Pew Research 2017). Indians have been arriving in the United States since the turn of the twentieth century. However, the Asiatic Barred Zone Act of 1917 prevented the further immigration of Asians, including Indians, into the United States for 29 years, until 1946, when the Luce–Celler Act allowed a quota of 100 Indian immigrants. Contemporary Indian immigrants started arriving as students in the 1960s. The passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which liberalized the U.S. immigration system, allowed many in this group to remain in the country and also brought in Indians as doctors, nurses, engineers, and other professionals and relatives of Indians already in the United States. Starting from the end of the 1990s, information technology (IT) jobs, particularly created to deal with the anticipated year 2000 (Y2K) computer problem, led to a significant migration of Indian immigrants on H-1Bs (temporary visas for high-skilled foreign workers). More than two-thirds of the H-1B visas after 2010 went to Indians (they received 86 percent of H-1B visas in 2014). Consequently, a large number of Indian immigrants are concentrated in the fields of science and technology. Another significant mode of entry into the United States has been as students. Since the year 2000, India has consistently been either the first or second ranked source (after China) of international students in the United States (Institute of International Education 2018).

Indian Americans are scattered around the country, but more than half live in California, New York, New Jersey, Texas, and Illinois (Chakravorty et al. 2017). About half (51 percent) identify as Hindu, although in India, Hindus account for over 80 percent of the population. Muslims are also somewhat underrepresented; in India, they make up 13.4 percent of the population but only around 10 percent of those of Indian ancestry in the U.S. Christians, on the other hand, constitute only around 2.3 percent of the population in India but account for around 18 percent of Indian Americans. Similarly, Sikhs in India are less than 2 percent of the population, but they are at least 5 percent of Indian Americans (Pew Research 2012).

Religion was important to Indian immigrants from the early days of their settlement, and home-based religious practices, rituals, and community gatherings in rented facilities were institutionalized quite early on (see Kurien 2007). In the diaspora, immigrant parents turned to ethnic organizations to provide moral and cultural grounding for their children—these were most likely to be religious organizations. As their numbers increased, Indian Americans started

building religious institutions such as temples, mosques, gurdwaras, and churches (sometimes by purchasing and repurposing older buildings) in areas where there were sufficient numbers to financially support such endeavours. These institutions and organizations focused on the spiritual, cultural, and social needs of members, but Indian Americans remained relatively united in the public sphere, mobilizing around issues of common interest. However, the political unity of Indian Americans was shattered as contemporary Hindu nationalism started growing in India starting from the 1980s, leading to the development of intracommunity tensions. This led Indian Americans to begin to mobilize around religious organizations rather than around pan-Indian American organizations. In fact, there are now far more religious than secular Indian American organizations, even when the very many regional language-based groups that have formed among Indian Americans are included (Agarwala 2016: 920; Chakravorty et al. 2017: 137). I am a sociologist of religion and immigration and have conducted research on a variety of Indian American religious communities. In this chapter, I draw on this research to show how religion, through a variety of indirect and direct mechanisms, shapes migration patterns, social incorporation, and forms of political mobilization.

How religion shapes patterns of migration

The role of religion in shaping out-migration patterns is not well recognized by migration scholars. For instance, the classic book on contemporary immigration, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, first published in 1990 by two leading migration scholars, included a chapter on religion (drawing on the research of other scholars) only in its third edition in 2006. Portes and Rumbaut (2006: 301) open the chapter on religion and migration by stating categorically, "A first basic point is that religion seldom causes emigration." However, as we will see subsequently, religion, mediated through colonial and postcolonial policies in India has been an important factor accounting for the migration patterns of Indian ethno-religious groups to the United States. Religion did not shape migration patterns directly through religious dictates or practices but indirectly by determining the sociopolitical location of groups within colonial and postcolonial India. Between 1901 and 1910, 5,762 immigrants from Punjab in British colonial India arrived in northern California (Gould 2006: 90). They worked in lumber mills, railroad construction, and later in agriculture (McMahon 2001: 19). The overwhelming majority of these Punjabi immigrants in the first decade of the twentieth century, around 85–90 percent, were Sikh, even though Sikhs were only around 13 percent of the population of Punjab (McMahon 2001: 10). Punjabi Muslims constituted the second largest religious group among these early West Coast immigrants, followed by Punjabi Hindus. But they were all identified in the United States as "Hindoos, or Hindus" the (racial) term then used for inhabitants of India (which was also called "Hindustan," or the land of the Hindus). Starting from the 1880s, a smaller group of Muslim men from a small cluster of villages in the Bengal region of British India arrived at ports on the East coast as peddlers of hand-embroidered chikan cotton, silk Indian fabric, and Indian rugs. They peddled these wares on the boardwalks of beach resorts in New Jersey over the summer, and when the beach season was over, they moved down south to cities like New Orleans, where they continued to ply their trade. Other Bengali Muslim men who worked as lascars or "native" seamen on British merchant vessels started arriving at East coast ports and Gulf ports later, from around the time of the First World War. These seamen used their networks to jump ship and find work in factories in interior towns, which were then working overtime to produce goods and materials needed for the war. Some found employment in the service sector in New York City (Bald 2013).

It is no coincidence that the two groups of labour migrants arriving in the United States from British India were from particular linguistic and religious backgrounds. British land

revenue disrupted traditional farming practices, leading to migration out of many rural areas: both Punjab and Bengal were areas that were particularly badly affected by British agricultural policies, resulting in famines and epidemics. Networks of kinship and ethnicity in these "labour catchment areas" were routinely mobilized by British colonialists and labour recruiters to find workers for various types of specialized jobs (Ahuja 2008). Kinship links also became a risk management strategy for recruiters who had to provide loans for workers to make the journey from the hinterland and stay in boarding houses while awaiting work assignments. These modes of access to jobs were a jealously guarded resource maintained by ethnic groups. A consequence of these recruitment strategies was that different occupational niches within the colonial economic system were filled by different ethnic groups, resulting in a highly ethnically segmented labour market (Ahuja 2008).

Sikhs dominated the early immigration to North America from British India (the colonial era lasted until 1947) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for three reasons. First, British colonial land policies in the Punjab transformed land into a commodity that was divisible and alienable. In addition, land taxes were fixed for two to three decades at a time (as opposed to the earlier annual assessments by native rulers that had allowed for some flexibility in bad years). This combination meant that peasants who were landowners, largely Jat (Jaṭṭs) Sikhs, sold or mortgaged their land during lean years and gradually became mired in debt (Oldenburg 2002). Consequently, younger sons (who were less likely to inherit land) were encouraged by their families to migrate. The region also experienced droughts, famines, and epidemics (Jensen 1988: 24).

Second, as an older Sikh man from Northern California whom I interviewed pointed out,

> A lot of Sikhs were in the British Army, and so wherever the British went, Sikhs went with them. And a lot of them didn't return after the service was over, and they remained in those countries. And so that's the reason why the very early migrants to many parts of the world were Sikh . . . you can call it a gift from the British to the Sikh community!

The British took over the Punjab region after a long and bitter struggle with Mahārājā Rañjīt Siṅgh, the founder of the Sikh empire (Gould 2006: 77–78). The British were so impressed with the military skills of the Sikh army that they designated Sikhs a "martial race" (Dirks 2001: 178–180) and heavily recruited them into the British army. In fact, the British were able to defeat the first major anti-colonial rebellion in India in 1857 primarily due to the support of Sikh regiments (Jensen 1988: 6). The British encouraged Sikh orthodoxy. Separate *khālsā* (initiated Sikhs who maintain articles of faith) Sikh regiments were formed, and the leaders of these regiments were rewarded by the British with honorary titles and material rewards to ensure their loyalty to the British (Sohi 2014: 18). Sikh regiments were considered elite units of the British army and served around the world, and the roots of the Sikh settlement in North America can be traced to the celebration of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, when a Sikh regiment based in India was sent to London to attend the rituals. In returning to India via Canada, they learned about the work opportunities on the Pacific coasts of Canada and the United States, and some returned seeking work (McMahon 2001: 9). Religious networks were the final factor that gave Sikhs an advantage over men of other religions from Punjab. Sikhs had *gurdvārā*s (temples) all along the long route from Punjab to North America, including in Hong Kong, where migrants had to break journey, often for weeks. The *gurdvārā*s provided free lodging and one free meal a day, which was useful for wayfarers (Jensen 1988: 27).

The role of religion in shaping out-migration can also be seen in the post-1965 period (see Kurien 2002). I have mentioned previously that Sikhs and Christians are overrepresented in the United States compared to their respective populations in India. In the contemporary period, a large Sikh out-migration was triggered by the Indian government's economic and political policies in Punjab. High-yielding varieties of wheat introduced into Punjab under the Green Revolution program worsened the position of small peasant farmers (largely Jaṭṭ Sikhs), who could not afford the large inputs of fertilizers and water these crops required. Economic marginalization led to a sharpening of Sikh ethnic and political identity, and a Sikh autonomy movement which had been simmering from the end of the colonial period was revitalized into a *Khalistan* movement for a separate homeland. This movement was brutally repressed by the Indian government, culminating in an attack on the sacred Sikh temple in Punjab in 1984. The assassination of then–Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two Sikh bodyguards later that year led to a pogrom against Sikhs in Delhi and several other cities in North India, killing thousands. Continuing economic and political problems in the Punjab and violent repression by the government over the next decade led to a large out-migration of Sikhs to the West. Sikhs form a large proportion of the Indian population in Canada (34 percent in 2001) and the United Kingdom (almost the same size as Hindus in 2011). Since the U.S. census does not have a religion category, we do not have an accurate estimate of how many Sikhs live in the United States at the current time. According to Pew Research Center estimates, there were at least 200,000 Sikhs in the United States in 2012. This is compared with around 1.6 million Hindus. However, Sikh groups argue that there are between 500,000 to 1 million Sikhs in the United States (Kurien 2018: 82).

