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The Formation of Religious Identities in India

Krishna Mohan Shrimali

Historians are always concerned about identifying elements of change and continuity, and points of disjunctures, in outlining and explaining historical processes. Further, the need to locate them within temporal and spatial contexts is also a *sine qua non* for them. The formation of religious identities in India needs to be studied from such a standpoint. More so, because religions are parts of large and complex historico-cultural dynamics. The world of 'ideas' and 'divinities' in Indian mythologies (of all religious hues) as well as the followers and practitioners of all religions have been rising, falling and changing through several millennia. These people, the real creators of the 'world of divinities', have never constituted a monolith – neither spatially, nor temporally.

Since we do not accept the notion of 'autonomy' of the 'domain of religion' and consider it as an integral component of the 'social order', one is able to discern processes of interplay of several factors in the making and construction of religious identities. Lest the process involving dynamism of Indian mythology creates the impression that brute physical force determined the 'fitness' and 'survival potentiality' of any deity, we would like to underline a different *modus operandi* of this dynamism. Indeed, our understanding is that of all the factors, it is the material conditions that tended to have an edge over others in shaping the form and content of people's religiosities through the millennia.¹

Given such an approach to understand the dynamics of the making of religious identities, we would like to focus on a few illustrative examples. We intend covering a vast chronological spectrum of nearly four millennia (from about the beginning of the second millennium BCE till this day). We shall refrain from being comprehensive or exhaustive in our treatment of the subject. Therefore, examples chosen here are very selective and perhaps also quite subjective, for which we would seek your indulgence.

Indra and Varuṇa

Let us begin our narrative with the *Rgveda*, the earliest known literary text of exceptional lyrical quality and high poetic value. Only on those counts, it would easily rank amongst humanity's extraordinary creative

This is a slightly revised version of the Keynote Address delivered at the 31st Annual Conference of the Paschimbanga Itihas Sansad in Kolkata, 2015.

compositions. No wonder, the UNESCO was persuaded to accord it the status of world heritage and include its thirty manuscripts from the archives of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (Pune) in the *Memory of the World Register* in 2007. Ascribed to several centuries between *circa* 1800 and *circa* 1000 BCE, this compendium of more than 1,000 *sūktas* (hymns) and more than 10,000 verses in its extant form, presents a remarkable world view of principally pastoral people. It is generally understood that notwithstanding very infrequent occurrence, the ‘*Saptasindhu*’, ‘seven rivers’ of the *Rgveda* covered an area that extended from modern Afghanistan in the north-west to western Uttar Pradesh in the east – the river Ganga, which is also mentioned rather rarely, perhaps constituted the easternmost frontier of the *Rgvedic* locale. Present-day regions of Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab (pre-1947) and Rajasthan formed part of the geographical horizon of the *Rgvedic* people, who do not seem to have been too familiar with Gujarat. The trek from Balkh to the land of the ‘seven rivers’ has received some support from archaeological finds.²

It is well-known that out of scores of divinities that figure in the *Rgvedic* hymns, Indra is the most conspicuous – more than 250 (more than 25 percent) hymns are dedicated to him. Like most of the divinities, as the God of Rains, he also personifies forces of nature. However, of the numerous epithets bestowed upon him, he is best known as *Gopati*, which acquires special significance because cattle constituted the chief form of wealth for the people of *Rgvedic* times.³ This *Gopati* becomes Indra *Śunāsīra* (Indra with a plough), who presides over the finale of the successive ceremonies of the *rājasūya* sacrifice, the purpose of which is to ‘set in motion . . . the exhausted powers of fertility’.⁴ This transformation coincides with the dispersal of agriculture in the Ganga valley in the times of the later Vedic texts (*circa* 1000 – *circa* 500 BCE). Still later, during centuries of feudal milieu (post-third century CE), Indra acquires the appellations of *Bhūpati* (Lord of the Land) and *Devarāja* (King of Kings). During the early medieval centuries, he is confined to his *Indraloka* surrounded by beautiful *apsaras* and becomes notorious for his lecherous behaviour in Sanskrit *purāṇas*, only to pass into oblivion as far as the brahmanic pantheon is concerned. He survives in the non-brahmanic traditions, which remember him very differently. He is Sakka in the early Buddhist narratives, where he is almost always spoken of as ‘*devānaṃ indo*’ (chief or king of gods), who is far from being perfect and not free from three deadly evils, viz., lust, ill-will and stupidity. Sakka was very susceptible to the charms of beauty.⁵ As Saudharma Indra of the Digambara Jinas, he leads other gods in the celebrations at the birth of a *tīrthaṅkara* – ‘dancing Indra’ is a recurring theme in Jaina belief and practice. Professor B.N. Goswamy has recently highlighted a *pañchakalyāṇaka paṭa* (measuring 1220 cm x 80 cm) of *circa* 1700 from possibly Aurangabad (Maharashtra). It beautifully depicts such a ‘dancing Indra’ with as many as twenty hands on either side emanating from the elbows rather than, as generally seen, from the shoulders.⁶

