Looking for a Hindu Identity

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I am deeply beholden to the Executive Committee of the Indian History Congress for electing me its General President for its 66th session. In all humility I accept the honour conferred on me, but, conscious as I am of my limitations, I treat it as encouragement to one who has been involved in the ongoing battle against jingoist, communal and obscurantist perceptions of India's past. I therefore propose to draw your attention, first, to the distorted notion that Indian national identity can be traced to hoary antiquity, and then to the false stereotypes about Hinduism which have no basis in history and yet feed Hindu cultural nationalism.

I

The quest for India's national identity through the route of Hindu religious nationalism began in the nineteenth century and has continued ever since. In recent years, however, it has received an unprecedented boost from those communal forces which brought a virulent version of Hindu cultural chauvinism to the centre stage of contemporary politics and produced a warped perception of India's past. This is evident from the indigenist propaganda writings which support the myth of Aryan autochthony, demonise Muslims and Christians, and propagate the idea that India and Hinduism are eternal. In an effort to prove the indigenous origin of Indian culture and civilisation it has been argued, though vacuously, that the people who composed the Vedas called themselves Aryans and were

the original inhabitants of India.[1] They are further described as the authors of the Harappan civilisation, which the xenophobes and communalists insist on rechristening after the Vedic Saraswatī. Such views have received strong support from archaeologists whose writings abound in paralogisms;[2] and from their followers, whose works are dotted with fakes and frauds, a notable instance being the attempt to convert a Harappan "unicorn bull" into a Vedic horse so as to push the clock back on the date of the Vedas and thereby identify the Vedic people with the authors of the Harappan civilisation.[3] This obsession with pushing back the chronology of Indian cultural traits and with denying the elements of change in them[4] has taken the form of a frenzied hunt for antiquity. We see a stubborn determination to "prove" that the Indian ("Hindu" is no different in

1 N. Prinja, *Explaining Hindu Dharma: A Guide for Teachers*, Norfolk, 1996, p.10, cited in Sudeshna Guha, "Negotiating Evidence: History, Archaeology and the Indus Civilisation", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol.39, no.2 (2005), p.399.

2 S.P. Gupta, *The Indus-Saraswati Civilization: Origins, Problems and Issues*, Delhi, 1996, p.142; B.B. Lal, "Rigvedic Aryans: The Debate Must Go On", *East and West*, vol.48, nos.3–4 (December 1998), pp.439–48. For a rebuttal of Lal, see Ram Sharan Sharma, "Identity of the Indus Culture", *East and West*, vol.49, nos.1–4 (December 1999), pp.35–45; Irfan Habib, "Imagining River Saraswati—A Defence of Commonsense", *Proceedings*, Indian History Congress, 61st session, Kolkata, 2001, pp.65–92.

3 For an assessment of the "evidence" of the horse in the Harappan context, see R.S. Sharma, *Looking for the Aryans*, Hyderabad, 1994, pp.14–34; idem, *Advent of the Aryans in India*, Delhi, 1999, pp.12–21; Asko Parpola, *Deciphering the Indus Script*, Cambridge, 1994, pp.155–9. For the debate centring on the forged evidence of the horse, see Michael Witzel and Steve Farmer, "Horseplay at Harappa: The Indus Valley Decipherment Hoax", *Frontline*, 13 October and 24 November 2000.

4 For detailed comments on the views of Lal and his followers, see Sudeshna Guha, op. cit., pp.399–426. In keeping with his indigenist approach, B.B. Lal speaks of the resemblance between the graffiti on megalithic and chalcolithic pottery on the one hand and Harappan script characters and Brāhmī letters on the other, in "From the Megalithic to the Harappa: Tracing Back the Graffiti on the Pottery", *Ancient India*, 16 (1960), pp.4–24). More recently he has made a tongue-in-cheek endorsement of the view that the Harappan script was the precursor of the later Brāhmī (*The Saraswatī Flows On*, Delhi, 2002, pp.132–5), though not long ago he was of the view that the Harappan script was read from right to left. The most recent view, however, is that the Harappans may not have been a literate people at all (Steve Farmer and Michael Witzel, "The Collapse of the Indus-Script Thesis: The Myth of a Literate Harappan Civilization", *Electronic Journal of Vedic Studies*, vol.11, no.2 (2004), pp.19–57).

the communal lexicon!) civilisation is older than all others and was therefore free from any possible contamination in its early formative phase.

In this historiographical format India, i.e., Bhārata, is timeless. The first man was born here. Its people were the authors of the first human civilisation, the Vedic, which is the same as the Indus-Saraswatī. The authors of this civilisation had reached the highest peak of achievement in both the arts and the sciences, and they were conscious of belonging to the Indian nation, which has existed eternally. This obsession with the antiquity of the Indian identity, civilisation and nationalism has justifiably prompted several scholars, in recent years, to study and analyse the development of the idea of India.[5] Most of them have rightly argued that India as a country evolved over a long period, that the formation of its identity had much to do with the perceptions of the people who migrated into the subcontinent at different times, and that Indian nationalism developed mostly as a response to Western imperialism. But not all of them have succeeded in rising above the tendency to trace Indian national identity back to ancient times. For instance, a respected historian of ancient India tells us that "the inhabitants of the subcontinent were considered by the Purānic authors as forming a nation" and "could be called by a common name—Bhāratī".[6] Assertions like this are very close to the Hindu jingoism which attributes all major modern cultural, scientific and political developments, including the idea of nationalism, to the ancient Indians. Although their detailed refutation may amount to a rechauffe of what has already been written on the historical development of the idea of India, I propose to argue against the fantastic antiquity assigned to Bhārata and Hinduism, as well as against the historically invalid stereotypes about the latter, and thus to show the hollowness of the ideas which have been the staple diet of the monster of Hindu cultural nationalism in recent years.

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5 B.N. Mukherjee, *Nationhood and Statehood in India: A Historical Survey*, New Delhi, 2001; Irfan Habib, "The Envisioning of a Nation: A Defence of the Idea of India", *Social Scientist*, vol.27, nos.9–10 (1999), pp.18–29; idem, ed., *India: Studies in the History of an Idea*, Delhi, 2005; Rajat Kanta Ray, *The Felt Community: Commonality and Mentality before the Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, New Delhi, 2004; Manu Goswami, *Producing India*, Delhi, 2004.

6 B.N. Mukherjee, op. cit., p.6; Rajat Kanta Ray, op. cit., pp.49, 55; and p.180, notes 33, 34.

II

The geographical horizon of the early Aryans, as we know, was limited to the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent, referred to as Saptasindhava,[7] and the word Bhārata in the sense of a country is absent from the entire Vedic literature, though the Bharata tribe is mentioned at several places in different contexts. In the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini (500 B.C.) we find a reference to Prācya Bharata in the sense of a territory (*janapada*) which lay between *Udīcya* (north) and *Prācya* (east).[8] It must have been a small region occupied by the Bharatas and cannot be equated with the Akhaṇḍa-bhārata or Bhārata of the Hindutva camp. The earliest reference to Bhāratavarṣa (Prākrit Bharadhavasa) is found in the inscription of Kharavela (first century B.C.),[9] who lists it among the territories he invaded: but it did not include Magadha, which is mentioned separately in the record. The word may refer here in a general way to northern India, but its precise territorial connotation is vague. A much larger geographical region is visualised by the use of the word in the *Mahābhārata* (200 B.C. to A.D. 300), which provides a good deal of geographical information about the subcontinent, although a large part of the Deccan and the far south does not find any place in it. Among the five divisions of Bhāratavarṣa named, Madhyadeśa finds frequent mention in ancient Indian texts; in the *Amarakośa* (also known as the *Nāmaliṅgānuśāsana*), a work of the fourth–fifth centuries, it is used synonymously with Bhārata and Āryāvarta;[10] the latter, according to its eleventh-century commentator Kṣīrasvāmin, being the same as Manu's holy land situated between the Himalayas and the Vindhya range.[11] But in Bāṇa's *Kādambarī* (seventh century), at one place Bhāratavarṣa is said to have been ruled by

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7 *RV*, VIII, 24, 27. This is the only Ṛgvedic passage where the word *saptasindhava* is used in the sense of territory; at all other places in the *Ṛgveda* it is used to mean the seven rivers (*Vedic Index*, II, p.324).

8 *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, IV.2.113.

9 D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, I, no.91, line 10.

10 *Amarakośa*, II.6, 8. Krishnaji Govind Oka, ed., *The Nāmaliṅgānu-śāsana: Amarakośa of Amarasiṃha* (with the commentary of Kṣīrasvāmin), Delhi, 1981, p.47.

11 *Manusmṛti*, II.22. According to the *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* (II.13), Āryā-varta was bounded on the west by Adarsana near Kurukṣetra and on the east by Kālakavana near Allahabad.

Tārāpīḍa, who "set his seal on the four oceans" (*dattacatuḥsamu-dramudraḥ*);[12] and at another, Ujjainī is indicated as being outside Bhāratavarṣa,[13] which leaves its location far from clear. Similarly, in the *Nītivākyamṛta* of Somadeva (tenth century), the word *bhā-ratīyāḥ* cannot be taken to mean anything more than the inhabitants of Bhārata, which itself remains undefined.[14]

Bhāratavarṣa figures prominently in the Purāṇas, but they describe its shape variously. In some passages it is likened to a half-moon, in others it is said to resemble a triangle; in yet others it appears as a rhomboid or an unequal quadrilateral or a drawn bow.[15] The *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* compares the shape of the country with that of a tortoise floating on water and facing east.[16] Most of the Purāṇas describe Bhāratavarṣa as being divided into nine *dvīpas* or *khaṇḍas*, which, being separated by seas, were mutually inaccessible. The Purāṇic conception of Bhāratavarṣa has much correspondence with the ideas of ancient Indian astronomers like Varāhamihira (sixth century A.D.) and Bhāskarācārya (eleventh century). However, judging from their identifications of the rivers, mountains, regions and places mentioned in the Purāṇas, as well as from their rare references to areas south of the Vindhyas, their idea of Bhāratavarṣa does not seem to have included southern India. Although a few inscriptions of the tenth and eleventh centuries indicate that Kuntala (Karnataka) was situated in the land of Bhārata,[17] which is described in a fourteenth-century record as extending from the Himalayas to the southern sea,[18] by and large the available textual and epigraphic references to it do not indicate that the term stood for India as we know it today.

An ambiguous notion of Bhārata is also found in the *Abhi-dhānacintāmaṇi* of the Jain scholar Hemacandra (twelfth century), who describes it as the land of *karma* (*karmabhūmi*), as opposed to

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12 *Kādambarī*, ed. & tr. M.R. Kale, Delhi, 1968, p.290; V.S. Agrawal, *Kādambarī: Ek Sāṃskritik Adhyayan*, Varanasi, 1958, p.188.

13 *Kādambarī*, p.311; V.S. Agrawal, op. cit., 1958, p.205.

14 *Nītivākyamṛtam* of Somadeva Sūri, *Prakīrṇaka* 78.

15 S.M. Ali, *The Geography of the Purāṇas*, New Delhi, 1966, p.109.

16 Ibid.

17 For references, see Israt Alam, "Names for India in Ancient Indian Texts and Inscriptions", in Irfan Habib, ed., *India: Studies in the History of an Idea*, p.43.

18 *EI*, XIV, no.3, lines 5–6.

that of *phala* (*phalabhūmi*).[19] Although he does not clarify what is meant by the two, his definition of Āryāvarta (which may correspond with Bhārata) is the same as that found in Manu.[20] In fact, Āryāvarta figures more frequently than Bhārata in the geohistorical discourses found in early Indian texts. It was only from the 1860s that the name Bhāratavarṣa, in the sense of the whole subcontinent, found its way into the popular vocabulary. Its visual evocation came perhaps not earlier than 1905 in a painting by Abanindranath Tagore, who conceived of the image as one of Bangamātā but later, "almost as an act of generosity towards the larger cause of Indian nationalism, decided to title it 'Bhāratmātā'".[21] Thus it was only from the sixties and seventies of the nineteenth century that the notion of Bhārata was "forged by the self-conscious appropriation and transposition of discourse at once British-colonial, historical, geographical and ethnological, as well as received Puranic chronotopes".[22]

In many texts Bhārata is said to have been a part of Jambūdvīpa, which itself had an uncertain geographical connotation. The Vedic texts do not mention it; nor does Pāṇini, though he refers to the *jambū* (the rose apple tree).[23] The early Buddhist canonical works provide the earliest reference to the continent called Jambūdvīpa (Jambūdīpa),[24] its name being derived from the *jambū* tree which grew there, having a height of one hundred *yojanas*, a trunk fifteen *yojanas* in girth and outspreading branches fifty *yojanas* in length, whose shade extended to one hundred *yojanas*.[25] It was one of the

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19 IV.12. *Abhidhānacintāmaṇi*, edited with an introduction by Nemichandra Sastri, with the Hindi commentary *Maṇiprabhā* by Haragovind Sastri, Varanasi, 1964, p.235.

20 IV.14.

21 Sugata Bose, "Nation as Mother: Representations and Contestations of 'India' in Bengali Literature," in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, eds., *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*, Delhi, 1997, pp. 53–4. For a discussion of the Tamil mother and Bhāratamātā, see Sumathi Ramaswamy, "The Goddess and the Nation: Subterfuges of Antiquity, the Cunning of Modernity", in Gavin Flood, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Indian reprint, Delhi, 2003, pp.551–68.

22 Manu Goswami, op. cit., chapters 5 and 6.

23 *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, IV.3.165.

24 G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, II, pp.941–2, sv. Jambūdīpa.

25 Malalasekera, op.cit., p.941.

four *mahādīpas* (*mahādvīpas*) ruled by a Cakkavattī. We are told that Buddhas and Cakkavattīs were born only in Jambūdīpa, whose people were more courageous, mindful and religious than the inhabitants of Uttarakuru.[26] Going by the descriptions of Jambūdīpa and Uttarakuru in the early Buddhist literature, they both appear to be mythical regions. However, juxtaposed with Sihaladīpa (Siṃhaladvīpa=Sri Lanka), Jambūdīpa stands for India.[27] Aśoka thus uses the word to mean the whole of his empire, which covered nearly the entire Indian subcontinent excluding the far southern part of its peninsula.[28]

  Ambiguity about the territorial connotation of Jambūdvīpa continued during subsequent centuries in both epigraphic and literary sources. In a sixth-century inscription of Toramāṇa, for instance, Jambūdvīpa occurs without any precise territorial connotation.[29] Similarly, the identification of Jambūdvīpa remains uncertain in the Purāṇic cosmological schema, where it appears more as a mythical region than as a geographical entity. The world, according to the Purāṇas, "consists of seven concentric dvīpas or islands, each of which is encircled by a sea, the central island called Jambūdvīpa…".[30] This is similar to the cosmological imaginings of the Jains who, however, placed Jambūdvīpa at the centre of the central land (*madhyaloka*) of the three-tiered structure of the universe.[31] According to another Purāṇic conception, which is similar to the Buddhist cosmological ideas, the earth is divided into four *mahā-*

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26 Ibid., p.942.