A large proportion of Indian Christians in the United States are Syrian Christians (an ancient community in Kerala originating from trade connections with the Middle East from the early centuries of the Christian era), and an overwhelming majority of this group migrated through the sponsorship of female nurses who were recruited to meet the U.S. nursing shortage from the late 1960s (Kurien 2017). Even though Christians in Kerala made up only about one-fifth of the population of the state, female nurses hailed almost entirely from this group until at least the late 1990s. Religious networks played a critical role in this development and in their migration outside the country. Syrian Christians were strongly influenced by British Christian missionaries during the colonial period and joined missionary educational and medical institutions in record numbers. Their out-migration to the Middle East, Malaysia, Singapore, and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) began in the early decades of the twentieth century through British missionary contacts. At that time, nursing was considered a low-status profession for women in Kerala (very few men went into nursing), since it challenged traditional gender norms of limited male–female interaction, as well as Hindu ideas of pollution stemming from contact with bodily fluids. However, the identification and alliance of Syrian Christians with British missionaries who promoted nursing as a "noble profession" gradually made the community more open to the profession. In the colonial and early postcolonial period, largely lower middle-class women went for nurse training to take advantage of the stipend that was provided at this time. As nurses came to be in high demand in the Middle East and the United States, Syrian Christian nurses became primary migrants and were able to sponsor family members and even friends (in the 1970s when immigration rules allowed for this possibility) and also sent remittances back to parents and relatives in Kerala. Their success prompted Syrian Christian women from a wider range of classes to turn to nursing.

My research (Kurien 2017) on a Syrian Christian denomination in the United States showed that the migration of several men was also directly facilitated through Christian networks. These men had arrived for higher education, including Christian theological education, at Christian

universities and colleges affiliated with Bible colleges in South India that they were connected with. The religious context of the United States played an additional role in motivating the migration of some Syrian Christians from Kerala. In interviews with me, a few who described themselves as strong Christians told me that they had decided to migrate to the United States, since it was a "Christian country" where they could practice their religion freely (unlike in the Middle East).

In the case of Hindu immigrants from India, the largely upper-caste migration from India in the 1960s and 1970s, with many Hindus arriving as graduate students, can be explained by the traditional educational and social advantages that upper-caste families enjoyed in India. However, as we have seen previously, Hindu immigrants are actually underrepresented among Indian immigrants to the United States when compared to their proportion in India. Although Hyderabadi Muslims are a mere 1 percent of Muslims in India (calculated from Census of India 2011), they are the largest group among Indian American Muslims (Mohammed-Arif 2002, 35). Here, again, we can see that religion and politics played a role in shaping this migration stream. Hyderabadi Muslims in the United States were mostly individuals who were part of the ruling class of the former Hyderabad State in South India (Leonard 2007: 9). When the Nizam (Muslim ruler) was deposed and that princely state became part of the Indian republic in 1948, the elite fled to countries such as Pakistan and England, from where some moved to the United States.

Religion and immigrant community formation

In contrast to the role of religion in shaping migration patterns, the ways in which religious institutions forge community formation among immigrants has been well documented (e.g. Hirschman 2004: 1228). I found that religion played an important role in sustaining community life in the diaspora, even in a non-congregational religion such as Hinduism. In a chapter in *Gatherings in Diaspora* entitled "Becoming American by Becoming Hindu" (Kurien 1998), I first laid out the argument, subsequently developed in my 2007 book, *A Place at the Multicultural Table: The Development of an American Hinduism*, that Indian Americans of Hindu background were able to make the transition from sojourners to residents and citizens of the United States by developing a Hindu American community and identity. This was because Hindu American organizations permitted Hindu Indians to adopt particularly American ways of expressing individuality and ethnicity and to take a place "at the multicultural table" while maintaining their cultural and personal integrity. However, in the process, Hinduism is recast and reformulated.

Hinduism in India consists of an extraordinary array of practices, deities, texts, and schools of thought. It is also a religion that stresses orthopraxis over theological belief. Since Hinduism is the dominant religion in India, it is transmitted through informal mechanisms. In the United States, on the other hand, parents realized that they had to make a deliberate effort to teach children what being Hindu or Indian means. Many Hindu immigrants felt the need for community to accomplish these goals and developed congregational forms of worship and learning such as *satsaṅgs* (local worship groups) and *bala vihars* (educational groups for children). Even temples adopted a congregational format, offering special Saturday or Sunday *pūjā* (Hindu ritual worship) and *bhajan* (Hindu devotional songs) "worship services." Hindu student organizations were another diasporic invention to provide support for Hindu students. Local and national Hindu umbrella organizations also formed with the goal of uniting, educating, and mobilizing Hindus of different backgrounds in support of Hindu interests. Leaders of all of these organizations worked to simplify, standardize, and codify the religion to make it easier to understand, articulate, and practice. In the process, an encapsulated, intellectualized American Hinduism has

been created, very different from the diversity of ritual practices and caste observances that are characteristic of everyday Hinduism in India.

I started fieldwork on Indian Christians (Syrian Christians belonging to the Mar Thoma denomination) toward the end of my study of Hindus. That research showed that the majority/minority religious status of immigrant groups both in the homeland and in the receiving country played an important role in shaping the reception and the incorporation patterns of groups. Hindus and Christians provided an interesting contrast, since Hindus, who are the dominant majority in India, became a small religious minority in the United States, while Indian Christians, who are a small minority group in India, became part of the religious majority group. As religious minorities, Hindus had to combat the ignorance and negative stereotypes about their religion and had to work hard to obtain recognition for Hinduism and Hindus as contributors to the American multicultural fabric. Indian Christians, on the other hand, had to deal with the unfamiliarity of the United States population with ancient Christian communities in India, but more importantly, they faced trouble establishing their "ethnic" church amidst the range of Christian options available. An important issue was retaining the allegiance of their American-born children to the distinct liturgical, ritual, and ecclesiastical practices of the traditional denomination. Second-generation Mar Thoma Americans were influenced by nondenominational American evangelicalism, which led them to reject the "ethnic," denominational worship practices of the Mar Thoma and in many cases leave the Mar Thoma church once they reached adulthood. Although they valued their ethnic identity, they felt that ethnicity should be confined to the home and secular arenas and should not be intertwined with religion (Kurien 2012). Ironically, then, Indian Hindus, who are a religious and cultural minority in the United States, are able to fuse religion, culture, and ethnicity and are more successful in the intergenerational transmission of ethnic religion than Indian Christians.

Research on second-generation Hindu and Christian Indian Americans also showed that race and religion interacted in complex ways to shape identity formation. In the case of religiously oriented Hindus, for instance, many seemed to have turned to religion and religious organizations due to a consciousness of racialization. Consequently, an embrace of an assertive Hindu identity was one way for them to contest racial marginality (Kurien 2005). Religiously oriented second-generation Indian Christians, on the other hand, separated their faith and their sociocultural identity and emphasized that their Christian identity was more important. Most had attended white or multiracial Christian institutions at least at some point in their lives (usually while in college). Instead of articulating their racial and ethnic difference from members of the wider American society as did Hindus, they stressed their "American" identity, their comfort with individuals from a variety of racial and ethnic groups, and the importance of opening their parents' ethnic church to the local community (Kurien 2017).

Religion has also been important for community formation for Muslims and Sikhs from India, but here, I discuss the case of Dalits in the United States, who constitute a small minority of Indian Americans (I conducted interviews with 43 Dalit rights activists in the United States between 2017 and 2018). Ravidassia temples function as the only visible space in the United States for regular Dalit gatherings. Another not-so-visible space is provided by Ambedkarite Buddhist groups. Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) was a very important Dalit leader from Maharashtra state. In 1956, shortly before his death, Ambedkar renounced Hinduism and converted to a reformulated neo-Buddhism (Navayāna), blaming Hindu religion for caste oppression. Through Ambedkar's influence, some Dalit activists, particularly those from his home state of Maharashtra, grew up Buddhist or converted to Buddhism. Maharashtrian Dalit Americans have started Ambedkarite Buddhist organizations in the United to unite and "create a cultural identity for Ambedkarite Buddhists" (as one activist told me). One of the best known

is the Dr. Ambedkar International Mission (AIM), founded in 1994 in Malaysia by Raju Kamble. The U.S. organization was started in 2003 and has branches around the country. Another well-known Ambedkarite Buddhist organization is Ambedkar Association of North America (AANA; established in 2008). Raju Kamble, a Maharashtrian who had grown up in an Ambedkarite Buddhist family in India, told me that he had not been drawn to the ritualistic side of Ambedkarite Buddhism as a child, but, he said,

> Today, I promote that as a cultural identity so that our people, the Ambedkarites, don't have to be drawn into Hindu culture or Hindu temples. Because Ambedkar created a distinct Buddhist identity so we must be proud about that. . . . Before Ambedkar International Mission came into being, all these families didn't know where to go. . . . They would go into the Hindu temple because at least there is some Indian culture there. There was no platform for the Ambedkarite Buddhist to practice or share their cultural identity.

The AIM group develops a cultural Ambedkarite Buddhist identity through monthly "Poornima" (full-moon) get-togethers which include a discourse on Buddha's teachings by a Buddhist monk and meditation. They also read and discuss Ambedkar's work and other Dalit literature and have developed several "Ambedkar songs" and "Buddha songs" for use at these events. On Sundays, several children participate in a "Virtual Vihara," a Buddhist online "Sunday school" organized by AANA. AIM and AANA organize festivals three times a year, for Ambedkar's birthday (April 14), Buddha's birthday (a full-moon day usually in May), Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism (October 14), and also to commemorate his death anniversary (December 6). At the festivals, children give speeches on Ambedkar and other anti-caste leaders, enact events from their lives, and also present a program with music, song, and dance. A father mentioned in his interview with me, "Had AIM not been here, all these young children would have been Indians . . . they are still Indians of course, but they would not have known this true side of their identity. So that is one important thing that AIM has provided or continues to provide, is give that platform to the younger generation." Raju Kamble, speaking to those gathered at an Ambedkar's birth anniversary celebration in April 2017 remarked on how surprised Indian Dalits have been to see these strong Ambedkar-Buddhist groups emerging in the diaspora, since they do not exist in India.