While still on the *R̥gveda*, we must take up the case of Varuṇa, who is designated as an *asura par excellence*. If the *R̥gvedic* Indra represented one pole, Varuṇa in the same text was the other pole and probably the god of another group of people. It is a well-known axiom of linguistics that words keep changing their meanings either because of a natural process of evolution or due to exigencies of changed milieu of people. In this sense, treating ‘*asura*’ in the *R̥gveda* as ‘demon’ requires a different look. Long ago, Dandekar had pointed out that the Vedic word *asura* was much older than the classical Sanskrit word *sura* (god) and that the former did not represent the opposite of the latter. Originally, the word *asura* stood for a being that possessed the largest amount of magical potency. It was only later when it acquired the connotation of ‘demon’ that the word *sura* was artificially coined. *Asu* was sought to be compared with the magical potency of *mana*. On account of his enormous ‘magic power’ he creates the universe, regulates it into an orderly whole and wields the most supreme sovereignty over it, and his unique power is called *māyā*. In the *R̥gveda*, VII.88.6, Varuṇa is called *yakṣin*, a magician.⁷ Varuṇa, with his *māyā*, was solely responsible for the maintenance of *Ṛta*, which was far more than moral and cosmic order. It was the material order that was under the charge of Varuṇa. One may not accept Dandekar’s contention about the primacy of Varuṇa being superseded by Indra and their apparent conflict. But the two seem to have had their roles clearly cut out. The declining *Ṛta* and fall in Varuṇa’s status belong to the same period, viz., the later Vedic times, when cracks emerged in the egalitarian social order, and social stratification was becoming the order of the day with its consequent emergence of exploitative classes.

Śiva and Viṣṇu

Śiva, the *Mahādeva*, the Great God of modern-day Hinduism, is conspicuous by his absence in the *R̥gveda*. That text, however, knows Rudra, a dreaded god whose darts are sought to be warded off. Rudra in the *R̥gveda* is the relentless destroyer of sacrificial rites, a war-lord and cattle-lifter.⁸ No *R̥gvedic* god is so utterly gruesome. For him the later Vedic *Śatarudriya* hymn in the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* says: ‘Homage to the cheater, the swindler, to the lord of burglars . . . the glider . . . the lord of cut-purses.’ And yet, the hymn offers 425 oblations to Rudra. It is this Rudra who gets absorbed in Śiva. In the process of becoming Mahādeva, Śiva had also absorbed numerous other contradictory cultic male and female deities by the time of the Purāṇas (c. 300 CE to c. 1500 CE). Amongst such divinities that went into the making of the Śaiva pantheon are included Maheśvara, Vināyaka, Gaṇeśa/Gaṇapati, Muruga/Kārttikeya, Manasā, Ambā, Durgā, etc.⁹ While Śiva himself was located on Mount Kailāsa and in the cremation grounds, most of his associated deities are specifically associated with tribals residing in forested and hilly areas. There are two very significant aspects of such