27 *Mahāvaṃsa*, V.13; *Cūlavaṃsa*, XXXVII.216, 246; Malalasekera, op.cit., p.942.

28 D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions Bearing on Indian History and Civilization*, Calcutta, 1965, I, no.2, line 2.

29 Ibid., no.56, line 9.

30 D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, Delhi, 1960, pp.8–9.

31 Pravin Chandra Jain and Darbarilal Kothia, eds., *Jaina Purāṇa Kośa* (in Hindi), Jain Vidya Samsthan, Srimahavirji, Rajasthan, 1993, pp.256, 259. *Harivaṃśa Purāṇa*, 5.2–13. According to some it is divided into six parts (*khaṇḍas*), of which one is *āryakhaṇḍa* and is the same as Bhārata, the remaining five being *mlecchakhaṇḍas*. Among the Jain texts, the *Jambūdvīpaprajñapti* provides the most detailed account of Jambūdvīpa and Bhārata. See *Jambūddivapaññattisuttam,* ed. Kanhailalji Kamal et al., Shri Agam Prakashan Samiti, Vyavara, Rajasthan, 1986. The Jain texts had several geographical categories in common with the Purāṇic ones, but they had many unique spatio-temporal conceptions too.

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dvīpas, Jambūdvīpa being larger than the others.[32] In both these conceptions of the world, Bhāratavarṣa is at some places said to be a part of Jambūdvīpa but at others the two are treated as identical.[33]

Since these differently imagined geographical conceptions of Bhārata and Jambūdvīpa are factitious and of questionable value, to insist that their inhabitants formed a nation in ancient times is sophistry. It legitimates the Hindutva perception of Indian national identity as located in remote antiquity, accords centrality to the supposed primordiality of Hinduism and thus spawns Hindu cultural nationalism.[34] All this draws sustenance from, among other things, a systematic abuse of archaeology by a number of scholars,

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32 Ibid., p.9, note 1.

33 D.C. Sircar, *Studies in the Geography of Ancient and Medieval India*, pp.6, 8.

34 Historians who locate Indian nationalism in the distant past are, to a certain extent, inspired by the champions of the notion of a Greater India in ancient times. As is well known, an organisation called the Greater India Society was founded in Calcutta in 1926 with the objective of organising the study of the history and culture of Asian countries in which ancient Indians supposedly established colonies. Rabindranath Tagore was its purodha (spiritual head), but scholars who extended active support to the Society included P.C. Bagchi , Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Phanindra Nath Bose, Kalidas Nag, U.N. Ghoshal, Nalinaksha Datta and R.C. Majumdar (Susan Bayly, "Imagining 'Greater India': French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode", *Modern Asian Studies*, vol.38, no.3 (2004), pp.703–44). Although it is difficult to agree with Bayly that the Calcutta-based Bengali scholars alone were responsible for producing historical literature on Greater India, there is no doubt that of all the historians mentioned above the most influential, industrious and prolific was R.C. Majumdar, to whose writings Hindu supremacists and cultural nationalists turn for legitimacy even today. In their perception Greater India included many Asian countries, especially Burma, Java, Cambodia, Bali and Vietnam, in which the ancient Indian adventurers established colonies and transmitted "high culture to a mélange of unlettered primitives". Their emphasis is on the supposed greatness of ancient India and its civilising genius, cultural colonialism forming a prominent feature of their narrative of "an eternally dynamic and inextinguishable", timeless "Hindu" nation. Indeed, there were and still are scholars in different parts of the country who feed into the "Greater India" dialectic. One is reminded of persons like Raghuvira, who made the following statement: "Our ignorant journalists and governmental papers call Indonesia "Hindesia", as though the term were to be divided into "India" and "Asia" (Hind+Asia). The fools! The correct translation of Indonesia is *bharatadvipa*, for *nesia* derives from the Greek *nesos*, island" (A. Bharati, "The Hindu Renaissance and Its Apolegetic Patterns", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 29 (1970), p.276 .)

notably B.B. Lal. The *Pañcatantra* stories, Lal tells us, are narrated on the pots found in the digs at Lothal,[35] and that the people in Kalibangan cooked their food on clay *tandurs* which anticipated their use in modern times.[36] The Harappans, his sciolism goes on, practised the modern "Hindu way of greeting" (*namaskāramudrā*); their women, like many married ones of our own times, applied vermillion (*sindūr*) in the partings of their hair and wore small and large bangles, identical to those in use nowadays, up to their upper arms. They are said to have practised fire worship (which is attested to by the Vedic texts and not by Harappan archaeology!) and to have worshipped *linga* and *yoni*, the later Śaivism being pushed back to Harappan times. An attempt is thus made to revive an archaic and ill-founded view—supported recently by several scholars[37]—that the Harappan religion, which, according to the Hindu cultural nationalists was in fact "Vedic-Hindu", was "the linear progenitor" of modern Hinduism.[38]

III

Those, including some supposed scholars, with an *idée fixe* about the incredible antiquity of the Indian nation and Hinduism have created several stereotypes about Hinduism over the years, especially recently, and these have percolated down to textbooks. A few sample statements from two books randomly picked from among a large number adequately illustrate the point: "Hinduism [is] a *very* old religion … sanatana dharma i.e. the Eternal Spiritual Tradition

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35 B.B. Lal, *The Earliest Civilization of South Asia: Rise, Maturity and Decline*, Delhi,1997, p.175.

36 B.B. Lal, *The Saraswati Flows On*, p.95.

37 Among those who, directly or indirectly, support the idea of the Harappan religion as being the "progenitor" of modern "Hinduism", mention may be made of Asko Parpola, op. cit., D.K. Chakravarti (*India: An Archaeological History*, New Delhi, 1999), and B.B. Lal (*The Earliest Civilisation of South Asia* and *The Saraswati Flows On*). S.P. Gupta, in a book review, makes the following shockingly ignorant statement: "…the culture of the Indus-Saraswati… continues to live in India even today" (*Puratattva*, vol.31, 2000–01, p.190). For a reasoned critique of their views, see K.M. Shrimali, "Constructing an Identity: Forging Hinduism into Harappan Religions", *Social Science Probings*, vol.15, nos.1–2 (2003), pp.1–59; Sudeshna Guha, op. cit., pp.399–426.

38 S.P. Gupta, *The Indus-Saraswati Civilization: Origins, Problems and Issues*, p.147.

of India."[39] "The Vedas are … recognised … as the most ancient literature in the world. The term 'sanatana' is often used to highlight this quality[40]… freedom of thought and form of worship is unique to Hinduism[41].… In Hindu history no example of coercion or conversion can be found[42].… there is no conflict [in Hinduism] between science and religion."[43]

The above passage contains several clichés which lend support to militant Hindu cultural nationalism. One of these—the imagined "oldness" of what has come to be known as Hinduism—has been a parrot-cry of Hindu rightist groups and needs to be examined in the light of historical evidence. It is not necessary to go into the etymological peregrinations of the word "Hindu", derived from "Sindhu", on which much has been written; suffice it to say that the earliest use of the word, as is well known, can be traced back to the *Zend Avesta*, which speaks of Hapta Hindu (identical with the Ṛgvedic Saptasindhava) as one of the sixteen regions created by Ahur Mazda. The word retained its territorial connotation for a long time and did not acquire any religious dimension. According to one scholar,[44] the earliest use of the word "Hindu" in a religious sense is found in the account of Hsüan Tsang, who tells us that the bright light of "holy men and sages, guiding the world as the shining of the moon, have made this country eminent and so it is called In-tu"[45] (the Chinese name for India being Indu, moon). But the religious affiliation, if any, of these "holy men and sages" remains unknown, which hardly supports the view that Hsüan Tsang used the word In-tu (Hindu) in a specifically religious sense:

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39 Makhan Lal et al., *India and the World for Class VI*, National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi, September 2002, p.133.

40 Nawal K. Prinja, *Explaining Hindu Dharma: A Guide for Teachers*, Norwich, 1996, p.7. The book was produced by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The history textbooks used in the RSS-run Shishu Mandirs and other schools abound in similar pearls of wisdom about Hinduism.

41 Ibid., p.13.

42 Ibid., p.54.

43 Ibid., p.153.

44 Arvind Sharma, "Of Hindu, Hindustān, Hinduism and Hindutva", *Numen*, vol.49 (2002), pp.3–4.

45 Samuel Beal, *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Delhi, 1969, p.69.

indeed, the later Chinese pilgrim I-tsing questioned the veracity of the statement that it was a common name for the country.[46]

Similarly, the suggestion that the use of the word "Hindu" in a religious sense began immediately after the conquest of Sind by Muhammad ibn Qāsim in 712 is unacceptable. It has been asserted that the "Hindu" was "now identified on a religious basis" and that "conversion from this Hindu religion" was now possible.[47] The sources bearing on eighth-century Sind indicate the existence of several non-Islamic religions and sects of Brāhmaṇism and Bud-dhism denoted by the Arabic compound *barhimah-sumaniyah* used by the classical Muslim writers, but the word "Hindu" in their writings had a geographic, linguistic, or ethnic connotation. In the *Chachnāma*, for example, *hinduvān* means Indians in general and *hindavī* stands for the Indian language.[48] The first use of "Hindu" in the religious sense is found in the *Kitābu-ul-Hind* of Alberuni (A.D. 1030),[49] who at one place distinguishes Hindus from Buddhists but at another holds the distinction to be between śramans (Buddhists)

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46 J. Takakusu, tr., *A Record of Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (A.D. 671–695) by I-tsing*, Delhi, 1966, p.118.

47 Arvind Sharma, op. cit., p.6, points out that Muhammad ibn Qāsim appointed his adversary Dahir's minister Siskar as his advisor after the latter's acceptance of Islam. Since conversion from what he calls "Hindu religion" became possible, he seems to imply that a Hindu identity had already emerged. Similarly, the brāhman princes of Sind, Jaysiyah b. Dahir and his brother Sassah, converted to Islam at the invitation of the Caliph 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Aziz (Derryl N. Maclean, *Religion and Society in Arab Sind*, Leiden, 1989, pp.33, 48) But mere acceptance of Islam by certain Sindis does not justify a reified perception of Hinduism as early as the eighth century.

48 Maclean, op. cit., pp.12–13; Irfan Habib, *Linguistic Materials from Eighth-Century Sind: An Exploration of the Chachnama*, Symposia Papers 11, Indian History Congress, Aligarh, 1994, pp.8–9.

49 Alberuni's reference to Hindu religion has been treated as a landmark in the "religious semantic journey" of the word "Hindu", just as the sack of Somanātha by Mahmūd has been blown out of proportion by some scholars, e.g., Arvind Sharma, op. cit., pp.6–7; cf. Narayani Gupta's statement that "it is fashionable to criticize Mill, but to most Indians precolonial India has two pasts (Mill's 'Hindu' and 'Islamic' civilizations), and the attack on Somanath by Mahmud in 1025 has the same emotive significance as the Turks' conquest of Constantinople in 1453 had for conventional European history ("Stereotypes versus History", *India International Centre Quarterly*, Summer 1999, p.169).

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and brāhmaṇs.[50] He states that "they (Hindus) totally differ from us in religion".[51] Alberuni's understanding was limited to Brāhmaṇical religious beliefs and practices, and his use of the word "Hindu" was far from clear and coherent.[52] It is therefore not possible to credit him with any definite and essentialist view of a Hindu religion,[53] much less treat his perception of one as a landmark in the development of Hindu religious identity. The ambivalence surrounding the word "Hindu" continued for a long time, so that even three centuries after Alberuni we find Ziāuddīn Baranī, the first Muslim to write the history of India (known as the *Tārīkh-i-Fīrūzshāhī*), making frequent references to Hindus (Hunūd and Hindu'ān) either as a religious category or as a political one and sometimes as both.[54] In the sixteenth century, despite Akbar's familiarity with and patronage of non-Islamic religions of India, Abū-l Fazl could do no better than "merely give resumés of Brahmanism … presumably

50 Edward C. Sachau, tr., *Alberuni's India*, London, 1910, I, pp.7, 21, cited in Irfan Habib, "India: Country and Nation—An Introductory Essay," in idem, ed., *India: Studies in the History of an Idea*, Delhi, 2005, p.5, note 14.

51 *Alberuni's India*, p.19.

52 For a detailed though biased view of Alberuni's perception of Brahmanical religion, see Arvind Sharma, *Studies in "Alberuni's India"*, Wiesbaden, 1983.

53 The general absence of an essentialist view of the religion of the Hindus may be inferred from the many inscriptions including the one from Veraval discussed by Anwar Hussain ("The 'Foreigners' and the Indian Society: c. Eighth Century to Thirteenth Century", unpublished M. Phil. dissertation, Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1993, Chapter IV). B.D. Chattopadhyaya (*Representing the Other: Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims*, Delhi, 1998, p.78) rightly points out that whatever essentialism may be there in Alberuni's description is contradicted by many records including the Veraval inscription, which speaks of the reconstruction of a demolished mosque by Jayasimha Siddharaja.