Religion, political interests, and mobilization

Since religion plays an important personal and public role in the United States, it becomes the political conduit to channel community concerns. Hinduism did not just get reformulated in the United States. It also became politicized as supporters of the Hindu nationalist *Hindutva* movement took the initiative to found and lead many American Hindu organizations. The role of religion in the United States and the politics of recognition played an important role in bringing about this development. Hindus in the United States have played an important part in transnational Hindutva mobilization, including mobilizing around the 2014 Indian national elections, which resulted in a major victory for the Hindu nationalist party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. Muslim Indian Americans have responded to Hindu nationalism by developing a very different construction of "Indianness" and pattern of homeland-oriented ethnic nationalism (Kurien 2001). Progressive, second-generation Indian Americans, on the other hand, favour a "South Asian" identity that opposes the religious nationalisms of the subcontinent (Kurien 2003).

Religion plays an important role in shaping the ethnic versus pan-ethnic mobilization of Indian Americans. Those who mobilize as Indian Americans are largely from the immigrant generation and operate within the nationalist ideology of India. Since India and Pakistan were formed through a bloody religion-based partition, religious nationalisms are deeply embedded in the South Asian context. As professionals and members of a U.S. group that has high levels of education and income, immigrant leaders want to distance themselves from problematic U.S. racial minorities. Consequently, the constant highlighting of the success of Indian Americans and the parallels with Jews are attempts to sidestep racial categorization. Second-generation progressives who mobilize as South Asian Americans, on the other hand, prefer to confront and challenge racialization, as well as the religious divides of their parents' generation. As American-born individuals, domestic issues and civil rights activism are of much greater interest to them than issues connected with India. The events of September 11, 2001, constituted a watershed in the activism of both types of groups. Indian American groups mobilized to protest the lumping of India with Muslim countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh. South Asian groups were also energized, "because to American bigots, Pakistanis, Indians, Bangladeshis, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs all look the same—brown—many victims are deciding they have a lot more in common than they had previously realized" (Madhulika Khandelwal, quoted in Wildman 2001). However, in contrast to Indian American groups, they mobilized to present a united front against the hate crimes that followed in the aftermath of 9/11 and to challenge government policies like the special registration required of immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries.

My research showed that the majority/minority status of the religious groups has played a central role in shaping political mobilization. In the United States, immigrant mobilization of religious minorities to gain recognition and inclusion into the religious fabric and identity of the nation has a long tradition, from the mobilization of Irish and European Catholics in the nineteenth century to the activism of Jews in the twentieth century. This tradition, together with the legitimization provided by contemporary ethnic and religious diversity has spurred Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs to mobilize around several common issues. These include religious discrimination and racial profiling, the presentation of their religious histories and traditions in school textbooks, and accommodation of their food restrictions. Sikhs and Muslims have also been active around the right to religious accommodation in schools and the workplace for their religious practices and symbols of faith.

Anti-defamation

Following the pattern of the Jewish Anti-Defamation League formed in 1913, the first organizations that Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu Americans established that were oriented toward the wider American society, focused on anti-defamation concerns. The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) was formed in 1994 by three Arab Americans around the negative portrayals of Muslims and of Islam. In 1996, Sikhs formed Sikh Mediawatch and Resource Task Force (SMART) to combat negative stereotypes about Sikhs in the media. In 1997, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), an umbrella Hindu American organization, formed the American Hindus against Defamation (AHAD), which had as its goal the aggressive defence of Hinduism against defamation, commercialization, and misuse, as well as monitoring the portrayals of Hindus and of India in the American news. The success of AHAD was followed by the formation of several other Hindu anti-defamation groups around the country, including the Hindu International Council against Defamation (HICAD) based in New Jersey. As civil rights and discrimination issues started coming to the fore, these organizations went on to either

develop other foci (CAIR), to morph into other types of organizations (SMART), or to give place to other organizations (Hindu American Foundation).

Religious discrimination and hate crimes after 9/11

In the wake of the 1995 bombing of the Murray Federal Building in Oklahoma City, there was a rash of hate crimes directed against Muslims. CAIR swung into action to educate the American public about Islam and about Muslims in the United States (Nimer 2002: 133). This experience set the stage for its activities after the events of September 11, 2001. The attacks of 9/11 represented a turning point in the mobilization of American Muslims, who became the targets of a hate crime backlash, and also of groups like Sikhs and Hindus, who were often mistaken for Muslims. CAIR and other American Muslim organizations mobilized against Islamophobia and hate crimes against Muslims. The Muslim Advocates, founded in 2005, an organization based in California and composed largely of younger, legally trained South Asian American Muslims, got involved in legal action around the Patriot Act and racial and religious profiling in the aftermath of 9/11. The Sikh Coalition was formed right after 9/11 to deal with attacks against Sikhs (the first person killed in the 9/11 backlash was a Sikh in Arizona), and the Sikh organization SMART renamed itself Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF) in 2004 to deal with the civil rights issues that developed after 9/11.

At that time, Hindus did not have a national advocacy organization, and they generally were overlooked in the several interfaith events that were organized in the wake of 9/11. Thus Hindu groups mobilized to bring Hinduism to the attention of the administration and policy-makers by pointing out that practitioners of the religion were an important part of American society who ought to be included in such interfaith activities. For instance, the umbrella group, Hindu International Council Against Defamation and several hundred individual Hindus sent a petition to George Bush entitled, "Why Do You Exclude Hindus from Your Prayers?" a reference to the fact that Hindu leaders were not invited to be part of the national prayer service on September 16, 2001 (Kurien 2003).

SALDEF and CAIR developed programs to educate and train law enforcement personnel about the cultural and religious heritage of their communities and to create a relationship between their communities, who were often viewed with suspicion after 9/11, and law enforcement. CAIR, Sikh Coalition, and SALDEF also worked on educating the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at airports about the rights of Muslims and Sikhs around their symbols of faith, including the Muslim hijab and the Sikh turban and *kirpan* (ceremonial dagger carried by initiated *Khālsā* Sikhs) to ensure that Muslim and Sikh air travellers were not harassed.

The Hindu American Foundation has also been active in combating hate crimes. Sikh American organizations tracked hate crimes against Sikhs and mobilized to bring them to the attention of authorities. As a result of their mobilization, the FBI finally agreed, in 2013, to track hate crimes against Sikhs, as well as Hindus and Arabs. Hate crimes against Muslims have been tracked by the FBI since 1990. Sikh advocacy organizations such as the Sikh Coalition and SALDEF have also been mobilizing against the bullying of Sikh children. A recent study by the Sikh Coalition found that Sikh children disproportionately experienced bullying in schools around the country. Over 50 percent of Sikh children (compared to 32 percent of all American school children) reported being bullied. The figure for turbaned Sikhs was even higher, 67 percent. Many indicated that they were attacked since they were labelled as "terrorists" (Sikh Coalition 2014).

Educating Americans

Due to the lack of understanding and negative stereotypes of Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism in the United States, and the absence of a required religious education curriculum in American schools, an important task facing Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh American organizations has been to educate Americans about their respective religions. For instance, on their website, the Hindu American Foundation offers a "Hinduism 101" (laying out the basic tenets of Hinduism) link, a Q&A booklet explaining the central briefs and practices of Hinduism, and a media toolkit detailing the top five "misrepresentations" of Hinduism in the United States media. In 2009, they created pocket-sized "Hinduism 2 Go" cards to distribute at interfaith gatherings and other events. The Sikh Coalition and SALDEF also have short presentations on Sikhs and Sikhism on their websites, have organized Sikh awareness presentations in schools and educational institutions around the country, and also have funded public service media messages to demystify the Sikh turban and beard.

Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus have also been very active in the educational arena to challenge the presentation of their religious histories and traditions in U.S. school textbooks. An Indian American Muslim man in California, Shabbir Mansuri, founded the Council on Islamic Education in 1990 to assess the portrayals of Islam in American school textbooks and to recommend changes. In 2011, the Sikh Coalition, through its mobilization, was able to get the Texas Board of Education to include information about Sikhs and Sikh practices as part of the state-wide curriculum. In 2012, the governor of California signed a bill mandating that information about Sikhs and Sikhism be included in school textbooks in California. The Hindu American Foundation and other Hindu groups have also mobilized to demand a positive portrayal of Hinduism in school textbooks on parity with those of other religions. They have been involved in such activism in Virginia and California, including a long-drawn-out legal battle against the California State Board of Education (see Reddy 2012 for details). Recently (November 2014), they were successful in getting changes implemented in textbooks in Texas.

The three religious groups have also been able to obtain acknowledgment and recognition for their religions from the White House and the U.S. administration. The White House now holds an annual Iftar dinner (begun in 1996) to celebrate Ramadan; an annual Divālī celebration (from 2003) to honour an important Hindu festival; and an annual event to commemorate the birth of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion (from 2009). In 2014, SALDEF hosted the first Langar (a traditional, shared meal of Sikhs) on Capitol Hill for members of Congress and their staff.