an evolutionary process of Śaivism. First, perhaps pantheon would be a less-than accurate word to delineate this process. Though indifferent to worldly ties, Śiva is perhaps the only deity who has a family – wives, daughters and sons. Such an accent on kinship ties may have something to do with their penetration into tribal quarters. Secondly, the aforesaid assimilative process took distinctive shape during the centuries that are supposedly the ‘dark age’ of early Indian history, largely on account of the penetration of ‘foreign’ powers such as the Śakas, Kuṣāṇas, Greeks and so on. Dharmanand Kosambi (the senior Kosambi, father of D.D. Kosambi) has been quite specific in proposing that the transformation of Mahādeva (fond of bull-sacrifice: see details of the *śūlagava* sacrifice in the *Āśvalāyana Gr̥hyasūtra*) into the non-violent Maheśvara (who stood against sacrifices) was the result of Buddhist influence and can be ascribed to the times of the Śakas.¹⁰

Another prominent god of modern-day Hinduism, viz., Viṣṇu, though not absent, is an extremely obscure divinity of the people who were responsible for the composition of the hymns of the *R̥gveda*, which we consider to be a text of a relatively unstratified society. However, like Śiva, Viṣṇu’s graph too kept rising, but in a very different milieu and through an equally different mechanism. Today, we do not need to strain ourselves too much to figure out that the *Lakṣmīnārāyaṇāya namaḥ* is nothing but homage to Viṣṇu. But this identity was achieved through a long-drawn process involving cultic integration of significant magnitude. The absorption and appropriation of Saṁkarṣaṇa–Balarāma, the *haladhara*, god of agriculturists, the cowherd god Gopāla Kṛṣṇa, and numerous other totemic cults was achieved through the unique mechanism of *avatāras* (incarnations or perhaps, more accurately, ‘appearance’/‘manifestation’). Both Śiva and Viṣṇu got rooted in different ecological zones – the former represented *vana* (forests) and the latter got identified with *kṣetra* (plains).¹¹ People of pre-class social formation created the retinue of Śiva’s kin, whereas the spread of Viṣṇu’s net was in tracts that were getting socially stratified and equally significantly brahmanised, and especially wherein brahmins acquired premier ritual status. It is not improbable that the followers of totemic cults such as those of *kūrma*, *matsya*, *varāha*, etc., may have been presented with a *fait accompli*. We may draw sustenance for such a possibility from the Buddha’s place in Viṣṇuism. Though the Buddha is also included in the list of Viṣṇu’s *avatāras*, the narrative in the *Kāśīkhaṇḍa* of the *Skandapurāṇa* shows how Viṣṇu disguised himself as a Buddhist monk, Puṇyakīrti, and preached the essence of Buddhist philosophy which contested *varṇadharmā*, to discredit not only Divodāsa, the ruler of Kāśī, but also the Buddha.¹² Incidentally, this nefarious way of absorbing the Buddha in Viṣṇu’s fold was reversed in Sri Lankan history and Sinhala Buddhist religious culture, where this brahmanic deity was transformed and subordinated to the Buddha as shown by Holt.¹³

and Viṣṇu, both owed considerable debt to the so-called ‘foreigners’ of the post-Mauryan centuries. The Yavanas, the Śakas and the Kuṣāṇas had also patronised Vishnuite divinities. To the well-known evidence of the Garuḍa pillar inscription at Besnagar, wherein a Greek ambassador Heliodorus describes himself as a Bhāgavat, must be added the finds from the French excavations at Ai Khanoum in Afghanistan between 1965 and 1978, which had yielded six *drachms* of Agathocles (180–170 BCE) in a hoard excavated in 1970. The uniqueness of these coins lies in the fact that they are probably the earliest anthropomorphic representations of two popular deities of the Vishnuite pantheon, viz., Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa and his elder brother Saṁkarṣaṇa-Balarāma. The excavations at Malhar in Bilaspur district of Chattisgarh between 1975 and 1978 yielded a stone sculpture of a four-armed Viṣṇu (*circa* second century BCE) delineated in the mode of a Śaka soldier. In addition, the Śaka kings are known to have adopted Śaiva names and a good repertoire of Śaiva iconography appears on Kuṣāṇa coins. The impact of these ‘foreign’ kings is also traced in the invocation of the iconographic concept of ‘western’ goddess Cybele (seated/standing on a lion-drawn chariot) as a result of the Roman trade with western India before third–fourth centuries CE.¹⁴ Incidentally, the earliest image of goddess Sarasvatī, too, is dated in (Śaka) year 54 (133 CE), when the Kuṣāṇas were ruling at Mathura, where the sculpture was found.¹⁵ Such evidences clearly show that the alleged villainous character and iconoclastic zeal of the Śakas and Kuṣāṇas, and the crocodile tears shed by K.P. Jayaswal over the alleged destruction of the so-called ‘Hindu’ religion, have neither any justification nor any rationale.¹⁶