54 Baranī mentions Hindus forty times in his *Tārīkh-i-Fīrūzshāhī*. Qeyamuddin Ahmad, "Baranī's References to the Hindus in the *Tārīkh-i-Fīrūzshāhī*—Territorial and Other Dimensions", *Islamic Culture*, LVI (1982), pp.295–302. The Moroccan traveller Ibn Battūtah, a contemporary of Baranī, interpreted the name Hindu Kush as "Hindu killer" because the Indian slaves passing through its mountainous terrain perished in the snows. This has been given a communal slant (Arvind Sharma, op. cit., p.9). Ibn Battūtah's derivation of the word, however, may have been based on folk etymology, and the name Hindukush possibly originated from the Arabic Hindu Koh, meaning the "mountains of India." I am thankful to Dr. Najaf Haider for this suggestion.

because this was the most prestigious"[55] and these are nowhere near the notion of a Hindu religion. Half a century after his death, the anonymous author[56] of the *Dabistān-i-Mazāhib*, who claimed to present a survey of all religions and sects, devoted one full chapter to the religion of the Hindus and other Indian sects but failed to provide a clear understanding of what was intended by the use of the term "Hindu". In his work, the word means the orthodox Brāhmaṇical groups ("smartians") as well as the non-Islamic belief systems of various schools, sects, castes and religions of India. At some places the rubric "Hindu" includes Jains and at others it excludes them, along with the Yogīs, Sanyāsīs, Tapasīs and Chārvakas.[57] A similar vagueness in the connotation of the word is seen more than a hundred years later in the history of Gujarat called the *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, authored by 'Ali Muhammad Khan (1761), who uses it "as a term of reference for people of all religions, castes, sub-castes, and professions who can be classified as a group different from the Muslims" and "reckons the Jain clergy (Shevra) and the laity (Shravak) as Hindus even though he is aware of the difference in the religious persuasions of, as well as the antagonism between, the Jains and the Vaishnavites (Maishris)".[58] The fuzziness of definitions of "Hindu" and "Hinduism" is thus unquestionable. This is rooted, to a large extent, in the fact that Arabic and Persian scholarship describes all non-Muslim Indians as Hindus.

What possibly added to the ambiguity surrounding the word is the fact that no Indians described themselves as Hindus before the fourteenth century. The earliest use of the word in the Sanskrit language occurs in a 1352 inscription of Bukka, the second ruler of Vijayanagara's first dynasty, who described himself with a series of titles, one of them being *hindurāya suratrāna* (Sultan among Hindu kings). His successors continued to use this title for 250 years, "until

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55 Romila Thapar, "Syndicated Hinduism", in Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke, eds., *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, 1997, p.73.

56 The author of the *Dabistān* has been variously identified, e.g., as "Mobad", Muhsin Fani, Mirza Zulfiqar Beg and Kaikhusrau Isfandyar.

57 Manisha Mishra, "Perception of the Hindus and their Religious Systems as Described in the Dabistan-i-Mazahib", unpublished M.Phil. dissertation, Department of History, University of Delhi, 2003.

58 Najaf Haider, "A 'Holi Riot' of 1714: Versions from Ahmadabad and Delhi", in Mushirul Hasan and Asim Roy, eds., *Living Together Separately: Cultural India in History and Politics*, Delhi, 2005.

as late as the opening years of the seventeenth century."[59] In north India, Rāṇā Kumbha was the first to style himself as *hindusuratrāṇa* in an inscription dated 1439.[60] Despite the use of the title by royalty, the word *hindu* does not occur in the mainstream Sanskrit literature until the early nineteenth century, with the rare exceptions of Jonarāja's *Rājataraṅgiṇī*[61] (1455–9), which uses the word as part of the compound *hindughoṣa*, and Śrīvara's *Jain Rājataraṅgiṇī* (1459–77), which refers to the social customs of the Hindus (*hindukasamācāra*)[62] and their language (*hindsthānavācā*)[63] as distinct from the Persian language (*pārasībhāsayā*) and also mentions a place called Hinduvāḍā[64] (modern Hindubata, 15 miles north of Sopore). The three Sanskrit texts of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition, ranging from the early sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, do not mention the word "Hindu" at all;[65] nor does it occur in the *Brahmasūtra* commentary written by the famous Gauḍīya Vaiśṇava *ācārya* Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa (1750), who tried to "affiliate the Krishna Chaitanya tradition with "official" Advaita Vedanta."[66] It was not before the first half of the nineteenth century that the word "Hindu" begins to appear in the Sanskrit texts produced as a result of Christianity's encounters with Brāhmaṇical religion. Among the religious debates and disputations of the early nineteenth century centring round the alleged superiority of Christianity vis-à-vis Brāhmaṇism, an important controversy was generated by John Muir's

59 Philip B. Wagoner, "Sultan among Hindu Kings: Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara", *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol.55, no.4 (November 1996), p.862. Cf. Hermann Kulke, *Kings and Cults: State Formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia*, Delhi, 1993, pp.208–39. Since the earliest mention of the word "Hindu" is in the Vijayanagara records, it will be worthwhile to examine south Indian texts which may contain references to it.

60 B.D. Chattopadhyaya, op. cit., p.54.

61 *Hindughoṣa* may be taken to mean the Hindukush mountain (*Rāja-taraṅgiṇī* of Jonarāja, ed. and tr. Raghunath Singh, Chowkhamba, Varanasi, 1972, verse 381). Also see footnote 54 above.

62 *Jaina Rājataraṅgiṇī* of Śrīvara, with translation, critical introduction and geographical notes by Raghunath Singh, Varanasi, 1977, 3.218.

63 Ibid., 2.215.

64 Ibid., 2.51.

65 Joseph T. O'Connell, "The word 'Hindu' in Gaudiya Vaisnava Texts", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol.93, no.3 (1973), pp.340–343.

66 Wilhelm Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Philosophical Understanding*, Delhi,1990, p.193.

evangelist critique published as *Mataparīkṣā* (in Sanskrit) in 1839, which provoked three Indian pandits to defend their religion.[67] One of them, Haracandra Tarkapancānana, in his reply to Muir, impugned him as *hindudharmātivairin* (Hinduism's great foe)[68] and laid down conditions for becoming "eligible [*adhikārin*] for [Vedic] *dharma*, having become Hindus [*hindutvam prāpya*] in a subsequent birth."[69] But the occurrence of the word "Hindu" in Sanskrit texts remained rare, and the two nineteenth-century Bengali encyclopedists, Rādhākānta Deb (1783–1867)[70] and Tārānatha Tarkavācaspati (1811–85)[71] could not cite any text other than the obscure and very late *Merutantra* (eighteenth century);[72] and they provided an extremely specious etymology of the word[73] based on it.

The word "Hindu" is rarely seen in the medieval vernacular *bhakti* literature as well. Ten Gauḍīya Vaiśṇava texts in Bengali, their dates ranging from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, were examined. The word "Hindu" was found forty-one times, and *Hindudharma* seven times, in the 80,000 couplets of only five of the

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67 The pandits were Somanātha (Subāji Bāpu), Haracandra Tarkapancānana and Nilakanṭha Goreh, the last of whom ultimately converted to Christianity and was baptised as Nehemiah Goreh. For a discussion of the material produced in the context of the controversy, see Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India*, Vienna, 1981.

68 Haracandra Tarkapancānan, *Mataparīkṣottaram*, Calcutta, 1940, p.1, cited in Richard Fox Young, op. cit., p.93.

69 Richard Fox Young, op. cit., p.150.

70 The multi-volume lexicon *Śabdakalpadruma* appeared between 1819 and 1858.

71 *Vācaspatyam*.

72 The crucial passage is given by V.S Apte (*Practical Sanskrit English Dictionary*, sv. *hindu*): *hindudharmapraloptāro jāyante cakravarttinaḥ/ hīnam ca dūṣayatyeka hinduritiucyate priye//* He dates the text to the eighth century A.D., but one is intrigued by its reference to *tantriks* born in London who will become lords of the earth.

73 *hīnam dūṣayati iti hindu*: the Hindu "spoils" (*dūṣayati*) what is "inferior" (*hīnam*). Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p.515, note 96. The twentieth-century text *Dharmapradīpa*, written by three leading pandits in the 1930s (Calcutta, 1937), discusses in detail the rules laid down for the purification of those Hindus who joined or were forced to join other religions: *atra kevalaṃ balād eva mlecchadharmaṃ svīkāritānāṃ hindūnām … vividhāḥ prāyaścittavidhayo nirdiṣṭā dṛśyante*, p.219, cited in Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p.534, note 66. The word also occurs in the *Dharmatattvavinirṇaya* by Vāsudeva Śāstrin Abhyaṇkara (Poona, 1929).

ten texts. Apart from the small number of occurrences, the interesting aspect of the evidence is that there is no explicit discussion of what "Hindu" or *Hindudharma* mean.[74] The word "Hindu" is also used in different contexts by Vidyāpati (early fifteenth century), Kabir (1450–1520), Ekanāth (1533–99) and Anantadās (sixteenth century). On this basis a scholar has argued that a Hindu religious identity defined itself primarily in opposition to Muslims and Islam and had a continuous existence through the medieval period.[75] This argument is seriously flawed because it is based on the patently wrong assumption that all non-Muslims were part of the postulated Hindu identity and ignores the basic fact that the medieval *sants* and *bhakti* poets used the term "Hindu" with reference to adherents of the caste-centric Brāhmaṇical religion, against which they raised their voice.[76] The general absence of the words "Hindu" and "Hindudharma" in the precolonial Sanskrit texts and their limited connotation in the not-too-frequent occurrences in the *bhakti* literature clearly indicate that Indians did not create a Hindu religious identity for themselves, as is argued by some. Of course the word was in use in precolonial India, but it was not before the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries that it was appropriated by Western, especially British, scholars[77] whose writings helped the imperial

74 Joseph T. O'Connel, op. cit., pp.340–44.

75 David N. Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.41, no.4 (October 1999), pp.630–659. Also see Lorenzen, ed., *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, Delhi, 1996, Introduction.

76 R.P. Bahuguna, "Recent Western Writings on Medieval Indian Sant Movement", ICHR Seminar on Dialogue with the Past: Trends in Historical Writings in India, Bangalore, 14–16 February 2003; idem, "Symbols of Resistance: Non-Brahmanical Sants as Religious Heroes in Late Medieval India", in Biswamoy Pati et al., eds., *Negotiating India's Past: Essays in Memory of Parthasarathi Gupta*, Delhi, 2003. Also see idem, "Some Aspects of Popular Movements: Beliefs and Sects in Northern India during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Delhi, 1999.

77 Charles Grant used the term "Hindooism" first in a letter to John Thomas in 1787 and subsequently in his *Observations on the State of Society among the Subjects of Great Britain*, written in 1792 (Will Sweetman, *Mapping Hinduism: Hinduism and the Study of Indian Religions 1600–1776*, Halle, 2003, p.56, note 12). William Jones also used the term "Hindu" in the religious sense in 1787 (S.N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones and British Attitudes to India*, Cambridge, 1968, p.119; Dermot Killingley, "Modernity, Reform, and Revival," in Gavin Flood, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to*

administration to formulate and create the notion of Hinduism in the sense in which we understand it today. The British borrowed the word "Hindu" from India, gave it a new meaning and significance, reimported it into India as a reified phenomenon called Hinduism,[78] and used it in censuses and gazetteers as a category in their classification of the Indian people, paving the way for the global Hindu religious identity—a process perceptively equated with the "pizza effect", basically meaning that the Neapolitan hot baked bread exported to America returned with all its embellishments to Italy to become its national dish.[79] Given this background, Hinduism

Hinduism, p.513). Rammohun Roy was, however, perhaps "the first Hindu" to use the word "Hindooism" in 1816 (Dermot Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition: The Teape Lectures 1990*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993, p.60, cited in Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion*, Delhi, 1999, p.100.)

78 Several scholars have argued that Hinduism was a colonial construct which finally took shape when the imperial administration engaged in the classification into categories of the Indian people through the mechanism of the census. Important among them are Vasudha Dalmia ("The Only Real Religion of the Hindus: Vaisnava Self-Representation in the Late Nineteenth Century", in Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron, eds., *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, New Delhi, 1995, pp.176–210); Robert Frykenberg ("The Emergence of Modern 'Hinduism' as a Concept and as an Institution", in Günther-Dietz Sontheimer and Hermann Kulke, eds., *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, 1997, pp.82–107); John Stratton Hawley ("Naming Hinduism", *Wilson Quarterly*, Summer 1991, pp.20–32); Harjot Oberoi (*The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Delhi, 1994, pp.16–17); and Heinrich von Stietencron ("Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a Deceptive Term", in Sontheimer and Kulke, op. cit., pp. 32–53). Their views have been contested by quite a few scholars in recent years, e.g., Will Sweetman, op. cit., and Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians and the Colonial Construction of Religion*, New York, 2005. Their main source of inspiration is David Lorenzen ("Who Invented Hinduism?", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol.41, no.4, (October 1999), pp.630–659), who has argued that "a Hindu religion … acquired a much sharper self-conscious identity through the rivalry between Muslims and Hindus in the period between 1200 and 1500, and was firmly established before 1800" (p.631). While he thus assigns primary agency to "rivalry between Muslims and Hindus" in the construction of Hinduism, he also pronounces: "Hinduism wasn't invented by anyone, European or Indian. Like Topsy, it just grow'd" (ibid., p.655). One wonders if this comparison to a character from the nineteenth-century anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not a mere muddying of the waters of history.

79 Agehananda Bharati, "The Hindu Renaissance and Its Apologetic

was a creation of the colonial period and cannot lay claim to any great antiquity.[80] Although some echo the views of B.B. Lal and his followers to proclaim that its origins lay in the Indus valley civilisation and in what they call Aryan culture,[81] Hinduism is the youngest of all religions, a nineteenth-century neologism popularised by the British.[82] That it has come to stay, despite the endless ambiguities of connotation in it,[83] is a different matter.

<div align="center">IV</div>

Even though Hinduism as a religious category acquired much visibility in Christian missionary writings and in British administrative records,[84] not until the nineteenth century did it come to be labelled *sanātanadharma*. The term can be translated in a variety of ways:

Patterns", *Journal of Asian Studies*, 29 (1970), pp.267–87.

80 Recently Brian K. Pennington (*Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion*, New York, 2005) has vehemently opposed the view that Britain invented Hinduism on the grounds, first, that that argument "grants … too much power to colonialism" and, second, that denying the existence of Hinduism prior to the arrival of the British "introduces an almost irreparable disruption in Indian traditions that can only alienate contemporary Indians from their own traditions" (p.5). He seems to forget that colonialisms everywhere have manipulated facts to suit their interests. Worse, must historians cease to work because their reasoned conclusions show that "traditions", held to be crucial to the psychic welfare of today's people, are concocted?

81 Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, first South Asian edition, Delhi, 2004, p.50.

82 Richard H. Davis, "A Brief History of Religions in India", Introduction, in Donald S. Lopez, Jr, ed., *Religions of India in Practice*, Indian reprint, Delhi, 1998, p.5. Also see John Stratton Hawley, "Naming Hinduism", *Wilson Quarterly*, Summer 1991, pp.20–23; and Wendy Doniger, "Hinduism by Any Other Name", ibid., 35–41.