Accommodation of religious practices

Obtaining accommodation for their religious practices has also been an important focus for organizations representing Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus. Beginning at its founding, CAIR has had to deal with cases where women wearing the hijab have faced discrimination, and this issue continues to be important to the organization (Nimer 2002: 133–134). In her book on religions in America, Diana Eck refers to a brochure published by ISNA and offered to schools, *You've Got a Muslim Child in Your School*, which describes some of the basics of Islam and some of the restrictions that Muslim children have to observe, including food restrictions, dress codes, and Islamic prayers (2001: 285). Similarly, CAIR has a brochure, *An Educators Guide to Islamic Practices*. The Hindu American Foundation promotes a vegetarian diet and has been involved in several events to advocate for a plant-based diet.

Sikh advocacy organizations have been particularly active around religious accommodation rights. Although turbaned Sikhs have been banned from joining the U.S. armed forces since the 1980s, due to the activism of second-generation Sikh leaders, individual exceptions were made in 2009 for three Sikhs who were allowed to maintain their beards, turbans, and kirpans and join the army. Sikh activists have also mobilized around the right of Sikhs to maintain their symbols of faith in the workplace. In September 2011, the mayor of New York City signed a Workplace Religious Freedom Act sponsored by Sikh groups, requiring employers to provide religious accommodation for all groups in the workplace unless they can prove that it will impose significant difficulty or expense. In 2012, Jerry Brown, governor of California, signed a similar bill into law in California.

Mobilization around foreign policy

With respect to foreign policy issues, however, Hindu American groups have generally explicitly or implicitly supported a Hindu-centric or Hindu nationalistic perspective. This perspective considers the preservation of India's Hindu culture and heritage and the assimilation of Indian religious minorities to a Hindu ethos as vital for India's cohesion and progress. On the other hand, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian Indian Americans have rallied to publicize attacks on their communities by Hindu majority groups in India and to seek U.S. intervention and support (Kurien 2017).

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) publishes an annual report, which is often critical of India's religious freedoms record. The USCIRF publication gives rise to the competing mobilizations of Indian American groups. On the one hand, Hindu American organizations have attacked the commission for its Christian bias. On the other hand, Muslim, Sikh, and Christian Indian American groups have supported the commission's placing of India on the list of "Countries of Particular Concern" (2002–2004), on its "Watch List" (2009–2011), and on its "Tier 2 Countries" list (2013, 2014). For instance, in 2011, Hindu American Foundation representatives testified before the USCIRF commissioners and strongly criticized the listing of India, "the world's largest secular democracy," on its Watch List (HAF 2011). The Federation of Indian American Christian Organizations of North America (FIACONA), on the other hand, issued a statement saying that its board "supports the decision of the USCIRF" and focused on recent attacks against Christians that had taken place in India (Malhotra 2011). Likewise, the spokesperson for Sikhs for Justice referred to attacks against Sikhs in India in 1984 "with the complicity of senior members of the Congress Party." Consequently, he said, the placement of India on the Watch List was "a step which will spread international awareness regarding the plight of religious minorities . . . who suffered violence in India" (Singh 2011). The president of the IAMC released a statement indicating that the organization, "firmly believes that the recommendations of USCIRF are based on factual information . . . [and] represent legitimate concerns about the treatment of religious minorities in India" (IAMC 2011).

Hindu and non-Hindu Indian American groups also mobilized differently around the infamous 2002 Gujarat riots when the chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi of the Hindu nationalist BJP party (as of 2014, India's prime minister), was accused of being complicit in orchestrating the violence against Muslims in Gujarat. In 2005, Modi was invited to the United States by the Asian American Hotel Owners Association (AAHOA, an organization composed almost entirely of Indian Americans, mostly from Gujarat) as the chief guest for their annual convention. A variety of secularist, Muslim, and Christian Indian American groups came together as a Coalition against Genocide (CAG) against Modi's visit and urged AAHOA to withdraw their invitation (Chatterjee 2005). At the same time, John Prabhudoss,

an Indian American Christian leader of FIACONA, was able to mobilize Christian evangelical support against Modi's visit and get two members of Congress to introduce a resolution in the House criticizing Modi's actions in India (Janmohamed 2013). The resolution led the State Department to deny Modi a U.S. visa. The Hindu American Foundation protested the resolution, calling it "Hinduphobic," and also expressed frustration that the Congressmen had "made India a focus of a resolution condemning religious persecution in South Asia while discrimination and violence against Hindus in Pakistan and Bangladesh escaped mention" (HAF 2005).

Indian American Muslim and secularist groups were also able to have a resolution introduced in Congress in November 2013, focusing on the 2002 human rights violations in Gujarat, calling for the revoking of anti–conversion laws, which exist in several Indian states, and asking that religious freedom be included in the United States–India Strategic Dialogue. However, through their visits to Congress offices, the Hindu American Foundation and U.S.–India Political Action Committee (USINPAC) activists succeeded in preventing the resolution from being considered in the House (Janmohamed 2014). The U.S. Congress still went ahead with a hearing on the plight of religious minorities in India in April 2014, just before the national elections in India. The hearing included testimony from representatives of the USCIRF and Human Rights Watch, a Minnesota-based group; Advocates for Human Rights, which has often worked with the Indian American Muslim organization IAMC; and from John Dayal, a well-known Indian human rights advocate of Christian background who had flown in from India for the hearing. The Hindu American Foundation, the USINPAC, and the Sikh Coalition submitted statements for the hearing that were not read out but placed on record.

In their statements, the Hindu American Foundation and USINPAC presented a strong defence of the religious rights record of India and questioned the timing of the hearing as being politically motivated and an attempt to influence the elections in India, where Modi was the leading candidate to be prime minister. (The USINPAC statement presented a Hindu-centric perspective and more than one-third of the statement repeated that of the HAF verbatim.) The presentations and statements of groups or individuals representing Indian Christians, Muslims, and Sikhs on the other hand, pointed to grave, ongoing human rights violations against religious minorities in India (Congressional Hearing 2014). More recently, two Sikh American organizations, Sikh Coalition and Ensaaf, were able to organize a Congressional hearing on the anti–Sikh violence in 1984 (such a hearing had not been held before), which some of the presenters also linked to the anti–Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002, at the same time that the newly elected Prime Minister Modi was visiting the United States in September 2014.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how religion has shaped patterns of out-migration from India by determining societal structures such as the social location of groups within society, which in turn influences the fundamental characteristics of groups and gives rise to differential state policies toward them. Religion has also played a central role in the community formation of Indian immigrants, not just through faith and religious institutions but through the intersection of the religiously infused identities and concepts of secularism of the United States and of India, which profoundly impact the political incorporation of Indian Americans and their mobilization patterns. Majority/minority religious status in the United States melds racial attitudes and self-identification in different ways, while majority/minority religious status in India affects activism profiles around homeland issues.

Note

1 This chapter draws on two earlier publications: Kurien, Prema (2014) "Immigration, Community Formation, Political Incorporation, and Why Religion Matters: Migration and Settlement Patterns of the Indian Diaspora." *Sociology of Religion*, 75 (4): 524–536; Kurien, Prema (2016) "Contemporary Ethno-Religious Groups and Political Activism in the U.S." In Barbara McGraw (ed.), *Politics and Religion in America*, 428–441. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, Companion Series.

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26

THE GLOBAL MANIFESTATION OF THE HINDU GURU PHENOMENON

Amanda Lucia

Introduction

In their seminal work, *The Guru in South Asia*, Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikegame argue that contemporary gurus are marked by their *uncontainability*, because they

> have crossed domains and become apt for given situations, drawing in and re-composing diverse aspects of Indian social life in the process: from sexuality to new media; from slavery to imagination and transgression; from Brahmanical orthodoxy to the arts of government; from milieus of modernising reformist fervor to those of convention and continuity.
>
> (Copeman and Ikegame 2012: 3)

With this notion, the authors recognize that in modernity, and particularly since the twentieth century, gurus have expanded beyond the religious field and now actively participate in influential ways in multiple interconnected social, economic, and political domains. This extension of gurus' reach and power beyond the confines of the religious field has centralized gurus as commercial actors, politicians, humanitarians, and entrepreneurs. Contemporary gurus are intervening as public advisors, advocating for particular political candidates, brands, Āyurvedic products, and a broad assortment of lifestyle choices, from sexuality to health.

However, it is difficult to designate this notion of the guru's uncontainability as a particularly modern phenomenon. In fact, although the figure of the guru is defined by the act of teaching religious knowledge, the religious field has never been contained in isolation. As critical scholars of religion frequently remind us, religion exists within society and history, and it cannot be extricated from its imbrication in both. Thus, just as the religious field cannot be contained, so too with its primary actors. Religious leaders have long operated as political advisors, and the intersectionality of the religious and political domains has an extraordinarily long history in India, not to mention world cultures more generally. In ancient India, kings had two Brahman ritualists who acted as advisors and interpreters of auspicious and inauspicious signs, the royal priest (*purohita*) and the royal astrologer (*sāṃvatsara*) (Inden 2006: 180). In inscriptional sources, the terms "*ācārya*," often translated as "religious preceptor" or "priest" and "guru," are often used interchangeably, both conveying a meaning of "respected elder" or "teacher" to be worshipped

and revered (Sears 2014: 17). In ancient India, the guru was an ascetic teacher of the highest priestly caste, under whom upper-caste members of society would study during childhood before moving on to marriage (Sears 2014: 4).

With the medieval rise of non-Brahmanical, Tantric, and *bhakti* religious lineages, gurus were increasingly divinized, revered as direct spiritual descendants or as divine incarnations (*avatāras*). Tamara Sears writes that as early as the turn of the first millennium, "the guru had become understood also as a living manifestation of divinity to be emulated, worshipped, and served not only by ascetic disciples but also by lay communities and royal elites" (2014: 17). Gurus became understood as a special class of people who were deemed especially qualified to mediate, access, and embody the divine. Revered as "holy men" (and sometimes women), gurus, like the gods, embodied "singular personalities," meaning that they existed as persons without definite forms, beings who can be conceived in many images and adored intimately as a deity, and singular because devotees worship them as a divine entity, as those who are without equal (Gold 1987: 7). The Indologist Daniel Gold explains that in the medieval period, deified gurus transitioned from mere teacher to the status of prophet, or even that of a supreme God. He writes, "No longer holy men like others, these leaders appear as special personages whose links to a singular personality give them a supreme status among living beings" (1987: 7). Gurus' uncontainability in the modern period can be traced to this gradual transition from gurus as local religious teachers for high-caste youth to the new role of gurus as exalted mediators of divinity, prophets, and even *avatāras* (divine incarnations).