Vibrant Religiosities

Buddhism of the Buddha and Jaina system as developed by Mahāvīra (the twenty-fourth and last *tīrthāṅkara*) were received with great enthusiasm in the mid-Ganga valley by traders, peasants, workers and artisans of urban centres, and new agriculturists because both these new religious thinkers recognised the economic value of cattle, the advent of money and other components of the new economic order.¹⁷ By *circa* fifth/fourth centuries BCE the brahmanical religiosities rooted in a rural milieu had less appeal, for they despised all the new material factors that had come to the fore in the society. Under the influence of these new non-brahmanical religions, numerous gods and goddesses of popular character who were fond of violence either got transformed into non-violent divinities or became followers of new religions, but under no circumstance were they completely destroyed.

An illuminating example and a vivid description of the dynamism, variety and richness of the post-Vedic religious scenario is available in the Pali *Chullaniddesa*, which seems to reflect the preferences of people in the valleys of the Ganga and its tributaries. Generally, this text is placed between

the third century BCE and first century CE. In a rather long passage, it refers to five *śramaṇa* (non-brahmanical) groups, viz., the Ājīvikas, Nigaṇṭhas, Jāṭilas, Paribbājakas and Avaruddhakas. Further, it enumerates as many as twenty-two sects. Those who kept *vratas* for/worshipped the elephant were called the *hatthi vatikas*, and they may have given rise to the sect involving worship of Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed deity. Those who kept *vratas* for/worshipped the horse were designated as *assa vatikas*. In a similar way, we read about the *go* (cow) *vatikas*, *kukkura* (dog) *vatikas*, *kaka* (crow) *vatikas*, *punṇabhadda vatikas*, *maṇibhadda vatikas*, *aggi* (fire) *vatikas*, *nāga vatikas*, *supaṇṇa* (*garuḍa*) *vatikas*, *yakkha* (*yakṣa*) *vatikas*, *asura vatikas*, *gandhabba* (*gandharva*) *vatikas*, *chanda* (moon) *vatikas*, *suriya* (sun) *vatikas*, *deva vatikas*, *disā* (directions) *vatikas*, and so on. Other allusions to these multifarious sects are found scattered not only in rich and varied literature (e.g., *Āṭānāṭiya* and *Mahāsamaya suttas* of the Pali *Dīghanikāya*), but their existence is also corroborated through art remains and epigraphic notices. This scenario of diverse religiosities effectively demolishes the nomenclature ‘Buddhist India’ that is often ascribed to the centuries between *circa* 500 BCE and *circa* 300 CE. It may also be recalled that the evolutionary process noted in the upward mobility and rising popularity of Śiva and Viṣṇu also belongs to these centuries, which were marked by considerable flexibility and fluidity in people’s religious preferences.