83 The only clarity about Hinduism is that it is used as a catch-all category for all non-Abrahamaic religions (Islam, Judaism, Christianity) and is thus a negative appellation. In the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), "Hindu" includes not only Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs but also all those who are not Muslims, Christians, Parsees or Jews. There is therefore much substance in Frits Staal's view that no meaningful notion of Hinduism can be obtained except by exclusion and in his argument that it fails to qualify both as a religion and as "a meaningful unit of discourse" (*Rules Without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences*, New York, 1989, p.397).

84 Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi,1987, pp.224–54.

"eternal religion" or "eternal law,"[85] "unshakeable, venerable order",[86] "ancient and continuing guideline"[87] and "the eternal order or way of life"[88] are some of its English equivalents. It has been used by a variety of representatives of modern Hinduism, ranging from neo-Hindus like Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan to the leaders and followers of reform movements as well as their opponents. Although some scholars have tried to project it as having a "dynamic character", *sanātanadharma*[89] was basically an orthodox resistance to reform movements[90] and drew on references to itself in ancient Indian literature. The earliest occurrence of the term is found in the Buddhist canonical work *Dhammapada*, according to which the eternal law (*esa dhamma sanātano*)[91] is that hatred and enmities cease through love alone; but it is mentioned frequently in the Brāhmaṇical texts as well. The *Mahābhārata* often uses the expression *eṣa dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ* "as a sanctioning formula intended to emphasise the obligatory nature of social and religious rules",[92] but its use to justify Śvetaketu's mother's being snatched away by a

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85 Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*, Albany, 1989, pp.31, 531.

86 Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p. 344.

87 Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, London, 1994, p.221.

88 Julius Lipner, "On Hinduism and Hinduisms: The Way of the Banyan", in Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, eds., *The Hindu World*, Routledge, New York, 2004, Indian reprint, Chennai, 2005, p.19.

89 John Zavos, "Defending Hindu Tradition: Sanatana Dharma as a Symbol of Orthodoxy in Colonial India", *Religion*, 31 (2001), pp.109–123. Also see Vasudha Dalmia, *Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions: Bharatendu Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Benaras*, Delhi, 1997, pp.2–4, note 5.

90 It is not surprising that early twentieth-century pandits like V.S. Abhyaṇkara, Anantakṛṣṇa Śāstri, Sītārām Śāstri and Śrīvijaya Bhaṭṭācharya were against the introduction of "new sectarian traditions" (*nūtana-sampradāya, Dharmapradīpa*, p.64) and described themselves as "followers of eternal religion" (*sanātanadharmīya, sanātanadharmāvalambin, Dharma-pradīpa*, pp.207,219: *Dharmatattvavinirṇaya*, pp.39ff).

91 *Dhammapada*, I.5. It has been suggested the word *sanātana* may have some connection with *sanatā*, which occurs in the Vedic literature only twice. At one place it occurs along with *dharma* (*RV* 3.3.1d) and at another, without it (*RV* 2.3.6ab). In both cases the word *sanatā* means "from old times" or "always." I am thankful to Professor Shingo Einoo, who drew my attention to these references.

92 *Mahābhārata*, xii.96.13; 128.30; 131.2; xiii.44.32; 96.46; xiv.50.37. Cited in Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p.558, note 56.

brāhmaṇ would be far from palatable to modern sanātanists.[93] The *Gītā* uses the term in the plural to mean the "venerable norms for the families" (*kuladharmāḥ sanātanaḥ*)[94] and describes Kṛṣṇa as "protector of the established norms" (*śāśvatadharmagoptā sanātanaḥ*).[95] Similarly, in the law book of Manu, *sanātanadharma* stands for established "customs and statutes of the countries, castes and families",[96] though the Purāṇas use the term in various senses. According to the *Matsyapurāṇa* it is rooted in virtues like the absence of greed and attachment, the practice of celibacy, forgiveness, compassion for living beings, etc.[97] The *Varāhapurāṇa* at one place refers to the eternal *dharma* promulgated by Varāha,[98] and at another states that according to the eternal law one should not sink into grief on seeing the fortunes of others and one's own distress (*eṣa dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ*).[99] In another Purāṇa, Śiva defines his eternal *dharma* (*dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ*)[100] as consisting of *jñāna*, *kriyā*, *caryā* and *yoga*, though in several epic and Purāṇic passages *sanātana* is used as an epithet for divinities like Kṛṣṇa, or for Dharma, who himself is thought of as a deity. The *Uttararāmacarita* of Bhavabhūti (eighth century), the earliest secular work to refer to *sanātanadharma*, mentions it in the sense of fixed laws and customs; and the Khanapur plates (sixth century), which contain the earliest epigraphic reference to it, use it in speaking of rites and rituals prescribed by *śruti* and *smṛti* (*śrutismṛtivihitasanātana-dharmakarmaniratāya*). Although these textual references provide different connotations of the term *sanātanadharma*, it has generally been understood in the sense of traditionally established customs and duties of countries, castes and families also in texts as late as the *Mahānirvāṇatantra* (eighteenth century), by an unknown

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93 According to the story, when his mother was being led away by a brāhmaṇ he flew into a rage and was calmed down by his father, who told him not to get angry because this was the eternal law (*eṣa dharmaḥ sanātanaḥ*), *Mahābhārata*, I.113, verses 11–14.

94 *Gītā*, I.40.

95 Ibid., XI.18.

96 *Manu*, I.118; VII.98; IX.64, 325.

97 *Matsyapurāṇa*, 143.32, Ānandāśramagranthāvali, 1981, p.269. Cf. *Brahamāṇḍapurāṇa*, II.31.36–38; 91.30–32.

98 *Varāhapurāṇa*, 126.7.

99 Ibid., 126.43.

100 *Śivapurāṇa*, 7.2.10.30–72.

author, and the *Śāstratattvavinirṇaya* (1844) of Nilakaṇṭha (Nehemia) Goreh. But when, in the nineteenth century, it emerged as a key concept in traditionalist self-assertion against Christianity as well as in the reform movements (Brahmosamaj and Aryasamaj), it came to be stereotyped as a venerable, "eternal", "all encompassing" and "inclusive" (*sarvavyapaka*) religion, "with no temporal beginning, no historical founding figure", one which needed no innovations or reforms.[101] This added to the conceptual opacity and vagueness of the "timeless religion", which had to wait for its first codification by the Englishwoman Annie Besant who, in collaboration with Indian scholars like Bhagwan Das, drew up a textbook[102] on *sanātanadharma* for use at the Central Hindu College, Benares, whose establishment in 1898 owed much to her initiative.

<div align="center">V</div>

Hinduism has often been viewed not only as eternal (*sanātanadharma*) but also as a monolithic religion in which there is "agreement about some static universal doctrine."[103] This stereotype has received support not only from Hindu right wing political groups but also from serious scholars of religion who define Hinduism as "the religion of those humans who create, perpetuate, and transform traditions with legitimising reference to the authority of the Vedas."[104] An early, though indirect, endorsement of the legitimising authority of the Vedas comes from Yāska (fifth century B.C.), who describes Vedic "seers" as "having attained a direct experience of *dharma*" (*sākṣātkṛtadharma*).[105] Later, Manu categorically states that "the root of religion is the entire Veda" (*vedo'khilo dharma-mūlam*),[106] and that the authority of the *śruti* and the *smṛti* is not to

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101 Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p.343.

102 *Sanātanadharma: An Elementary Text-book of Hindu Religion and Ethics*, Central Hindu College, Benares, 1910. This was followed by several works on the *sanātanadharma*, e.g., *Sanātanadharmadīpikā* by Hamsayogin, Madras,1917; Ganga Prasad, *The Fountainhead of Religion*, 1909; Shri Bharat Dharma Mahamandala, ed., *The World's Eternal Religion*, Benares, 1920; etc.

103 Julius Lipner, *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, p.221.

104 Brian K. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual and Religion*, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp.13–14.

105 *Nirukta*, I.20.

106 *Manu*, II.6. Cf. *Manu*, XII.95–96.

be questioned or reasoned about (*amimāṃsya*).[107] His assertion has received much support over time from the different philosophical systems, though their apologetic patterns have varied considerably. Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, though not affiliated to the Veda, recognised it as a "source of knowledge" (*pramāṇa*), and their leading early medieval thinkers (Uddyotakara, Vācaspatimiśra and Udayana) defended it, sometimes even by developing new argument.[108] Much stronger support for the Vedic texts, however, came from the Mimāṃsā, whose "genuine affiliation with, and commitment to, the Veda are generally accepted."[109] Mimāṃsā thinkers like Kumārila, Prabhākara and Maṇḍanamiśra (all of the eighth century), for example, laid great emphasis on the principle that the *dharma* is justified by the Veda alone (*vedamūlatva*).[110] Similarly, Śaṅkara (eighth century) treated all the declarations of the Veda as authoritative[111] and defiance of it (*vedavirodha*) as heresy.[112] Indeed, the acceptance of the authority of the Vedas is an important feature of Brāhmaṇical orthodoxy, but their number being only four, an amorphous category of the "fifth Veda" came into being as early as the later Vedic period,[113]leading to an open-endedness in the Vedic corpus, a phenomenon also in keeping with the general absence of and aversion to writing and the Brāhmaṇical preference for the oral

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107 Ibid., II.10.

108 Wilhelm Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection: Exploration in Indian Thought*, Albany,1991, pp.24–27.

109 Ibid. p.33.

110 Brian K. Smith, op. cit., p.18; Halbfass, *India and Europe*, pp.326–9, 359. Cf. Louis Renou, *The Destiny of the Veda in India* (English tr. Dev Raj Chanana), Delhi,1965, pp.40–46.

111 Renous, op. cit., p.37.

112 Brian K. Smith, op. cit., p.18.

113 *itihāsapurāṇaṃ pañcamaṃ vedānāṃ vedam*, *Chandogya Upaniṣad*, 7.2, *The Principal Upanisads*, ed. and tr. S. Radhakrishnan, Delhi, 1991, p.470. For a discussion of the claim of the *Mahābhārata* to be the "fifth Veda", see John Brockington, *The Sanskrit Epics*, Leiden, 1998, p.7. According to some scholars even the *Atharvaveda* did not belong to the "revealed" Vedic corpus and its followers invented legends and allegories to prove the superiority of the text and earn for it the status of a "divine revelation" (Lakshman Sarup, *The Nighaṇṭu and the Nirukta*, Indian edition, Delhi, 1984, pt.1, pp.72–73.

transmission of all knowledge.[114] The *Mahābhārata*,[115] the Purā-
ṇas[116] and the Tantras[117] are called the "fifth Veda", just as the large
body of Tamil devotional hymns in the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava tradi-
tions, ranging in date from the sixth to the ninth centuries, claimed
Vedic status.[118] Many religious teachers holding different opinions
sought to legitimise their teachings with reference to the Vedas
during the medieval period. Acceptance of the authority of the
Vedas is in fact an important feature even of modern Hindu revi-
valist movements like the Arya Samaj of Dayananda, who is some-
times called the Luther of India.[119] But all this cannot be construed
to mean that Hinduism acquired a monolithic character: for it has
rightly been pointed out that allegiance to the Vedas was very often
a fiction, nothing more than a mere "raising of the hat, in passing,
to an idol by which one no longer intends to be encumbered later
on."[120]

There is substantial evidence to show that the Vedas did not
always enjoy a pre-eminent position even in Brāhmaṇical Hindu-
ism.[121] Anti-Vedic ideas, in fact, began to find expression in the

114 Frits Staal, "The Concept of Scripture in the Indian Tradition", in
Mark Juergensmeyer and Gerald Barrier, eds., *Sikh Studies: Comparative
Perspectives on a Changing Tradition*, Berkeley, 1979, pp.121–4. For a
different point of view, see C. Mackenzie Brown, "Puranas as Scripture:
From Sound to Image of the Holy Word in the Hindu Tradition", *History of
Religions*, 26 (1986), pp.68–86.

115 The *Mahābhārata* (I.56.33) claims: *yad ihāsti tad anyatra, yan
nehāsti na tat kvacid* ("That which is found herein exists elsewhere; that
which is not here, is nowhere").

116 The Purāṇas often claim to be the essence of all the Vedas
(*sarvavedasāra*, *akhilaśrutisāra*, *sarvedārthasāra*), or the soul of the
Vedas: *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.2.3, 1.3.42, 12.13.15; *Nāradīya Purāṇa* 1.1.36,
1.9.97; *Skanda Purāṇa* 5.3.1.22. Cited in Brian K. Smith, op. cit., p.26.

117 Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p.366.

118 Brian K. Smith, op. cit., pp.20–29. The tradition of extending the use
of the word *veda* is seen in the description of Nammalvar's *Tiruvaymoli* as
Draviḍaveda. It was in keeping with this old practice that the "Tranquebar
Bible" was entitled *Vedapustagam* and B. Ziegenbalg described the Bible
and the Christian religion as *satyavedam* or "the true Veda" (Halbfass, *India
and Europe*, p.340).

119 J.E. Llewellyn, *The Arya Samaj as a Fundamentalist Movement*, Delhi,
1993, chapter 2. Also see J.T.F. Jordens, *Dayanand Saraswati: His Life and
Causes*, Delhi, 1981.

120 Louis Renou, *The Destiny of the Veda in India*, p.2.

121 Although we are not here to discuss the various forms and levels of

Ṛgveda itself. The famous Ṛgvedic passage which equated brāhmaṇs with croaking frogs was an early attempt to ridicule the Vedas and their reciters.[122] In addition to the satirisation of the brāhmaṇs, there is also evidence of the questioning of Vedic knowledge: "Whence this creation developed is known only by him who witnesses this world in the highest heaven—or perhaps even he does not know."[123] At several places in the *Ṛgveda*, Indra is abused and his very existence is questioned.[124] Thus in a hymn to Indra it is said: "to Indra, if Indra exists" (*RV* VIII.100.3), and in another the question is asked (*RV* II.12.5): "about whom they ask, where is he? ... And they say about him, 'he is not' ..." (*RV* II.12). Scepticism about the Vedic sacrifice was expressed by reviling it at the end of the *mahāvrata* Soma festival, as is evident from several Ṛgvedic passages.[125] The sanctity of the Vedas was questioned soon after their composition. The Upaniṣads contain several passages which

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atheism and heresies in India, it is necessary to recall that among those who repudiated the authority of the Vedas outside the Brāhmaṇical fold and earned the epithets *pāṣandas* (heretics) and *nāstikas* (non-believers in the Vedas), the important ones are the Jains, the Buddhists and the Cārvākas, the followers of Cārvāka also being known as *lokāyatikas*. The Vedas, according to the Jains, were *anāryavedas*, which they replaced with their own scriptures, calling them *āryavedas*. They also describe the Vedas as *mithyāsūtras* (*micchāsūya*) (Renou, op. cit., p.87). Gautama Buddha is equally unsparing in his denunciation of the Vedas and says that "... the talk of the Brāhmaṇas versed in the three Vedas turns out to be ridiculous, mere words, a vain and empty thing" (*Tesaṃ idaṃ-tevijjānaṃ brāhmaṇānaṃ bhāsitaṃ hassakaṃ yeva sampajjati, nāmakam yeva sampajjati, rittakaṃ yeva sampajjati, tucchakaṃ yeva sampajjati, Dīghanikāya*, London, 1967, vol.I, p.240, Tevijjasutta 15). Further, he describes the three Vedas as "foolish talk", "a waterless desert", and their threefold wisdom as "a pathless jungle" and "a perdition" (*Tasmā idaṃ tevijjānaṃ brāhmaṇānaṃ tevijjā-īriṇan ti pi vuccati, tevijja-vipinam ti pi vuccati, tevijja-vyasanan ti pi vuccatiti*, ibid., p.248, Tevijjasutta. The strongest condemnation of the Vedic texts, however, came from the Cārvākas. According to them the Veda is "tainted with the three faults of untruth, self-contradiction, and tautology... the incoherent rhapsodies of knaves" (*dhurtapralāpa*)", *Sarva-darśana-saṅgraha*, tr. E.B. Cowell and A.E. Gough, London, 1914, p.4.