Importantly, this transition also exponentially increases the expansivity of gurus' domains and their "domaining effects,"[1] a term referring to gurus' influence on other domains with unexpected results. With the advent of modernity, gurus' teachings were no longer restricted to high-caste Brahmanical youth in the *brahmacārī* (celibate student) stage of life. Instead, they are broadcast globally, directed to the masses. Riding the crest of globalization, contemporary gurus transmit their teachings through virtual *satsaṅgs* (religious gatherings), massive darshan programs, online and print publications, and countless hours of discourses distributed for free via global streaming services like YouTube. Their outward-facing content is bolstered by extensive marketing and advertising budgets, with legal teams poised at the ready to monitor and protect their branded images.

Thus, there does seem to be something particularly expansive about the modern guru phenomenon. By the medieval period, gurus were situated as singular personalities, with distinctive roles as mediators for the divine. They sometimes operated independently of the traditional *maṭhas* (religious institutions) and conveyed unique theologies. Gold argues that the rise of the independent *sant* (saint/guru) was deeply related to the influence of Islam and the cultural and religious insecurities that accompanied social instability. He writes, "In this midst of this period of unsettledness and cultural doubt, the *sants* arose from common, unlettered classes to transcend orthodox doctrines. To those who recognized the received traditions of neither Hinduism or Islam as unquestionably true, the *sants* could present the mystery of the guru as an alternative basis of faith" (1987: 4). Sants, such as Kabīr (Hawley 2012), established this theologically betwixt and between model and it continues in the ecumenical universalism of many modern guru figures, Rampal, Mooji, Anandamayi Ma,[2] Shirdi Sai Baba (Elison 2014), and Sathya Sai Baba (Srinivas 2008; Srinivas 2010). This period was also marked by the rise of the *bhakti* movement and the proliferation of Tantra, both of which spawned a class of religious exemplars who targeted their teachings to the general populace. Contemporary gurus who derive their authority from these religious innovations include, but are not limited to, Mata Amritanandamayi (Lucia 2014), A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Osho/Bhagavan Shree Rajneesh (Urban 2015), Prem Baba, and Neem Karoli Baba (Dass 1995).

However, in the early-mid-twentieth century, as India fought for its independence, religious leaders, and gurus in particular, increasingly took on political, public-facing roles. In the past several decades, this increased overlap between religion and politics has only increased as the Hindu nationalist government of India continues to reserve a special place for Hindu gurus in governance, commerce, and in public relations. Many of these modern gurus identify as Hindu, but even in so doing, they identify with a broad, universalist conception of Hindu identity rather than with a distinctive sectarian tradition. They mobilize their discourses in English, projecting a "commodifiable cosmopolitanism" readied for consumption by the urban middle classes, and oftentimes Hindu supremacy is thinly veiled by a crypto-universalistic humanism (Aravamudan 2006: 10–11). Today, in India, critics have noted the new formation of what Meera Nanda calls the "state-temple-corporate complex," that is to say, clear religious-political collaborations and alliances that concentrate power in the confluence between corporate interests, the secular state, and the powerful religious forces that seek to influence it (Nanda 2009: 108–144). Many of these contemporary gurus espouse neo-Vedāntic ideals in efforts to bring together diverse sectarian groups of Hindus under the umbrella of universalistic monism, such as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Paramahansa Yogananda, Muktananda, and Ramana Maharshi. Some are more nationalistic and committed to Hindu revivalism, for example, Swami Chinmayananda, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Baba Ramdev, Nithyananda, Sadhvi Ritambhara, and Yogi Adityanath.

The assent of technological advances and globalization have significantly augmented gurus' capabilities to broadcast their messages and to effectively missionize globally. Contemporary gurus are uncontainable, indeed. Many gurus, in their self-presentation, express themselves as a repository for all things, fully omnipresent and all-encompassing. As gurus have extended this claim beyond the religious field, they have positioned themselves social experts in multiple domains and expanded their influence through associations therein. As Copeman and Ikegame write in reference to the recently deceased guru, Sathya Sai Baba:

> Containment comes to form an aspect of his uncontainability because a feature of his being uncontained is his containing everything. He "contains" his spiritual forebears and a range of other associations/affiliations (there is seemingly no limit to them) and this contributes dramatically to his expansibility. . . . Having himself revealed a set of multiple and layered associations, devotees appear to be adept in taking (proliferating) them further: here the guru, as signifier, to employ Derridean terminology, is not fixed to a signified, but floats beyond itself to other signifiers in an indefinite referral of signifier to signified. . . . A picture emerges, then, of a kind of strategic unfolding, that is also simultaneously an *enfolding*, for its structuring logics are those of encompassment and commensuration.
>
> (Copeman and Ikegame 2012: 16)

Augmented by technology and globalization, many of these uncontainable gurus travel widely and through media, simultaneously, which buttresses their claims to expansive omnipresence.

Recognizing contemporary gurus' uncontainability complicates the project of composing a succinct classificatory schema of the contemporary field of the global guru phenomenon. In what follows, I have chosen an historical approach that broadly demarcates the expansiveness of modern global gurus into three main epochs: first, the expansion of gurus as missionaries from India to the West; second, the global proliferation of gurus in tandem with increased technology and mobility as a result of globalization; and third, gurus' more recent renewed focus on India's urban middle classes as primary audiences for their spiritual messages.

Gurus travel to the West (1893–)

When Swami Vivekananda first arrived in the United States, he spoke to American audiences at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Illinois. Liberal Protestants had convened the celebration of the diverse religions of the world, but they did so also in an effort to demonstrate the supremacy of Christianity. In large part, that enterprise failed, because many American audiences were captivated by the religious representatives from Asia. They were particularly attracted to the gurus and Swami Vivekananda, who in particular increased in fame exponentially as a result of the Parliament. After the Parliament, at the invitation of multiple liberal Protestant organizations, Swami Vivekananda embarked on a nearly three-year-long lecture tour, during which he lectured on Neo-Vedānta and taught yogic techniques to American audiences, attracting literati, elites, and particularly women. Most famous among his devotees were Sister Christine (Christina Greenstidel), Josephine MacLeod, and Sarah Chapman Bull in the United States and Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble), whom he met during his three-month sojourn for speaking engagements in Britain. Courted by intellectuals and elites in the West, Vivekananda declined an academic chair in metaphysics at Harvard University but maintained an extraordinary speaking and lecturing schedule. In 1896, he published his famed text, *Rāja Yoga*, and in 1906, what is often referred to as the first Hindu temple in the United States, the headquarters of his organization, the Vedanta Society in San Francisco was founded in his name.[3]

In 1920, another Indian ascetic who would become known as guru, and even as the father of modern yoga, arrived in the United States. Paramahansa Yogananda, most famous for his book, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Yogananda 1981 [1946]), arrived in Boston at the invitation of Unitarians who were convening the 1920 International Congress of Free Christians and Other Religious Liberals (Neumann 2019: 70). He donned a turban for the first time in preparation for the event, likely in an attempt to mirror the appearance of his famed predecessor. Like Vivekananda, he too eschewed temple Hinduism and downplayed the importance of material forms of deities. He echoed Vivekananda's orientalist conviction that "India possessed a uniquely rich spiritual tradition that was lacking in the West" (Neumann 2019: 63). Yogananda differed, however, in that he aimed to appeal to Christian audiences by creating a hybridized religion at the intersection of Hinduism and Christianity. He relied on Neo-Vedāntic universalism but used Christian terms and categories while imitating the rhetorical style of "a revival sermon or a gospel tract" (Neumann 2019: 73). Between 1925 and 1946, Yogananda traversed the United States and Britain with a rigorous schedule of speaking engagements. He attracted audiences with his practical system of Yogoda, a set of exercises that emphasized health, wellness, and energy techniques. Yogananda's program introduced practitioners through physical exercises but soon offered them lessons in more philosophical doctrines and meditation techniques. By the late 1940s, Yogananda's new religion had gained traction among American audiences and he established 34 Self-Realization Fellowship Centers, including what would become his international headquarters in Encinitas, California (Neumann 2019: 168).

Historians of Hinduism and yoga in the West have consistently emphasized the importance of Swami Vivekananda and Paramahansa Yogananda as seminal figures in the missionizing of Hinduism and yoga outside of India. However, recent scholarship has begun to shed light on numerous other yogis and gurus who similarly engaged in public speaking tours and exhibitions during this time period. Many of these were travelling yogis who exploited commonplace orientalist assumptions of Indic knowledge as both magical and mystical and situated Indian yogis as purveyors of psychic and paranormal powers. Philip Deslippe's recent research reveals that between the years of 1922 and 1945, yoga was being taught in 90 cities in 26 states in the United States (Deslippe 2018: 10). These early yogis used print media to advertise their public

engagements but facilitated their instruction with constant travel (Deslippe 2018: 12), often traversing circuitous routes within and between the United States and England. In so doing, they subscribed to the model of itinerant portraitists, salesmen, Vaudeville acts, and circus performers who were popular at the time, and in the United States, they followed in the well-established Methodist and Baptist evangelical tradition of itinerant preaching.[4] But instead of tent or church meetings, these early global yogis hosted their lectures in the secular spaces of commercial hotels and invited especially interested attendees to pursue additional private classes, a model that would be enacted by later gurus. Some gave attunements and healings to audiences *en masse*, another practice that would be enacted by the gurus who followed in their stead. Many were imagined as gurus,[5] and the term *yogi* was in fact a multiple signifier, used by audiences interchangeably with "swamis, fakirs, fakers, 'mediators', wonder-workers, jugglers, and mystics" (Deslippe 2018: 8). As spiritual teachers, most of these yogic characters who took on students may be also considered gurus.