122 *Ṛgveda*, VII.103.

123 *Ṛgveda*, 10.129.7.

124 J.C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition*, Delhi, 1985, p.77.

125 J.C. Heesterman, op. cit., p.75; *RV*, V.30.1, VI.18.3, VI.27.3, VIII.64.7, VIII.100.3, X.22.1 (cited in ibid., p.225). Also see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "The Origin of Heresy in Hindu Mythology", *History of Religions*, 10 (May 1971), p.284, note 83.

deprecate the Vedas. The *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, for example, regards the four Vedas as "lower knowledge" (*aparāvidyā*).[126] Similarly, in the *Nirukta*, Yāska (sixth–fifth centuries B.C.) describes Kautsa as saying that "the Vedic stanzas have no meaning" and that "their meaning is contradictory."[127] Indications of the undermining of Vedic rituals are also found in the Dharmaśāstra texts, which have been the main vehicle of Vedic thought. Baudhāyana, for instance, cites the view that non-Vedic local practices may be allowed in their own territory", though his own opinion is that "one must never follow practices opposed to the tradition of learned authorities."[128]

An unwillingness to concede a legitimising role to the Veda manifested itself in many texts representing the various strands of Brāhmaṇical thought. For example, in the *Bhagavadgītā*, which has been the most popular Hindu religious text through the centuries, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna in unambiguous terms that those who delight in the eulogistic statements of the Vedas (*vedavādaratāḥ*) are full of worldly desires (*kāmātmānaḥ*),[129] and that the desire-ridden followers (*kāmakāmāḥ*) of the Vedic sacrificial rites stagnate in the world.[130] The Purāṇas often undermine the supremacy of the Vedas despite their general allegiance to them. While one Purāṇic text tells us that God thought of the Purāṇas before he spoke the Vedas, others state that the Vedas are "established" on the Purāṇas.[131] "There is no higher essence or truth than this", the *Agnipurāṇa* tells us, and "… there is no better book, … there is no better *śāstra*, or *śruti* or … *smṛti* … for this Purāṇa is supreme."[132] The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* was similarly said to have superseded and transcended the Vedas, and Jīva Goswāmī (sixteenth century) of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school vehemently denied that this text was based on

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126 *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, I.1.4–5. Lakshman Sarup (*The Nighaṇṭu and the Nirukta*, Indian edition, Delhi, 1984, pp.74–75) lists several anti-Vedic Upaniṣadic passages: *Muṇḍaka Up.*, III.2.3; *Kaṭha Up.*, I.2.23; *Bṛh. Up.*, I.5.23; *Kauṣītaki Up.*, II.5; *Chāndogya Up.*, V.11–24; *Taittirīya Up.*, II.5.

127 Lakshman Sarup, op. cit., I.15.

128 Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "The Origin of Heresy in Hindu Mythology", p.286.

129 *Bhagavadgītā*, II.41–46.

130 Ibid., IX.21. Cf. XI.48, 53.

131 *Matsyapurāṇa*, 53.3.20, 5.3.1.20; *Nāradīyapurāṇa*, 2.24.16. Cited in Brian K. Smith, op. cit., p.26.

132 *Agnipurāṇa*, 383,47–50, cited in C. Mackenzie Brown, op. cit., pp.70–71.

them at all.[133] Despite the fact that the authors of the Tantric texts tried to base their doctrines on the Vedas, they also undermined their authority. For example, the *Mahānirvāṇatantra*, an eighteenth-century work, states that the Vedas, Purāṇas and Śāstras are of no use in the *kaliyuga*[134] and "declares that all of the other religious traditions are encompassed by and disappear within the Tantric *kuladharma*, just as the tracks of all other animals disappear within the tracks of the elephant."[135] All this may not amount to a repudiation of the Vedas, but it certainly indicates that all post-Vedic Brāhmaṇical religious traditions did not look to them for legitimacy.

 Several religious movements within the fold of what is now known as Hinduism in fact rejected the authority both of the brāhmaṇs and that of the Vedas. Vīraśaivism, a Śaivite sect whose followers are also called Lingāyats and which gained prominence in Karnataka in the twelfth century, is a case in point. Its hagiographical texts bear ample testimony to the fact that, at least in the early phase, the Vīraśaivas ridiculed the Vedas and unequivocally rejected them. The *Bāsavapurāṇa* speaks of a Vedāntist who was humiliated by Bāsava at the court of Bijjala, and the *Cenna-bāsavapurāṇa* narrates how a Vedic scholar was ridiculed by the Lingāyats, who had the Vedas recited by dogs.[136] Similarly, the

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133 Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p.366.

134 N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of Tantric Religion*, Delhi, 1982, p.75.

135 Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p.366. The *Mahānirvāṇatantra* is "probably the most widely known" and the most recent of the Tantras. Written in the second half of the eighteenth century, it contains much material on such varied themes as marriage, conjugal ethics, inheritance, caste rules and slavery, though it has been described by J.D.M. Derrett as a "well-intentioned fraud". For a useful discussion of the work, see Teun Goudriaan and Sanjukta Gupta, *Hindu Tantric and Sakta Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1981, pp.98–101; J.D.M. Derrett, *Essays in Classical and Modern Hindu Law*, Leiden, 1977, vol.2, pp.197–242; N.N. Bhattacharyya, *History of the Tantric Religion*, pp.74–75.

136 R.N. Nandi, "Origin of the Vīraśaiva Movement", in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order*, Delhi, 2000, p.485, note 47. The smārtas, who joined the Vīraśaiva movement in large numbers, retained their superiority, undermined its fraternalism and paved the way for the growth of the Brāhmaṇical caste system among its followers. Not surprisingly, the Vīraśaivas, in the later phase of their movement, preached loyalty to the *varṇāśramadharma*, as is evident from the works of Bhīmakavi and Śrīpati Paṇḍita (both of the fourteenth century). The latter even said that only the performance of caste duties and Vedic rites could purify a person and prepare him for final liberation (ibid., p.477; Suvira Jaiswal, "Semitising

adherents of the south Indian Śrīvaiṣṇava sect of Tenkalai rejected the Vedas and composed their own Veda, called the *Nālāyira-prabandham*.[137] This rejection of Vedic authority seems to have been a feature of other medieval religious movements as well. The Mahānubhāvas in Maharashtra and the Sahajiyās in Bengal also renounced the Vedas. So did individual medieval *bhakti* saints like Kabīr (fifteenth–sixteenth centuries) and Tukārām (seventeenth century), to name two.[138] As recently as the nineteenth century, precisely at the time when Dayananda Saraswati was busy spreading the word that the Vedas are the repository of all knowledge, they were rejected by Ramakrishna, who said: "the truth is not in the Vedas, one should act according to the Tantras, not according to the Vedas, the latter are impure from the very fact of their being pronounced."[139] Evidently, thus, different religious sects have not had the same attitude towards the Vedic corpus, and even the texts of specific sectarian affiliations often express contradictory views about it. This being so, the stereotype of a monolithic Hinduism based on the Vedas must be seen as a myth deliberately propagated both by some scholars as well as by right wing Hindu groups, all of whom not only ignore the plurality of religious beliefs and practices covered by the umbrella term "Hinduism", invented in the colonial period, but who also deny the centuries-long process of their evolution.

VI

Another myth which, through repetition, has been made to stick to the artefact called Hinduism is that it is a tolerant religion. This is rooted to a certain extent in European writings on India. Thus Francois Bernier, the French doctor who travelled widely in India during the 1660s, stated that Hindus "did not claim that their law is

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Hinduism: Changing Paradigms of Brahmanical Integration", *Social Scientist*, vol.19, no.12, 1991, p.22.). The Vīraśaiva emphasis on the observance of caste duties as well as on the necessity of seeking legitimation from the Vedas is evident from one of their basic texts, the *Liṅgadhārana-candrikā*: Louis Renou, op. cit., p.61, note 1.

137 Louis Renou, op. cit., p.2.

138 Ibid., p.2.

139 Cited in ibid., p.3.

universal",[140] and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) said that they "do not hate the other religions."[141] Such views as these, however, find a more prominent place in the writings of Orientalists like William Jones as well as in the thought of some nineteenth-century religious reformers. Vivekananda (1863–1904), for example, picked up the famous Ṛgvedic passage *"ekamsad viprā vahudhā vadanti"* to support his vision that "India alone was to be … the land of toleration"—a vision which, in reality, did not conform to his view that all creeds may be equal but Hinduism was more equal than the others.[142] The quotation from the *Ṛgveda*, a scholar has observed,[143] has been "milked for all its worth ever since"; and the prophecy, if seriously meant, has repeatedly been shown to be ill-founded. But even so, in recent years many scholars, most notably Amartya Sen,[144] have spoken glowingly of religious tolerance and inclusiveness in early India. It is true that religious sects showed a certain degree of mutual accommodation, so that the Buddha as well as the first Jain tirthankara Ādinātha (Ṛṣabha), both associated with heretic religions, were accepted as incarnations of Viṣṇu,[145]

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140 Cited in Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p.407.

141 Cited in ibid., p.407. Paul Hacker first used "inclusivism" and related terms in his discussion of tolerance and intolerance in Indian religions ("Religiöse Toleranz und Intoleranz im Hinduism", *Saeculum*, 8 (1957), pp.167–79). In his view "inclusivism is an essentially, even exclusively, Indian phenomenon" (*Inclusivismus. Eine indische Denkform*, ed. G. Oberhammer, Vienna, 1983, pp.11–28). But, as has been pointed out by J.W. Hauer (*Toleranz und Intoleranz in den nichtchristlichen Religionen*, Stuttgart, 1961, pp. 90ff) tolerance and inclusivism are not synonymous, the latter being "hierarchical universal tolerance." While some of the ideas of Hacker have been discussed by Halbfass (*India and Europe*, Chapter 22) his thesis has been criticised by Karl-Heinz Golzio ("Das Problem von Toleranz und Intoleranz in indischen Religionen anhand epigraphischer Quellen", in Helmut Eimer, ed., *Frank-Richard Hamm Memorial Volume*, Bonn, 1990, pp.89–102.

142 For a brief resume of Vivekananda's perception of the relationship between Hinduism and the other religious communities of India, see Torkel Brekke, *Makers of Modern Indian Religion in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 2002, pp.41–42.

143 A. Bharati, op. cit., p.282.

144 Among the writings of scholars who have recently championed the idea of a tolerant Hinduism, the most influential are those of Amartya Sen (*The Argumentative Indian*, London, 2005, pp.3–33).

145 R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, second edition, Delhi, 1975, pp.41–42, 103; Wendy Doniger

and sacrifice to the former was recommended for worshippers desirous of beauty (*rūpakāmo yajed buddham*).[146] But it is forgotten that Śiva is believed to have appeared on earth in the form of Śaṅkara to combat a Buddha *avatāra*;[147] and that his followers "opposed and persecuted the Vaiṣṇava philosopher Madhu/Madhva (1199–1278)."[148] Similarly, the Vedāntist philosopher Mādhava Ācārya (fourteenth century) is often said to have displayed an exemplary tolerance towards points of view which opposed his own. His *Sarvadarśanasaṃgraha* (Collection of All Systems) begins by presenting the school of Cārvākas, then criticises it, and ends with Śaṅkara's Advaita "as the conclusion and crown of all philosophical systems".[149] What, however, is missed is that this was in keeping with the traditional Indian practice of presenting the opponent's view before seeking to refute it. Even if we accept these instances as indicating that Brāhmaṇism gave space to heterodoxies, there is considerable historical evidence to question the stereotype of India as a land of religious tolerance. Apart from the fact that a religion with a caste system and untouchability as characteristic features was and is inherently incapable of promoting tolerance, sources show that there were antagonisms between the various Brāhmaṇical sects as well as between Brāhmaṇism, which accepted the authority of the Vedas, and the heterodox non-Brāhmaṇical sects which

O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, Delhi, 1988, pp.187–88, 204–11. As regards the Ṛṣabhāvatāra of Viṣṇu, P.S. Jaini observes that "the 'Vaiṣṇavisation' of the Jina through the device of the *avatāra* is a fine example of a vain drive towards the syncretism of two rival faiths" (*Collected Papers on Jaina Studies*, Delhi, 2000, pp.343–44.

146 *Varāhapurāṇa*, 48.22.

147 *Śankaradigvijaya* of Mādhava, I.28–43, cited in Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, pp.208–9. On the adoption of the Buddha as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, Padmanabh S. Jaini makes this insightful observation: "… a way was open even for introducing the brāhmaṇa priests to officiate at the Buddhist temples. In course of time, these temples, often rich and generously endowed, as in the case of the Jagannath-Puri temple in Orissa, the Kadri Vihara in south India, and (until they were handed back to Buddhists from Ceylon by the British Government) even the Buddha-Gaya and the Sarnath temples passed into the hands of the brāhmaṇa priests and were converted into Vaiṣṇava or Śaiva temples" (*Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, Delhi, 2001, p.290).

148 Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*, p.209.

149 John A. Grimes, "Darśana", in Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, eds., *The Hindu World*, Indian reprint, Delhi, 2005, p.539.