Global gurus (1965–)

The counterculture of the late 1950s and 1960s invited a resurgence of fetishization of Asian cultures and religions as bastions of ancient wisdom and mystical knowledge. Beat poets, like Alan Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder turned to East Asian Buddhism, while later cultural icons, like the Beatles, particularly George Harrison, turned to Hindu gurus in India in their search for meaning and spiritually transformative experiences. The loosening of US immigration policy with the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 also enabled Asian religious teachers to migrate to the United States. What developed was a marked enlargement of cultural and religious exchange between the United States and Asia, fuelled both by the counterculture's attention to Asian religions and increased Asian diasporic populations seeking to build familiar cultural and religious institutions abroad.

In 1965, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada arrived in New York with the intention of proselytizing his version of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, devotion to the Hindu god, Kṛṣṇa. He soon established a centre in a storefront and spread his new movement, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) to other major cities in the United States and Europe. As ISKCON historians Edwin Bryant and Maria Ekstrand write, "The almost overnight worldwide propagation of the movement caused devotees to feel they were the first generation of a tradition carrying spiritual truths all but unknown outside of India that they believed would transform the religious and social landscape of the world."[6] Kenneth Valpey (Krishna Kshetra Das) recounts that when Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada visited Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa deities he had consecrated in Sydney, Australia, in 1971, he said, "I am leaving You here in this *mleccha desh* [foreign country].[7] Now, these devotees, they have come to You, kindly give the intelligence so that they can serve You nicely. This is my prayer."[8] In these *mleccha deśas*, the Hare Krishnas established vegetarian cafés and temples at critical geographies of the burgeoning counterculture movement in the West: the lower east side of Manhattan, downtown London, and Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco. According to Prabhupada, the hippies are "our best customers" and were "immediate candidates of our Krishna Consciousness."[9] Prabhupada and his devotees targeted hippies burnt out on psychedelics and attracted them with the promise of a more permanent enlightenment through Krishna consciousness. The Hare Krishnas enjoyed considerable success among the hippies and countercultural spiritual explorers, and they formed an important nexus of the growing field of guru devotionalism in the West.

1968 became the "Year of the Guru," according to *Life Magazine*, in recognition of the fact that Indian gurus had made considerable inroads into the West and were attracting significant

numbers of countercultural youth (Howard 1968: 52–61). After reaching global acclaim as a result of world tours between 1958 and 1965 teaching Transcendental Meditation, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, pictured on the *Life* cover, had become an overnight sensation in the United States. He promised that his meditation technique would transform individuals, institutions, and the world. In his view, collective practice could have a positive effect on the surrounding environment, a claim that was then codified as "the Maharishi effect." He promised that even just 15–20 minutes of daily practice would ensure health and that in time, one could learn to levitate. The Maharishi intentionally appealed to youth audiences, for example, when he toured US college campuses in 1968, the Beach Boys were his opening act (Howard 1968: 54). In 1969, the Maharishi was thrust into the global spotlight when he received at his *āśrama* (religious abode) in Rishikesh, India, the most famous visitors and potential devotees that the world had ever known, the Beatles.

Aside perhaps from the Hart-Cellar Act, no other event in the twentieth century was as influential in bringing Indian gurus into the popular mainstream than the Beatles, accompanied by Mia Farrow Sinatra and her sister Prudence, visiting Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in 1968.[10] The fact that the Beatles memorialized the encounter with smash hits like "Across the Universe," "Dear Prudence," and "Sexy Sadie" on the subsequently released *White Album* only added to the mystique and fame of the revered guru. The Maharishi's technique, Transcendental Meditation, was soon being practiced even beyond the counterculture, incorporated in public schools, universities, corporations, prisons, and the military. However, in 1977, the Maharishi lost the legal case *Malnak v. Yogi*, which deemed TM religious and thereby prohibited its instruction in governmental institutions in compliance with the (Dis)Establishment Clause in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.[11] This famed court case was an important antecedent to *Sedlock v. Baird*, the 2013 court case contesting whether postural yoga should be prohibited from being taught in public schools for a similar violation.[12] The following year, in 1969, Swami Satchidananda stood at centre stage to open Woodstock Music and Art Festival, the largest and most cataclysmic public festival of the twentieth century. In what would become a momentous historical gathering, the *svāmī* led nearly half a million youth in chanting "*Oṃ*" during his opening remarks. Swami Satchidananda would go on to develop his patented technique of Integral Yoga, a combination of "six branches of yoga: *haṭha*, *rāja*, *jñāna*, *karma*, *bhakti*, and *japa*."[13]

If gurus had been part of the scene before, Woodstock ensured that they became an integral aspect of the counterculture. But in many ways, they became symbolic figures, signifying radical and exotified, but diffuse and insubstantial, conceptions of alternative religions. The historian of American religions, Mark Oppenheimer, argues that if one considers the turn toward alternative (non-Christian, non-Jewish) religions in terms of membership and conversion, the numbers are miniscule.[14] Instead, he argues that the counterculture's primary influence was on the mainline religions, wherein its impact was largely aesthetic, taking on a variety of forms of loosening, in dress, music, and décor. It also included a relaxation of extant hierarchies, for example, the inclusion of women in religious leadership and the vernacularization of the Catholic mass with Vatican II (Oppenheimer 2003: 27). This process of "getting loose" also adopted a radical new conception of the self and human potential (Kripal 2007: 135–156). The anthropologist Sam Binkley explains that

> [A loose life] was lived in the immediacy of the now—a real life one could really experience. To 'be yourself, to 'do what was right for you,' to 'let it all hang out' was to release a primordial vitality, to become an artist of oneself and of one's identity and to assume responsibility and take credit for what one made of oneself by crafting a distinctly loose style of life.
>
> (2007: 3–4)

Thus, attending only to antiquated notions of religious membership and conversion overlooks the fundamental change that was happening through the counterculture's influence. Furthermore, the counterculture's demand for immediacy and authentic experience coupled nicely with some aspects of Hindu philosophical thought, and the turn to the "religious exoticism" (Altglas 2014: 63–118) proved that one had truly become "an artist of oneself" by sculpting a personalized and creative amalgam of practices and beliefs drawn from "Eastern" and mystical" religions.

In 1971, Baba Ram Dass (Richard Alpert) preached the importance of this kind of immediacy in his book, *Be Here Now*, an artistic account of the author's spiritual revelations during his travels in India. After leaving Harvard University as a result of disputes with the administration over his clinical LSD experiments, in 1967, Richard Alpert travelled to India in search of meaning and radically transformative experience. There, he met Bhagavan Das, another countercultural vagabond living in India, who introduced him to his guru, Neem Karoli Baba. In the guru's presence, Alpert had a breakthrough spiritual experience, which shifted his intentions from experimentation with LSD to devotion and service to God. After returning home to the United States, Alpert, now Baba Ram Dass, began to give public lectures on spiritual matters and developed a following of his own. Operating from the Lama Foundation, a commune of hippies and artists based in Taos, New Mexico, Ram Dass used the proceeds from his talks to distribute several thousand spiritual kits, including selected stories of his transformative trip to India. The manuscript, originally titled *From Bindu to Ojas*,[15] was printed on brown paper and hand bound with twine, and the box it came in included additional booklets on spiritual practices, "holy pictures" to put on the refrigerator or home altar, and a recording of chants and spirituals. In many ways, Ram Dass' "do-it-yourself" kit exemplified the counterculture's transference of authority from the guru to the self. While Ram Dass had travelled to India and prostrated at the feet of his guru, interested audiences back home could access spiritual transformation by reading books and designing personal ritual practices according to their own tastes and desires. A small minority, like Rameshwar Das, followed Ram Dass' trail to India to meet Neem Karoli Baba, and others adopted Ram Dass as their guru. In fact, Ram Dass is certainly one of the most famous of those whom Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson call "homegrown gurus," because they are "produced from the ground up" in the United States.[16] But the large majority of the counterculture who were inspired by *Be Here Now* inserted what they had gleaned into their personalized pastiche of self-styled spirituality, drawing on a variety of "exotic" religious traditions (Heelas 2008; Campion 2016; Altglas 2014).

By the early 1970s, the Beatles had introduced the Maharishi, *Be Here Now* and *Autobiography of a Yogi* were in wide circulation, and ISKCON devotees clad in orange robes were an active presence distributing literature on street corners and in airports. In this pivotal cultural turn toward India, Swami Muktananda embarked on several world tours preaching his doctrine of Siddha Yoga accompanied by the promise of instant awakening through *śaktipāt*, the transference of spiritual energy through the guru's touch. He established spiritual centres in Ganeshpuri (near Mumbai) and in the United States in Oakland, California, and New York; he founded the SYDA Foundation to administer his global mission. Bhagavan Shree Rajneesh (Osho) also expanded from his early work in Mumbai to establish his *āśrama* headquarters in Pune in 1974, and then in 1981, he purchased land in Wasco County, Oregon, upon which he would build the highly controversial and short-lived utopian community of Rajneeshpuram (Urban 2015: 101–136). This influx of Indic gurus in the West contributed significantly to the formation of global Hinduism.[17]

But by the mid-1980s, the majority of these guru-led movements were engulfed in scandal. The Maharishi had long ago lost the respect of John Lennon and George Harrison when he

allegedly approached Mia Farrow sexually during their stay at his ashram in Rishikesh back in 1968 (Goldberg 2010: 161). By the late 1980s, several figures in the ISKCON leadership were accused of sexual and financial impropriety,[18] Swami Muktananda was accused of violating his doctrine of celibacy,[19] and Bhagavan Shree Rajneesh had been deported from the United States accused of serious crimes.[20] In the 1990s, amidst a variety of scandals and contestations in the Self-Realization Fellowship, allegations surfaced that accused Paramhansa Yogananda of having fathered a child with one of his devotees (Neumann 2019: 249). Ironically, these scandals buoyed the success of the female global gurus who followed in their wake, such as Mata Amritanandamayi, Karunamayi Ma, Mother Meera, and the female successors of both Swami Muktananda and Paramahansa Yogananda: Gurumayi Chidvilasananda and Daya Mata,[21] respectively.