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rejected it. Thus the legend of Dakṣa, which evolved from the *Ṛgveda* through several *Brahmaṇas* (*Taittirīya*, *Śatapatha*, *Aitareya*, *Gopatha*) to the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas (*Bhāgavata*, *Kūrma* and *Devī-Bhāgavata*), has been interpreted by scholars as a saga of conflict between Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism.[150] It has also been construed as a struggle between adherents of the two cults for control over a holy place called Kanakhala near Hardwar on the Ganga.[151]

The Purāṇas provide plentiful evidence of sectarian rivalry among Brāhmaṇical sects. The *Viṣṇupurāṇa* claims the superiority of Viṣṇu over Brahmā and Śiva,[152] while the *Saurapurāṇa* seeks to prove the superiority of Śiva who, according to it, gave the *sudarśanacakra* to Viṣṇu.[153] Śaiva fanaticism went much beyond mere theological differences and disputations. For example, it manifested itself in the persecution of Rāmānuja (1017–1137), who was forced to withdraw from his centre of activity in Srirangam (Tamilnadu) in 1098 to Mysore (Karnataka) for nearly twenty-five years,[154] in the

150 Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2000, p.124; Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, Penguin, Baltimore, 1975, p.118.

151 Access to the river Ganga at a place like Kanakhala, which is spoken of highly in the *Mahābhārata* and in later texts, was given much importance by both the Vaiṣṇavas and the Śaivas. Śaiva ascetics fought for the right to enter the Ganga at the most auspicious times of the Kumbhamela. According to one account the Naga *sanyāsīs* Bhavānanda, Surasurānanda and Kamalānanda "won a decisive victory at Hardwar over Bairagis, the Vaisnava ascetics, in 1266" (G.S. Ghurye, *Indian Sadhus*, Bombay, 1964, p.103). Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava groups also fought a battle at Hardwar in 1760 in which, according to one estimate, 18,000 were killed. This battle decided the issue once and for all in favour of the Śaiva ascetics (Klaus Klostermaier, "The Original Daksa Saga", in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Essays on the Mahabharata*, Leiden, 1991, p.112). Another example of sectarian intolerance comes from Ayodhya, where an open confrontation took place between the Śaiva *sanyāsis* and the Vaiṣṇava *vairāgis* after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 over control of religious places and the pilgrims' fees and gifts (R.S. Sharma, *Communal History and Rama's Ayodhya*, revised edition, Delhi, 2000, pp.14–15; Hans Bakker, *Ayodhya*, Groningen, 1986, p.149).

152 *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, I.9.56.

153 *Saurapurāṇa*, 3.6.

154 K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, University of Madras, 1975, p.644; idem, *A History of South India*, seventh impression, Delhi, p.432. For a critical evaluation of the narrative of Rāmānuja's persecution, see Richard H. Davis, "The Story of the Disappearing Jains: Retelling the Śaiva–Jaina Encounter in Medieval South India", in John E. Cort, ed., *Open Boundaries:*

removal of the statue of Viṣṇu from the courtyard of the Chidambaram temple by Kulottunga II, and in the stipulation by a *sabhā* that the property of Śaivas who freely mixed with Vaiṣṇavas would be forfeited.[155]

While there are many more examples of mutual hostility between Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas, sources testify also to the conflict between Brāhmaṇism and heterodox sects. Early evidence of Brāhmaṇical hostility towards Jainism, for example, comes from its canonical text, the *Ayarangasuttam*, according to which monks hid themselves in the day and travelled by night lest they be suspected of being spies.[156] Similarly, the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya contemptuously describes the followers of non-Vedic sects as *Vṛṣala* or *pāṣaṇḍa* (e.g., Śākyas, Ājīvikas), assigns them residence at the end of or near the cremation ground (*pāṣaṇḍacaṇḍālānāṃ śmaśānānte vāsaḥ*) and prescribes a heavy fine for inviting them to dinners in honour of the gods and the manes,[157] though the occurrence of the word *pāṣaṇḍa* in the edict of Aśoka "is not necessarily pejorative" because he appointed *dharmamahāmātras* to look after the affairs not only of the Buddhist Sangha, the brāhmaṇs and the Ājīvikas but also those of "some other religious sects" (*pāṣaṇḍeṣu*).[158]

The toleration of dissenting faiths which was the hallmark of Aśoka's policy is not seen, however, in later times; for the celebrated grammarian Patañjali (second century B.C.) observed that "the śramaṇas and Brāhmaṇas are 'eternal enemies' (*virodhaḥ śāśvatikaḥ*) like the snake and mongoose."[159] The Buddhist work *Divyā-*

Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History, Albany, 1998, pp.213–24.

155 Nilakanta Sastri, *The Colas*, pp.644–45.

156 *Āyāranagasuttam*, tr. H. Jacobi, SBE, XXII, II.3.1.10, cited by A.K. Narain, "Religious Policy and Toleration in Ancient India with Particular Reference to the Gupta Period", in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Essays on Gupta Culture*, Delhi, 1983, p.22.

157 *Arthaśāstra*, II.4.23; III.20.16.

158 It has been pointed out that heresy was in the eye of the beholder. "To the Hindus as a whole, Buddhists and Jains and Cārvākas ... are heretics. To many Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas are heretics, and to many Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas are heretics ... the Jains regarded the Hindus as heretics": Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "The Image of the Heretic in the Gupta Purāṇas," in Bardwell L. Smith, op. cit., p.116.

159 *The Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali*, 2.4.9, third edition, Poona, 1962, vol.I, p.476. Also see Prabhudayal Agnihotri, *Patañjalikālīna Bhārata*, Patna, 1963, p.573; Padmanabh S. Jaini, *Collected Papers on Jaina Studies*, p.337.

vadāna (third century) describes Puṣyamitra Śunga as a great persecutor of Buddhists who marched out with a four-fold army, destroying stūpas, burning monasteries and killing monks as far as Śākala (Sialkot), where he announced a prize of one hundred *dīnār* for every head of a Śramaṇa.[160] The Brāhmaṇical animosity towards Buddhism and Jainism seems to have become more intense in the early medieval period, going by the textual evidence of theological antagonism and that of the persecution of their adherents. Uddyo-takara (seventh century) is said to have refuted the arguments of the Buddhist logicians Nāgārjuna and Dignāg, and his arguments were reinforced by Vācaspati Miśra (ninth century). Udayana, another anti-Buddhist logician and the founder of the Navya Nyāya school, launched a sharp attack on the atheistic thesis of Buddhism in his *Ātmatattvaviveka*, which is also known as the *Baudha-dhikkāragrantha* on account of its outright rejection of the ideas of Buddhists. Several Brāhmaṇical thinkers outside the school of Nyāya also attacked Buddhism and Jainism. For example, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (eighth century), the south Indian dialectician, rejected the views of all unorthodox religious movements, especially Buddhism and Jainism, because, according to him, whatever is contradicted by a Vedic statement has to be rejected: *virodhe tv anapekṣyaṃ syād*.[161] He goes to the extent of saying that "they are like ungrateful and alienated children who refuse to acknowledge what they owe to their parents" because they "use the [Vedic] idea of *ahiṃsā* as an instrument of their anti-Vedic propaganda."[162] Śaṇkara, Kumārila's younger contemporary, is even more rigid and uncompromising. He categorically rejects all traditions outside the Vedas, including those of the Bhāgavatas and the Pañcarātrins,[163] and accuses the Buddha of "incoherent prattling (*asambaddhapralāpitvā*) or even deliberate-ly and hatefully leading mankind into confusion...."[164] Similarly, Madhusūdana Sarasvatī, the sixteenth-century Bengali commentator on the *Bhagvadgītā*, holding that the teachings of materialists,

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160 *Divyāvadāna*, ed. E.B. Cowell and R.A. Neil, Cambridge, 1886, pp.433–34.
161 Cited in Halbfass, *Tradition and Reflection*, p.61.
162 Ibid., pp.61, 95–6.
163 Ibid., p.59.
164 Ibid., p.57.

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Buddhists and others are like those of the *mlecchas*, excludes them from his consideration.[165]

The attitude of the orthodox philosophers found an echo in the Purāṇic texts as well. The *Saurapurāṇa*, for example, says that the Cārvākas, Buddhists and Jains should not be allowed to settle in a kingdom.[166] Similarly, the early medieval literary texts provide highly pejorative portrayals of the Buddhists and the Jains. The *Mattavilāsa Prahsana*, a farce written by the Pallava ruler Mahendravarman (seventh century), depicts Buddhists as morally depraved, dishonest and the scum of the earth; a corrupt Buddhist monk is made to ask "…why did [the Buddha] not think of sanctioning the possession of women and the drinking of *surā* (*kinnukhalu strīparigrahaḥ surāpānavidhānam ca na dṛṣṭam*)?"[167] The *Prabodhacandrodaya*, a drama written by Kṛṣṇa Miśra (eleventh century), describes both Buddhism and Jainism as *tāmasika* (arising out of darkness), depicts a Buddhist monk as indulging in worldly pleasures[168] and a Jain monk as naked, devoid of manliness (*nivīrya*), the hair of his head plucked out and carrying a peacock feather in his hand.[169]

The heterodox sects reciprocated in full measure. The Jain scholar Hemacandra (twelfth century) thus dubs Manu's verses supporting animal sacrifice as part of *himsāśāstra*,[170] and Jinadāsa (seventh century) describes Maheśvara (Śiva) as "the son of a nun who had been magically impregnated by a wizard seeking a suitable repository for his powers."[171] While the medieval Jain hagiographies are replete with hostile statements about the Brāhmaṇical sects, they frequently refer as well to great Jain teachers defeating Buddhists in debate.[172] There is also evidence of the appropriation of

165 Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p.361.

166 *Saurapurāṇa*, 64.44; 38.54.

167 *Mattavilāsa Prahasana* of Mahendravikramavarman, ed. and tr. N.P. Uni, Trivandrum, 1973, p.49. Cf. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "The Origin of Heresy in Hindu Mythology", p.276.

168 *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Kṛṣṇa Miśra, ed. and tr. Sita Nambiar, Delhi, 1998, Act III, verse 9.

169 Ibid., pp.44–45.

170 *Yogaśāstra* of Hemacandra, ed. Muni Jambuvijaya, 3 vols., Bombay, 1977–86, II.33–40, cited in Paul Dundas, *The Jains*, London, 1992, p.201.

171 For more anti-Brāhmaṇical statements in the Jain literature, see Paul Dundas, op. cit., pp.200–206.

172 Paul Dundas (op. cit., pp.206–8) discusses the tension between the

Buddhist caves by Jains.[173] The Buddhists, on their part, did not lag behind in running down Brāhmaṇical deities and beliefs.[174] Dharma-svāmin, the Tibetan scholar who visited Bihar in the thirteenth century, tells us that the Buddhists had put an image of Śiva in front of Buddha's image so as to protect it from the wrath of non-Buddhists.[175] They not only criticised the Brāhmaṇical practice of bathing at *tīrthas* and in the Ganga but also treated several Brāh-maṇical deities as menials and as subordinate to Buddhist gods and goddesses.[176] This is also seen in the early medieval sculptural portrayal of Buddhist gods as trampling upon Śaivite deities.[177] Although the evidence of Buddhist and Jain antipathy towards Śaivism may not be voluminous and needs to be investigated further, it is not altogether impossible that anti-Śaiva literature was destroyed in the medieval period.[178]

The Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite invective against Buddhists and Jains was far more than empty words; for their persecution from around the middle of the first millennium is amply borne out by early medieval sources. Hsüan Tsang states that the Gauḍa king Śaśānka, a contemporary of Harṣavardhana, cut down the Bodhi tree at Gaya and removed the statue of the Buddha from the local temple. He

Buddhists and the Jains. For evidence from the *Prabandhacintāmaṇi*, see Ranjana Bhattacharya, "Religion in Early Medieval Gujarat (A.D. 600–1300)", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Delhi, 1998, p.56.

173 Ranjana Bhattacharya, op. cit., p.204.

174 There are many early medieval texts which throw light on the bitter philosophical debate between the various religious groups. The *Yoga-dṛṣṭisamuccaya* of Haribhadra (eighth century), for example, critiques Buddhism and Vedanta from the Jain perspective (Christopher Key Chapple and John Casey, *Reconciling Yoga: Haribhadra's Collection of Views on Yoga*, Albany, 2004). Similarly, the *Tattvasaṃgraha* of Śāntarakṣita (eighth century) critically reviews Nyāya, Mimāṃsā, Śāṅkhya and Jain philosophies from the Buddhist point of view (*Tattvasaṃgraha* of Śāntarakṣita, ed. Dwarikadas Shastri, Varanasi, 1968; tr. Ganganatha Jha, Baroda, 1937).

175 G. Roerich, *Biography of Dharmasvāmin*, Patna, 1959, p.64.

176 *Sādhanamālā*, XLI.II, nos.260, 263–4, etc., cited in B.N. Sharma, "Religious Tolerance and Intolerance as Reflected in Indian Sculptures", *Journal of the Ganganath Jha Research Institute*, Umesh Mishra Commemoration Volume , 1970, p.665.

177 B.N. Sharma, op. cit., pp.665–66.

178 Kamil Zvelebil, *Companion Studies to Tamil Literature*, Leiden, 1992; cited by Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "Śramaṇas Against the Tamil Way", in John E. Cort, ed., *Open Boundaries*, Albany, 1998, p.167.

also tells us that the Huṇa ruler Mihirakula, a devotee of Śiva, destroyed 1,600 Buddhist *stūpas* and monasteries and killed thousands of Buddhist monks and laity,[179] his account being corroborated by Kalhaṇa (eleventh century), who makes a reference to the persecution of Buddhists by a Kashmir king in the earlier period. Although the references to the plunder and destruction of temples found in the *Rājataraṅgiṇī* of Kalhaṇa relate generally to the royal greed for wealth, some of them are certainly indicative of hostility towards Buddhists. An early example of this is the destruction of a Buddhist *vihāra* by Aśoka's son Jalauka, a Śaivite.[180]

  Important evidence of the persecution of Buddhists in Kashmir dates from the reign of the king Kṣemagupta (950–58), who destroyed the Buddhist monastery Jayendravihāra at Śrīnagara and used the materials from it in constructing a temple called Kṣemagaurīśvara.[181] In Uttar Pradesh, we are told, forty-seven deserted sites of fortified towns in Sultanpur district are the ruins of Buddhist cities which were destroyed by fire when Brāhmaṇism won its final victory over Buddhism.[182] Some inscriptions from northern India, as well as Purāṇic passages, also provide evidence of the persecution of Buddhists. A Tibetan tradition has it that the Kalacuri king Karṇa (eleventh century) destroyed many Buddhist temples and monasteries in Magadha; and the Tibetan text *pag-sam-jon-zang* refers to the burning of the library of Nalanda by some "Hindu fanatics."[183] An interesting example of antagonism towards Buddhists comes from south India. The Vaiṣṇava poet-saint Tirumaṅkai, according to a thirteenth-century Ālvār text, stole a large gold image of the Buddha from a *stūpa* at Nagapattinam and

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179 Samuel Beal, *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Delhi, 1969, pp.171–172.

180 *Rājataraṅgiṇī* of Kalhaṇa, I.140–144.

181 Ibid., VI.171–173.

182 A. Führer, Archaeological Survey, Lists, N.W. Provinces and Oudh, p.325; cited in B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century*, Allahabad, 1973, p.346.

183 B.N.S. Yadava, op. cit., p.346. It has been generally held that Bakhtiyar Khalji destroyed the university at Nalanda. D.R. Patil, however, categorically states that it was destroyed by the Śaivas (*Antiquarian Remains of Bihar*, Patna, 1963, p.304). This view has been discussed at some length by R.S. Sharma and K.M. Shrimali (*A Comprehensive History of India*, vol. IV, pt.2 [A.D. 985–1206], forthcoming, chapter XXV(b): Buddhism, footnotes 79–82).

had it melted down for reuse in the temple which he was commis-
sioned by the god Viṣṇu himself to build.[184]

While all this points to hostility towards Buddhists, there is much
more evidence of antipathy towards and persecution of Jains,
especially from south India, where the proponents of devotional
Śaivism (Nāyanārs) and Vaiṣṇavism (Ālvāras) consistently por-
trayed them as hated "others" from the sixth–seventh centuries
onwards. Evidence of this is available from the *Tevāram* (tenth
century), which is a collection of hymns attributed to the three early
and prominent Nāyanār saint-poets. Two of them, Appar (seventh
century) and Sambandar (seventh century), denigrated the Jains in
abusive language. Appar spoke of them as the "shameless Jain
monks", "naked Jains who fast by night", "wicked monks who eat in
barbaric ways", "the weak and filthy Jains with their yellowing
teeth". Sambandar's denunciation of the Jains is couched in similar
words. He refers to them as "mad Jain monks who wear mats, and
pluck their hair and eat their food standing."[185] A vivid description
of the encounter of these two Nāyanār saints with Jains is available
in the twelfth-century hagiographical work, the *Periyapurāṇam* of
Sekkilār. The most important and well known part of his narrative
relates to how Sambandar defeated the Jains in all contests and
succeeded in converting the Pāṇḍyan king of Madura from Jainism
to Śaivism, leading eventually to the impalement of eight thousand
Jain monks. Although there is no record of such a massacre,[186] Śaiva
intolerance of Jains is corroborated by several legends found in the
Sthalapurāṇa of Madura.[187] Similarly, the conversion of the earliest
known Jain cave temple in Tirunelveli district (Tamilnadu) into a
Śaiva shrine in the seventh century[188] and the depiction of scenes of

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184 Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, first Indian edition, Delhi,
1999, p.83.

185 Indira Viswanathan Peterson, "Śramaṇas Against the Tamil Way", in
John Cort, ed., *Open Boundaries*, p.171.

186 For an insightful discussion of the impalement legend, see Paul
Dundas, op. cit., pp.109–10; Richard H. Davis, "The Story of the Disap-
pearing Jains", in John Cort, op. cit., pp.213–24.

187 For details, see P.B. Desai, *Jainism in South India and Some Jaina
Epigraphs*, Sholapur, 1957, p.82.

188 Romila Thapar, *Cultural Transaction and Early India*, Delhi, 1987,
p.17; K.R. Srinivasan, "South India", in A. Ghosh, ed., *Jaina Art and
Architecture*, vol. 2, Delhi, 1975; R. Champakalakshmi, "Religious Conflict
in the Tamil Country," *Journal of the Epigraphical Society of India*, vol. IV

violence on the walls of the Kailashnath temple of Kanchipuram[189] and on the *mandapam* of the Golden Lily tank of the Minaksi temple at Madura bear testimony to the persecution suffered by Jains in Tamilnadu.

Evidence of the persecution of Jains also comes from outside Tamilandu. In Karnataka, for example, they were a perpetual *bête noire* of the militant Śaivite Lingāyat sect, which started in the twelfth century. The hagiographies of its leader Bāsava furnish evidence of the slaughter of Jains.[190] Thus the conversion of their temples at several places in Karnataka into Śaiva shrines and the vandalising of Jain images are well documented.[191] A notable dese-cration of a Jain religious establishment, recorded in a Karnataka inscription as well as in the *Cennabāsava Purāṇa*, took place in 1160 at Ablur, when the Vīraśaiva Ekāntada Rāmayya defeated the Jains in debate and demolished their temple. He then built a shrine in honour of Vīra Somanātha, which contains sculptured panels depicting scenes of his encounter with the Jains.[192] Their victim-isation became so severe that the Jains had to seek the intervention of the Vijayanagara ruling family in the fourteenth century; but the Vīraśaivas continued to persecute them, as is clear from several sixteenth-century inscriptions from the Srisailam area of Andhra Pradesh. One of them tells us that a chief named Linga even took pride in beheading Śvetāmbara Jains.[193] The Jains remained a hated lot until very late, and this is remembered in verses like *hastinā tāḍyamāno pi na gacched jaina-mandiram* (even under the threat of being trampled upon by an elephant, one should not enter a Jain temple).[194]

Our survey of evidence, though far from exhaustive, shows that

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(1978), pp.69–81; John Cort, op. cit., pp.107–8.

189 R.N. Nandi, *Social Roots of Religion in Ancient India*, Calcutta, 1986, p.97.

190 Velcheru Narayana Rao, *Śiva's Warriors: the Bāsava Purāṇa of Palkuriki Somanātha*, Princeton, 1990, pp.200–213, cited in Paul Dundas, op. cit., p.118.

191 Romila Thapar, op. cit., p.18.

192 *EI*, V, no.25, ll.69–80. Cf. P.B. Desai, op. cit., p.182; David N. Lorenzen, "Warrior Ascetics in Indian History", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 98 (1978), pp.64–5.

193 P.B. Desai, op. cit., p.23.

194 Dev Raj Chanana, "The Sanskritist and Indian Society", *Enquiry*, Monsoon, 1965, p. 65.

the followers of the Brāhmaṇical sects did not, as they are said to have done, practise tolerance towards non-Brāhmaṇical faiths: on the contrary, they seem to have played a leading role in fomenting religious conflicts and perpetrating sectarian violence during the early medieval period. This was accompanied by their gradual militarisation. An analysis of the inscriptional data shows that the term *caṭṭa*, which occurs in the epigraphs along with *bhaṭṭa*, indicates that the brāhmaṇs received training in the martial arts. The word *caṭṭa*, found in a record from Parthivapuram (A.D. 866), has been interpreted to mean that brāhmaṇ students were required not only to study Vedic lore but also to receive military training in the centre called *śālāi* attached to the local Viṣṇu temple.[195] Several similar temple-supported establishments existed in Kerala during the early medieval period, an important one being the Kāntalūrśālai, which became famous for its military role in the Coḷa-Cera conflict.[196] The counterparts of the *śālāis* were called *ghaṭikās* in the Cālukya and Pallava territories, the most famous being the one at Kanchi. That the *śālāis* and *ghaṭikās* imparted military education to brāhmaṇs is borne out by literary texts from both north and south India[197]—a fact which may not be entirely unrelated to the emergence of militant ascetic orders of the Śankara school.[198] The militarisation of Brāhmaṇical sects and the growth of temple militias created conditions for violent conflicts between arms-bearing brāhmaṇs and the votaries of non-Brāhmaṇical sects.

There is little doubt that Brāhmaṇism was inherently intolerant,

195 Kesavan Veluthat, *Brāhmaṇa Settlements in Kerala*, Calicut, 1978, Appendix II, pp.102–115.

196 Ibid.; M.G.S. Narayanan, "Kāntallūr Śālāi: New Light on the Nature of Aryan Expansion to South India," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Jabalpur, 1970, pp.125–136.

197 The Jain work *Kuvalayamālā* of Udyotanasūri (eighth century) describes a *maṭha* at Vijaya, where students from different parts of India such as Lata, Karnataka, Malava, Kannauj, Maharastra, Saurastra, Srikantha and Sindha, received instruction in such diverse subjects as archery (*dhanurveda*), manoeuvring with a shield (*phalakakrīḍā*), use of the sword and the bow (*asi dhanu praveśa*), fighting with a spear (*kuntayuddha*), fighting with clubs (*lakuṭiyuddha*) and fighting with arms (*bāhuyuddha*) (Shanta Rani Sharma, *Society and Culture in Rajasthan c. A.D. 700–900*, Delhi, 1996, p.231). Several *maṇipravāla* texts, especially the *Candrotsavam* (fifteenth century) and the *Keralolapatti* (seventeenth century) show the association of brāhmaṇs with the martial arts.

198 G.S. Ghurye, op. cit., chapter VI.

as all religions are; and that its intolerance, often expressed through violence, may have received much sustenance from the martial brāhmaṇs. It is thus difficult to swallow the claim that "Hinduism" has "a propensity to assimilate rather than to exclude" or that tolerance is the very essence of "Hinduism qua Hinduism."[199] Equally, to say that Islam brought violence to a land which until then had not known it, is to ignore much evidence. Groups of warrior ascetics and soldier *sādhus* had come into being much before Islam arrived in India, and they fought among themselves.[200]

<center>VII</center>

Scholars and politicians who pay glowing tribute to "tolerant Hinduism" have also been at pains to characterise it as a non-prose-lytising religion with no scope for conversion, their purpose being to distinguish it from Christianity and Islam. While the Brāhmaṇical sects which are now covered by the term "Hinduism" may not have proselytised in the same manner as Christianity or Islam, early Indian sources indicate that conversion was by no means unknown then. A later Vedic text, the *Tāṇḍya Brāhmaṇa,* also known as the *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa*, describes the *vrātyastoma* sacrifice that the vrātyas were required to perform in order to become eligible to have social intercourse with the orthodox āryas. The vrātyas have been generally taken to mean people living outside the pale of Brāhmaṇical religion, and the *vrātyastoma* rite served the purpose of their conversion to it.[201]

Mention may also be made of the *dīkṣā* ceremony, generally understood in the sense of initiation (*upanayana*) or consecration, which "implies death to profane existence, enables man to gain

199 Arvind Sharma, "Some Misunderstandings of the Hindu Approach to Religious Plurality", *Religion*, vol. 8 (Autumn 1978), p.145. However, Nirad C. Chaudhuri (*The Continent of Circe*, London, 1965, p.39) has this to say on the matter: "If the familiar words about the tolerance and capacity for synthesis were true, one would be hard put to it to explain why there are such deep suspicions and enmities among the human groups in India...."

200 David N. Lorenzen ("Warrior Ascetics in Indian History", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, pp.61–75) has argued that the military orders of ascetics became significant during the period of Muslim rule. Also see William R. Pinch, *Peasants and Monks in British India*, Delhi, 1996.

201 P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, Poona, 1974, vol. II, pt.1, pp.385–89; Jan Gonda, *The Ritual Sutras*, Wiesbaden, 1977, pp.539, 641.

sacred knowledge and wisdom, a higher stage of existence and access to heavenly life."[202] Without expatiating on the meaning and significance of this ceremony in the various ritual contexts, it may be pointed out that its importance in different Indian religions can hardly be exaggerated. In Vaiṣṇavism, for example, its main object is purification, without which an individual cannot be admitted to the religious order or community.[203] Similarly, in Kashmir Śaivism, "the most important method of attaining integral Śivahood is *dīkṣā*". It is mandatory for members of the Vīraśaiva community because it alone opens the door of Vīraśaivism to them. Of particular significance here is the fact that this route is available also to outsiders who seek admission to the fold.[204] Thus the *dīkṣā* is best thought of as an early and necessary stage in converting to the faiths named; and its very existence speaks of the possibility of conversion.

Even if there are differences of opinion about the nature and significance of this ritual,[205] the practice of religious conversion in Śaivite sects seems to have been common. The chief function of the monastery founded by Bāsava at Kalyana in 1156, as well as that of the five traditional Vīraśaiva monasteries established in different parts of India after the twelfth century, was to convert non-Lingāyats to Vīraśaivism.[206] Tradition has it that large-scale conversions from Jainism to Vīraśaivism took place in Karnataka in the wake of Ekāntada Rāmayya's victory over the Jains.[207] What could conversions in such circumstances have been if not forced?

Evidence of conversion also comes from mythology, religious texts as well as the secular literature. Among the early myths, the legend of Dakṣa Prajāpati points implicitly to religious conversion within the fold of Brāhmaṇism. It has many versions, but at its core is "the conflict between the Vedic sacrificial religion and the Rudra-Śiva religion which ... was reconceived into a conflict between

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202 J. Gonda, *Change and Continuity in Indian Religion*, The Hague, 1965, p.316.

203 Ibid., p.398.

204 Ibid., p.433; H.M. Sadasivaiah, *A Comparative Study of Two Vīraśaiva Monasteries*, Mysore, 1967, pp.104–106.

205 What most scholars have viewed as conversion has been understood as purification by S.N. Biswas ("Über das Vrātyaproblem in der Vedischen Ritualliteratur", ZDMG, vol.105, 1955, pp.53; cited in J.C. Heesterman, "Vrātya and Sacrifice", *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol. 6 (1962–63), p.2.