Global gurus in India (1909–)

Gurus have held a place of importance in India since time immemorial, but in the twentieth century, they have increasingly developed high-profile public personas through which they interject their views into economic, social, and political domains. In choosing where to begin this tertiary thread of the narrative, one might begin again with Swami Vivekananda but tell the story instead from the perspective of his role as a nationalistic reformer who went abroad in order to fundraise for social uplift back home. Or one might begin with Mahatma Gandhi, who took on disciples and preached his doctrines of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) and *satyagrāha* (self-rule) in efforts to establish a new, independent India. In both cases, these gurus were public figures who taught spiritual messages to implement social and political change. Or perhaps one might begin with Swami Chinmayananda, the founder of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council, [VHP]), who said in 1963, "A new type of swami is emerging in this country who will serve as missionatries [*sic.*] to their own people. At this crucial time in our history, we do not need those who live in a cave and meditate" (Jaffrelot 1996: 195). Christophe Jaffrelot argues that,

> Swami Chinmayananda is representative of many "modern gurus" who were active in the VHP and shared a common set of characteristics: their spiritual practice is based on discourses in English and hence both language and message were adapted to the urban middle class; they often shared the same background as that of the latter; the *guru-shishya* (guru–disciple) relation is accorded less importance than that of mass contact (for example, Swami Chinmayananda does not initiate disciples individually but gives "the mantra from the platform"); the "modern *gurus*" do not emphasise their sectarian affiliation but rather their "Hindu" allegiance; they have often founded their own *ashram*; and, lastly, the attend conferences all over the world.
>
> (1996: 196)

Swami Chinmayananda was an outspoken activist who sought to unify and strengthen Hindu identity globally. He mobilized that vision by establishing educational curricula for Hindu adults and youth in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and India; particularly popular are the Bala Vihar programs for children aged 5 to 18 and the Chinmaya Yuva Kendra (CHYK and CHYK West) for youth 18 to 30 (Sippy 2018).

The modern ascension of political gurus, that is to say, gurus who intersect with and advocate for particular social and political platforms, deeply intertwines with the nationalistic and self-governance projects mobilized in India during the twentieth century. In this vein, Ashish Nandy provocatively identifies Aurobindo as "India's first modern guru," in large part because

he "was culturally a European child who grew up to become a votary of the spiritual leadership of India."[22] A prolific writer of poetry and treatises on spiritual matters, Aurobindo began his career as a government official and nationalist activist. During his solitary confinement in Alipore jail between 1908 and 1909, Aurobindo experienced a spiritual awakening during which he claimed he was "visited" by Swami Vivekananda. Following Nandy's suggestion, 1909, then, the year of Aurobindo's spiritual epiphany, may be the appropriate year to begin the story of modern Indian gurus (Aurobindo 2006: 98). Aurobindo wrote and taught prolifically, and in 1926, he formally established the Shri Aurobindo ashram in Pondicherry in partnership with Mira Alfassa, a French national who was his spiritual collaborator. Thereafter, Aurobindo retired into seclusion (thereafter appearing in public only three times [and later four times] each year) (Aravamudan 2006: 100). Despite his seclusion, Aurobindo continued to write political prose, philosophical tracts, and poetry; in Srinivas Aravamudan's phrasing, "the odor of politics hovered around Aurobindo's religious pronouncements" (Aravamudan 2006: 101). Nandy argues that Aurobindo was India's first modern guru, because he chose to engage with and proclaim the supremacy of Indian spirituality even though well educated in European languages and philosophical thought. Significantly, he also established an interdependent domain of religion and politics that many future gurus would emulate.

Post-Independence India has advanced a significant rise in cooperation between, and even the comingling of, the religious and political spheres. But instead of viewing this theopolitical turn as a modern innovation, it is best understood as a postcolonial reversion back to traditional Indic interdependence between religious and political domains, as I have argued elsewhere (Lucia forthcoming). For example, reading eighth and ninth century inscriptions from the Mattamayūras at Kadwāhā, an important Śaivite centre located in present-day Madhya Pradesh, Tamara Sears concludes, "it is clear that the guru had become, through the act of initiation, a *rājaguru* who was officially tied to the structure of the Pratīhāra state at Buḍhi Chanderī" (2014: 37). Kings sought out gurus for *gurudakṣiṇā* (the guru's blessing) in "highly negotiated acts" for both "social and soteriological effects," while the guru was both "committed to sustaining his monastic community" and participated actively in the "worldly affairs of kings" (Sears 2014: 36). Throughout Indian history, there is significant evidence suggesting that gurus only rarely existed as permanent ascetical recluses in secluded Himalayan caves. Instead, this commonplace trope is largely a mythopoetic fabrication of historical figures who were not only spiritual advisors, but also functioned as worldly actors intimately engaged in the administration of social capital for political officials and governance through collective warfare and land stewardship (Sears 2014; Pinch 2006; Maclean 2008; Diamond 2013: 172–173).

In fact, modern scholars who have condemned the collusion between gurus and politics as a modern invention have largely been chastised for their lack of historical acumen. For example, Lise McKean is quite accurate in asserting that,

> The activities of many gurus and their organizations during the 1980s and 1990s are related to the simultaneous expansion of transnational capitalism in India and growing support for Hindu nationalism in India and abroad. . . . As producers and purveyors of spiritual commodities, gurus assist in propagating Hindu nationalism, an ideology that relies on referents to Hindu India's unparalleled spiritual prowess and moral authority.
>
> (1996: 1)

But the trouble with her condemnatory analysis is that this is an extension of traditional Indic power dynamics between religion and politics, not a new phenomenon signifying the political corruption of religion.

However, while religion and politics have traditionally overlapped in Indian history, three important factors collided in the 1980s and 1990s, which rapidly accelerated the importance and impact of gurus on the political domain: globalization, the rise of Hindu nationalism, and the Internet. Much that I have discussed here is deeply related to the impact of globalization. Under globalization, several factors made international travel easier and more practical for common people. Most fundamentally, airline flights decreased in price, and as international travel became more affordable, distance was no longer the massive impediment that it had once been. Second, caste restrictions prohibiting international travel began to loosen after Indian service members' enlistment in WWI and WWII, and by the post-war period, caste-based restrictions on travel were mostly relegated to rural and conservative households. Third, the proliferation of Western countercultural seekers travelling to India in search of enlightenment demonstrated that there were opportunities for employment and fame in the role of guru.

As McKean writes, the 1980s and 1990s also provoked a demonstrable rise in collective organization and political mobilization in service of Hindu nationalism. Gurus were often at the helm, initially supporting political campaigns for various factions of the Sangh Parivar, the conglomerate group of political organizations and parties devoted to the cause of Hindu nationalism, and then later as aggressors and political candidates themselves. During India's struggle for independence, many activists situated themselves as both political and religious leaders, the most famous of whom was Mahatma Gandhi. But even lesser-known figures fought for Indian independence "with the *Bhagavād Gītā* in one hand and a revolver in the other," and terrorist nationalist groups explicitly modelled their authoritarian organizational structures after the *guru–śiṣya* (master–disciple) relationship (Jaffrelot 1996: 35–36). After independence and the social catastrophe of Partition, this confluence between religion and politics continued as Hindu nationalist organizations grew in power and religious leaders situated themselves at their helm.

Spatial constraints prohibit a full exposition of the numerous gurus who served and continue to serve at the intersection of religion in politics in efforts to further the project of Hindu nationalism. But it is important to note the spectrum of Hindu militancy that exists in India today, as some Hindu gurus have actively incited violence in service of the cause, while others comply with a form of what Michael Billig has called "banal nationalism" (Billig 1995), a mundane yet complicit embrace of Hindu supremacy. For example, Sadhvi Ritambhara grew to international fame with the hate speech she delivered to riotous audiences, which contributed to the violent destruction of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya in 1992. More recently, Yogi Adityanath, the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (the most populous state in India) has been criticized for his violent speeches directed toward minority Muslim communities in service of his vision of Hindu nationalistic supremacy. These are only two of the most prominent examples in what numerous scholars have noted as a troubling trend of Hindu supremacy and resulting activation of violence against religious minorities in contemporary India.[23] Other popular celebrity gurus like Baba Ramdev and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar similarly operate in service of and in conjunction with PM Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government (Jain 2016; McCartney 2018, 2019).

Last, one cannot overstate the critical impact that easily accessible technology in India and across the globe has had on the rise of the global guru phenomenon. Baba Ramdev launched his career with the popular morning yoga slot on *Aastha TV*, and there is a now a television series that fictionalizes his early childhood and subsequent rise to fame.[24] Other famous hyper-gurus, like Mata Amritanandamayi (Amma), have developed their own television channels that offer continuous programming celebrating the guru's messages and endeavours.[25] Once television became widely accessible to the masses, it also brought the extraordinarily popular serials of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* into the homes of millions of Indians. Many gurus have been at the forefront of technological advances and have instrumentalized the public's fascination with

new media to their significant advantage. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Indians log into their computers daily to participate in *satsaṅg*s with their gurus online. Popular gurus, like Swami Nithyananda, have extensive Internet presences and host several YouTube channels to promulgate their discourses to global audiences. Most recently, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has developed an app that devotees can install on their cellular smart phones and through which they can access his teachings, suggested practices, and upcoming *satsaṅg* schedule.

Conclusion

Looking back at this narrative of the long twentieth century (1893–present), one can see the gradual expansion of gurus into the West and a peak during the countercultural moment of the late 1960s and 1970s. Subsequently, in the 1980s and 1990s, global gurus have refocused on growth in India (and other parts of Asia) (see, for example, Waghorne 2020), influenced by eviscerating scandals that embroiled many of the guru movements in the West and the rapid growth of the Indian middle class, particularly in urban centres. The global guru phenomenon can thus be viewed as a narrative of expansion and retraction, but this notion should not be overstated for several reasons. First, the gurus who expanded into the West never fully retracted, but rather they established *āśrama*s and organizations, and left large followings of devotees who continue to administrate them. Second, many gurus never left India, and instead they concentrated their energies on building communities among India's growing middle classes and often operating in service of Hindu nationalism. Last, one would not wish to reinforce the early narratives of globalization that imagined unidirectional exchanges from West to the East and then subsequently from the East to the West. Instead, today's globalization is better imagined as cellular systems (Appadurai 2006: 21–31), rhizomes (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 3–25), hyphal knots (Urban 2015: 5–6), and holograms (Urry 2003: 50–51), all of which signify spontaneous, nodal concentrations of inorganic and organic matter shifting across multiple geographies simultaneously.

It may seem surprising that there is still a place for the *guru–śiṣya* relationship in this era of late capitalism wherein neoliberal governments around the world are celebrating freedom and freedom of choice as a supposedly universal ideal. After all, the scriptures are undeniably clear: the guru–disciple relationship is an autocratic one, and there are dire consequences for those who do not submit to the guru's authority unconditionally.[26] But perhaps the *guru-śiṣya* model is changing in late-capitalist modernity, as Maya Warrier wrote in 2003:

> most individuals, at various points in their lives, owe their spiritual allegiance to more than one *guru*, either simultaneously or in succession. . . . devotees are best seen not as members of any one *guru* organization but as travelers along various and diverse paths of spiritual questing. Their attachment to a *guru* or *gurus* at any given point in time may then best be seen as "stops" on this spiritual journey, where they secure a temporary anchor at the feet of the chosen *guru* before they move on to other *gurus* and *guru* organizations. . . . There is, in this scheme of things, no fixed and permanent boundary delineating any particular *guru* faith.
>
> (2003: 33)

More recently, in her study of Gurumaa (Anandmurti Gurumaa), Angela Rudert demarcates the category of "New Age gurus," signifying the post-1965 rise to predominance of gurus who signify a break with tradition and present themselves as "'universal' teachers and spiritual preceptors, conveying 'truths' that are valid for all time and in all contexts."[27] In light of this, it is appropriate to consider contemporary gurus as operating within a broad and diverse field

that intersects and overlaps with multiple adjacent domains. Thus, to return to Copeman and Ikegame's assertion of the guru's uncontainability, it is certain that the contemporary global guru phenomenon is expansive, intersectional, and multifarious. However, as contemporary gurus flow through the rhizomatic networks and erupt at the intersections of technological inventions, globalization, and late-capitalist modernity, their uncontainability might be situated as a starting point for scholarly analysis, not at the conclusion. Instead, gurus' uncontainability can be the platform from which scholars can begin to understand the complexity of their global expansion and extensive influence.

Notes

1 Copeman and Ikegame argue that "Indeed, the guru is a prolific producer of 'domaining effects'; effects that occur when the logic of an idea associated with one domain is transferred to another, often with interesting or unanticipated results (Strathern 1992: 73)" (2012: 2).

2 Anandamayi Ma largely followed Hindu precepts and practices, and she was deeply concerned that her role as a female religious and ritual authority would not violate Hindu *śāstric* injunctions. However, she also was born in what is now Bangladesh, to a Brahman family within a primarily Muslim region, and intentionally appealed to both Hindus and Muslims. Like many contemporary gurus, she eschewed identity claims and routinely mirrored the emotions and projections of those surrounding her. See Hallstrom (1999: 26).

3 For more on the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, see Seager (1993), and on Swami Vivekananda, see Lucia (2017); Waghorne (2009).

4 Brekus (1998); Benes (1986); Heyrman (1997).

5 For example, Philip Deslippe writes, "Deva Ram Sukul was addressed as 'Dear Guru' in a 1935 letter from a female student of eleven years who mentioned that she had 'kept all your secrets under cover as you have instructed' and reminded him that he had previously mentioned being able to give her a spirit guide 'to call upon for guidance'" (2018: 16).

6 Bryant and Ekstrand, "Introduction," p. 1–10 (2004: 3).

7 Though *mleccha desh* can be translated literally to mean foreign country, it also has a negative connotation of danger and debasement. Highlighting these aspects, Valpey translates the phrase as "land of the uncivilized." Footnote 2, Valpey "Krishna in *Mleccha Desh*," p. 45–60, in Bryant and Ekstrand (2004: 55).

8 Valpey "Krishna in *Mleccha Desh*," p. 45–60, in Bryant and Ekstrand (2004: 45).

9 William H. Deadwyler (Ravindra Svarupa Das), "Cleaning House and Cleaning Hearts," pp. 149–169, in Bryant and Ekstrand (2004: 152).

10 For more on this momentous encounter, see Goldberg (2010).

11 The (Dis)Establishment Clause of the First Amendment reads, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

12 Importantly, while the Maharishi lost the case and TM was, in fact, prohibited from being taught in governmental institutions (public schools, prisons, and military), the judge in the 2013 yoga case ruled in favor of yoga, arguing that while yoga may be "religious" for some, it is not "religion" and thus does not violate the First Amendment. See Brown (2019).

13 "Sri Swami Satchidananda on Hatha Yoga," *Integral Yoga Institute San Francisco*, https://integralyogasf. org/sri-swami-satchidananda-on-hatha-yoga?gclid=Cj0KCQjwzozsBRCNARIsAEM9kBMU0jJwrp hJrJ3N7jnPrP4QF4_Utlvl0MzExbnaSLDM_jgvVLe8GPoaAu05EALw_wcB, accessed September 19, 2019.

14 For example, he cites a longitudinal study of undergraduates on University of California, Berkeley campus between 1970 and 1974, one of the most liberal campuses in the nation, wherein the researchers found that only 4 percent of Jews and 3 percent of Protestant and Catholic students in their junior year of college held "Eastern/mystical" beliefs. Oppenheimer (2003: 13).

15 "From Bindu to Ojas." http://frombindutoojas.com/origin/?fbclid=IwAR0i_bMlkKYah-olWh70n0s-CDeLPP9czhStN-bV34v2XvNh_VNrY05UXLw, accessed September 24, 2019. See also Dass and Das (2011: xv).

16 Gleig and Williamson (2013: 2). Of course, there are significant early twentieth-century predecessors to the later countercultural gurus included in Gleig and Williamson's volume, including the notorious

tantric teacher, the Omnipotent Oom (Love 2010) and the yogi and dancer Indra Devi (Goldberg 2015).

17 Thomas Forsthoefel and Cynthia Humes argue that these global gurus have also had an impact on the proliferation of Advaita Vedānta (non-dualism) because of its facility as a "global marketing strategy" (2005: 6).

18 Hubner and Gruson (1988); see also Bryant and Ekstrand (2004), particularly David Wolf, "Child Abuse and the Hare Krishnas: History and Response," pp. 321–344.

19 Lola Williamson writes that Muktananda "publicly stressed the value of celibacy for making progress on the spiritual path, but he almost certainly violated his own rules" (2010: 114).

20 Urban 2015: 128–136. See also the six-part Netflix series, "Wild Wild Country" (Duplass et al. 2018).

21 Daya Mata served as the president of SRF from 1955 until her death in 2010, at which time she was succeeded by Mrinalini Mata, who was president 2011 until her death in 2017. This extraordinarily lengthy period of female leadership (1955–2017) was broken with the most recent president and suc-cessor, Brother Chidananda.

22 Nandy (2009: 97, 85), quoted in Aravamudan (2006: 96).

23 The bibliography of Hindu nationalism is too extensive to be cited effectively here, but *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism is Changing India*, a recent edited volume by some of the leading scholars in the field, is a good place to begin (Chatterjee et al. 2019).

24 The television biopic *Swami Ramdev–Ek Sangharsh* first premiered in India on Discovery Jeet in 2018 and then later launched on Netflix with the title, *Swami Baba Ramdev: The Untold Story*.

25 "Amrita Television," www.amritatv.com/, accessed September 30, 2019.

26 "Those who dissent (*vipratipad-)* from the guru with hatred (*dveṣa*) and abandon (*tyag-*) the guru are destined to die or live in hell." *pratipannaṃ guruṃ yaś ca mohād vipratipadyate sa janma-koṭiṃ narake pacyate puruṣādhamaḥ* (Saurapurāṇa 15.34). See also: *jīvitārthan api dveṣād gurubhir naiva bhāṣaṇam udito 'pi guṇair anyair guru-dveṣī pataty adhaḥ* (*Kūrmapurāṇa* 2.12.30), *guru-tyāgī labhen mṛtyuṃ mantra-tyāgī daridratām guru-mantra-parityāgāt siddho 'pi narakaṃ vrajet* (*Saurapurāṇa* 68.11) (Hara 1980: 101–102).

27 Rudert (2017: 21). Rudert draws on the work of Smriti Srinivas, in her book on Sathya Sai Baba, who writes that, "there may be an Indian New Age, creative and alternative rather than purely derivative— and transnational in its own right" (Srinivas 2008: 339).

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