206 H.M. Sadasivaiah, op. cit., pp.88–89, 168ff.

207 P.B. Desai, op. cit., pp.182–183.

Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism" in the epic and Purāṇic texts.[208] The climax of the story is represented by Śiva's destruction of the sacrifice performed by Dakṣa, followed by the Dakṣa's realisation of Śiva's superiority and conversion to him.[209]

There are also textual references to the procedure to be followed during conversion. The *Nāradaparivrājakopaniṣad*, for example, sets out in detail the way in which renouncers are to be converted or admitted to the Daśanāmī orders said to have been established by the earliest disciples of Śaṅkarācārya.[210] The *Somaśambhu-paddhati*,[211] a manual compiled by Somaśambu in the second half of the eleventh century, prescribes a procedure called the *lingoddhāra* (conversion ritual) for converting people from other creeds to Śaivism by the ritual removal of earlier religious affiliation, the purpose of the conversion being the realisation that without becoming a Śaiva, salvation is unattainable.[212] Similarly, a Tantric text called the *Kubjikānityāhnikatilaka* (1197) describes the conversion of nine Buddhists to the Kaula religion. According to the tradition recorded in it, when Śrīnātha alias Tūṣṇīśa alias Unmanīśanātha, the first of the ancient *gurus* of the Kubjika school of Tantra, went to the land of the *gandharvas* (*gandharvaloka*), he was questioned by some Buddhists living there. He told them that he was a *siddha* (perfect) and possessed the supreme divine instruction (*divyajñānavaralabdhaka*). Upon this the Buddhists laughed at him and challenged him to prove his statement. Śrīnātha, the story goes, uttered the syllable HUM and all the Buddhist monasteries collapsed. The monks acknowledged his

208 Klaus Klostermaier, "The Original Dakṣa Saga", in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Essays on the Mahābhārata*, Leiden,1991, p.110.

209 Ibid., pp.125, 128; Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2000, p.124.

210 G.S. Ghurye, op. cit., p.93.

211 The earliest manuscript of the text belongs to Vikrama 1130 (A.D. 1073). It has been edited by several scholars, the last and most authentic edition being by Madame Brunner-Lachaux published in three parts by Inst. Francais Indologie, Pondicherry. For details of the text and the conversion ritual, see Heinrich von Stietencron, "Religious Configurations in Pre-Muslim India and the Modern Concept of Hinduism", in Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron, eds., *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*, Delhi, 1995, pp.51–81.

212 Ibid, pp.56–57; Axel Michaels, *Hinduism: Past and Present*, New Delhi, 2005, pp.20–21.

authority, and later he converted them.[213] Among the secular works, the *Prabodhacandrodaya* of Kṛṣṇa Miśra (eleventh century) records how, after an interesting conversation with a Buddhist and a Jain, and after offering them wine and women, a Kāpālika succeeded in converting them to Śaivism.[214]

Religious conversion may have been of central importance to the many *bhakti* saints and *gurus* who appeared on the religious scene with the development of the various devotional sects, especially in early medieval south India, and who were inspired by a strong missionary zeal to convert the people to a life of spiritual surrender to the highest god. This is corroborated by the instances of conversion recorded in the early medieval Śaiva hagiographies. The twelfth-century work *Periyapurāṇam* of Sekkilār tells us that the Nāyanār saint Appar was born in an orthodox Śaiva family of the Vellāla community but became a Jain monk at an early age. Agitated, his elder sister sought Śiva's help. Appar was then afflicted with a serious abdominal disorder, which was cured not by the Jain physicians and their mantras but only by the grace and miracle of Śiva. Repentant over his earlier conversion to Jainism, he came back to the fold of his family faith. Enraged at this, the Jains brought charges against him before the Pallava king Mahendravarman, who was a follower of Jainism. Appar, however, succeeded in convincing the king of the truth of Śaivism, whereupon Mahendravarman himself became a Śaiva. Although the various assumptions underlying this narrative, related in the *Periyapurāṇam* five centuries after the events, have been rightly questioned[215], it is true that Appar and Mahendravarman changed their religions.

Sekkilār also gives an account of the encounter between another Śaiva saint, Sambandar, and the Jains. As the story goes, the queen and the minister of the Pāṇḍyan king invited Sambandar to Madurai to drive out the Jain monks who exercised their hold over the king. The saint went to Madura, proved the superiority of his miracles over those of the Jains and converted the king to Śaivism. As we

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213 *The Ṣaṭsāhsra Saṃhitā*, ed. and tr. J.A. Schoterman, Leiden, 1982, p.38; Teun Goudriaan and Sanjukta Gupta, *Hindu Tantric and Śākta Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1981, p.149.

214 *Prabodhacandrodaya*, Act III.

215 Richard H. Davis, "The Story of the Disappearing Jains: Retelling the Saiva–Jain Encounter in Medieval South India", in John E. Cort, ed., *Open Boundaries*, 1998, pp.213–224.

noted earlier, 8,000 Jains are said to have been impaled. Like the story of the conversion of Mahendravarman, that of the Pāṇḍyan ruler's embracing Śaivism may be a tall tale told by Sekkilār; but in neither of the two cases can the fact of conversion be questioned.

   An early medieval smṛti text also indicates that the idea of conversion was not altogether alien to Brāhmaṇism. The *Devala-smṛti* states that if brāhmaṇs and members of other castes are carried off by *mlecchas* and indulge in forbidden acts, they can be purified by performing the prescribed penance (*prāyaścitta*).[216] It also lays down that anyone who has lived with *mlecchas* for between five and twenty years can be purified by undergoing two *cāndrāyaṇas*.[217] According to Devala and other early medieval law-givers, anyone who left his religion could be taken back into its fold.[218] This idea of reconversion anticipated the later *śuddhi*[219] movement led by the Arya Samaj and is the same as the religious conversion currently being supported aggressively by the VHP and its affiliates in India and abroad as well as by the Ramakrishna Mission, founded in 1897 by Vivekananda, who "wished to flood the country of the Yankees with idolatrous missionaries" and had "grandiose ideas of how the US and Europe could be converted to Advaita Vedanta in a matter of decades."[220]

   Most of these references to conversion, with the exception of *vrātyastoma*, can be assigned to the early medieval period, when the important Purāṇas were composed. As pointed out earlier, they

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216 M.L. Wadekar, *Devalasmṛti Reconstruction*, 2 vols., Delhi, 1996. The chapter on *mlecchitaśuddhiḥ* contains as many as seventy-one verses dealing with the *śuddhi* (purification) of those who were taken away by *mlecchas* or stayed with them for five to twenty years.

217 P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasastra*, vol. II, pt.1, Poona, 1974, pp.389–91.

218 Ibid., p.391.

219 P.V. Kane uses the term *parāvartana* for reconversion and even equates it with the ancient *vrātyastoma* (op. cit., vol. IV, p.118). On the basis of the *Hindukaraṇavidhi* prepared by the Dharmanirnayamandala, Lonavala (Maharashtra), he has also suggested "a model but brief rite for the *parāvartana* for those who were forcibly converted or for those who voluntarily left the Hindu fold" (ibid).

220 Torkel Brekke, op. cit., p.48. Cf. Paul Hacker, "Der religiöse Nationalismus Vivekānandas", in L. Schmithausen, ed., *Kleine Schriften*, Wiesbaden, 1978, pp.565–79. There are many Hindu sects which are actively engaged in converting people, but the discussion of their activities is beyond the scope of this paper.

provide substantial evidence of sectarian rivalries, but it is just as important that they betray a strong Brāhmaṇical hostility towards the proselytising activities of the votaries of the heterodox sects: the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, for example, tells us that the Buddha came to the earth in order to indoctrinate the *daityas* against the Vedas.[221] The Purāṇas were used, on the one hand, to resist the conversion of people to non-Brāhmaṇical sects and, on the other, as an instrument for the diffusion of Brāhmaṇical religious ideas among the various ethnic groups to which they refer.[222]

Like the propagation of Purāṇic lore, the practice of making land grants to brāhmaṇs and their religious establishments became fairly widespread. As a result, brāhmaṇ settlements came up in different parts of the country during the early medieval period. They became specially important in the economically backward regions inhabited by culturally marginalised tribal people, for in those areas the brāhmaṇs, living as they did at a higher level of material existence, were able to disseminate their own religious beliefs and practices. The popularisation of the Purāṇas and the practice of making land grants in the peripheral areas both acted as agents of acculturation and religious transformation.

Since the pace of religious change brought about by these means was slow and may have stretched over generations, it is difficult to liken the penetration of Brāhmaṇism in the peripheral areas to the dramatic change wrought by conversion. There is no doubt, however, that in many cases land charters specified the donees' obligations, which included not only the teaching of Vedic lore but the actual performance of Brāhmaṇical rites and rituals, which enabled them to make inroads into tribal societies and religions. An interesting eighth-century inscription from the Raipur district in Chhattisgarh mentions two Śaiva ascetics, Sadyaḥśivācārya and Sadāśivācārya, and records the dedication of a temple to the latter and his spiritual successors along with several plots of black-soil land (*kṛṣṇatalā*) located in different villages. It states that the ascetics, in return for the endowment, were expected to arrange a

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221 *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, III.18. Cf. Vijay Nath, *Purāṇas and Acculturation: A Historico-Anthropological Perspective*, Delhi, 2001, p.195.

222 The role of the Purāṇas in bringing about religious and cultural change in the peripheral areas has been discussed perceptively and at length by Vijay Nath, op. cit., chapter 8. Also see Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, Delhi, 2001.

free feeding house (*annasya sattram*), a sacrificial rite (*yāga*), the exposition of the Śaiva doctrine (*vyākhyāyaḥ samayasya*) and the ceremony of initiation (*dīkṣā*) into the Śaiva faith, which was capable of securing salvation (*nirvāṇa-dakṣa*).[223] This inscription clearly indicates that land gifts to priests in the peripheral areas were an important and effective instrument for spreading religious beliefs and practices among tribal groups and for their conversion to Brāhmaṇical sects. Similarly, while the monasteries and the mendicant orders traditionally believed to have been established by Śankara certainly spread his ideas, their role in converting people needs to be examined, despite the reference to the initiation of novitiates in the *Nāradaparivrājakopaniṣad*.[224] The number of inscriptions which provide direct evidence of conversion may not be large; nor is the evidence on the Śankarite monasteries clear about their possible proselytising activities. But to make the sweeping statement that Hinduism has been a non-proselytising religion appears unwarranted and calls for a rigourous reappraisal by historians.

<p style="text-align:center">VIII</p>

The stereotyping of Hinduism as eternal, monolithic, tolerant and non-proselytising began soon after its invention in the nineteenth century, and the effort to present it as different from all the other religions of the world has gathered momentum over the years. Not content with imagining their religion to be unique, the Hindu cultural nationalists persist in noisily proclaiming its imagined uniqueness. The clichés about it receive inspiration and support from the writings of scholars of religion based at universities in the West, where departments of religious studies or comparative religion have

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223 Senkapat Stone Slab Inscription of the time of Śivagupta Bālārjuna, Ajay Mitra Shastri, ed., *Inscriptions of the Sarabhapurias, Panduvamsins and Somavamsins*, Delhi, 1995, pt. II, pp. 154–59, verses 15–22. I am thankful to Professor B.P. Sahu, but for whose timely reminder I might have forgotten to refer to this inscription.

224 G.C. Pandey (*Life and Thought of Sankaracarya*, Delhi, 1994) discusses the establishment of Śankarite monasteries but shies away from scrutinising them for proselytising activities of the kind seen later in Vīraśaiva monastic organisations.

mushroomed after World War II, their number having come to exceed 1,200 in the US alone.[225]

 Most of the scholars affiliated to these departments and a few of their Indian disciples[226] are inspired by Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade[227] and speak of the science of religion (*religionswissenschaft*): but in reality they study Hinduism as a socio-historically autonomous phenomenon, thus supporting the claim that religion is *sui generis*. Opposed to the scientific analysis of religious data and to any kind of reductionism, they have studied religion by prioritising "interior and generally inaccessible personal experiences and religious convictions at the expense of observable and documentable data,"[228] focussing on the "transhistorical religious meaning of any given hierophany."[229] The influence of these scholars is reflected in the anti-historical attitude of the bulk of writing on Hinduism produced by Western scholars and their Indian followers. For example, one of the leading Western scholars of religion, and the most influential, Wendy Doniger, has studied many neglected aspects of Hinduism (e.g., myths, symbols, metaphors) on the basis of an extensive use of Sanskrit texts and has provided interesting and provocative interpretations of the early Indian myths and religions, often rousing the Hindu diaspora's ire. But she has generally shied away from examining their changing social contexts. The same may be said of several recent publications on Hinduism which do not view religion as a multifactoral historical and cultural process but as a decontextualised phenomenon not linked to material realities on the ground.[230]

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225 Kwagsu Lee, "Resisting Analysis, Persisting Interpretation: A Historiography of Some Recent Studies of Hinduism in the United States", *Social Science Probings*, vol.15, nos.3–4, Winter 2003, p.28.

226 Among the younger Indian scholars advocating the idea of *sui generis* religion, mention may be made of Kunal Chakrabarti, according to whom "…religion as man's response to the ultimate reality has an autonomy and a dynamic of its own…", "Recent Approaches to the Study of Religion in Ancient India", in Romila Thapar, ed., *Recent Perspectives on Early Indian History*, Bombay, 1995, p.189.

227 Kwangsu Lee, op. cit., p.28.

228 Russell T. McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, New York, 2003, p.128.

229 Kwangsu Lee, op. cit., pp.12–13.

230 Constraints of space do not permit us to list and discuss all the recent writings on Hinduism, but a few of the most recent ones may be

There are a few exceptions from India,[231] but most Western scholars writing on various aspects of early Indian religions, especially Hinduism, describe them merely as systems of faith and salvation and "prioritize their abstract essences and homogeneity over their socio-political context."[232] In their works, phenomenology takes precedence over rational historical enquiry and a subtle defence of Hinduism masquerades as serious academic enterprise. Naturally, stereotypes about it tend to become deep-rooted and their grip on the masses strong.

The study of religion in academia needs to be rescued from those "scholars of religion" who insidiously strengthen the stereotypes which feed religious fundamentalism and who take upon themselves the task of defending "the religiosity of religion", a task which the sybaritic sadhus, despite their questionable personal track records, can discharge with greater efficiency. Historians cannot be the custodians of religion: our task is to critically examine it.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my views with you.

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mentioned: Gavin Flood, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, first Indian reprint, Delhi, 2003; idem, *Introduction to Hinduism*, Cambridge, 2004; Arvind Sharma, ed., *The Study of Hinduism*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, 2003; Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby, eds., *The Hindu World*, Routledge, London–New York, 2004, first Indian reprint, 2005; Axel Michaels, *Hinduism Past and Present*, Princeton, 2004, Indian edition, Delhi, 2005.

231 Unlike most scholars of religion, there are a few who have looked at early Indian religious developments against the backdrop of social change. Examples are Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya (*Lokāyata*), D.D. Kosambi (*Myth and Reality*), Suvira Jaiswal (*Origin and Development of Vaiṣṇavism*) R.S. Sharma (*Tantricism*), R.N. Nandi (*Social Roots of Religion in Ancient India*). For comments on their relevant writings, see Kunal Chakrabarti, op. cit., pp. 182–89.

232 Russell T. McCutcheon, op. cit., p.3.