Bhakti and Tantra

It is now well recognised that significant changes had taken place in the nature of land rights from *circa* 300 CE that remained quite firm till at least *circa* 1500 CE. The tendency that had already started in the first century of the Common Era (CE) got accentuated in the next few centuries. Grants of land were first made to religious beneficiaries – the Buddhists, brahmins, *saṅghas*, *maṭhas*, and brahmanical temples and other religious establishments and institutions. Later, several grades of *sāmantas* and other officials of the state also received land, sometimes even in lieu of services. It was not just the kings, queens and members of the royal family who made such grants; we also know about *sāmantas* themselves as grantors of land. The net result of this land grant mechanism was the creation of a huge class of landed intermediaries who tended to lord over peasants of different hues, artisans, craftsmen and other actual wealth producers. Subjection and immobility of these wealth producers were the hallmarks of this structure of graded land rights. Agrarian expansion involving newer lands being brought under cultivation, various technological innovations and diversification of crops also constituted an important feature of the centuries that saw growing expansion of a land-grant economy. The whole socio-economic and political structure got *sāmanta*-ised or feudalised.

It is perhaps not a mere coincidence that the same centuries simultaneously witnessed the rise of two very distinctive practices that

permeated all religions, both brahmanical and non-brahmanical, and that too on an almost pan-India scale. Indeed, the contemporary forms of Buddhism and the Jaina system also developed new ethics, where *aparigraha*, or non-possession, was duly compromised – and their followers had no qualms in competing with the brahmins in this land-grab movement. The ideas of *bhakti* (complete devotion and surrender to god/goddess) and *tantra* (with special accent on the worship of goddesses) became pervasive features of all religious systems during these feudalised centuries. Given the aforesaid material base, two mutually reinforcing features, viz., the royalty of the juridico-political structure with its dependent hierarchical loyalties and the equally hierarchical divinity of the ideological apparatus, determined the character of this new *bhakti*. As shown by Rajan Gurukul:

A well-known Tamil passage, *tiruvutal mannare kanal tirumale enrum*, which means seeing the king in his royal attire is as good as seeing Lord Viṣṇu himself. A structural analysis of the iconic forms of the temple-deity brings out the idea more clearly. The chief attributes of the iconic form of the temple-deity are the *kirita* (crown), *āyudha* (weapons), *bhūṣaṇa* (decorations), the *chālaka*, *dhāraka*, *parivāra* (the regalia) and the *parichāraṇa* (services). Needless to say, these are royal attributes. This is clearly the extension of the concept of royalty in its sublime form to iconography.¹⁸

Another streak of *bhakti* may be seen in the rise of the Viraśaivas or the Liṅgāyats in north-western Karnataka in the twelfth–thirteenth centuries. Later they spread to other parts of Karnataka and parts of Andhra Pradesh. The rise of new towns and the revival of a monetary economy and concomitant emergence of traders and artisans provided a potent support base for this new sect. This was very similar to the material base of early Buddhism and Mahāvīra's movement. Further, Basava, the founder of the new sect, like the Buddha, started off with a tirade against traditional brahmanism and was even called an 'axe to the root of the tree of caste'. Most importantly, he also rejected the authority of the Vedas.¹⁹

Similarly, with the dispersal of land grants across the whole sub-continent and consequent agrarian expansion, the old association between Mother Earth and the symbolism of female fertility got further accentuated. This in turn gave a new dimension to tantric practices. Indeed, it would perhaps be accurate to say that tantricisation of religions is an extremely pronounced feature of people's religiosities. Further, this process ought not to be seen merely in the vulgarisation of the *pañchamakāras*. Instead, tantricisation is signified more by the penetration of the female form and goddesses in both brahmanical and non-brahmanical religions. R.S. Sharma had shown the link between agrarian expansion and the proliferation of mother goddesses in early medieval centuries, and their intrusion in all religious systems. M.C. Joshi too saw the roots of Śākta Tantrism in the concept of a fertile mother goddess.²⁰ While brahmanical

religions accepted various goddesses as consorts, the Jains created spaces for *yakṣis* of various Jinas as independent divinities. The Buddhists, too, gave rise to several ‘malevolent’ and ‘benevolent’ goddesses.²¹ If ever any mapping is undertaken, one would see the subcontinent dotted by the presence of Tārās, Dākinīs and Śākinīs, the Śāktis, the Saptamātrikas, the Daśamahāvidyās, the twenty-six Vidyādevīs, the *chaunsaṭha* Yoginīs, the Grāhīs and Bhairavīs, Jvālāmālīnī, Padmāvatī and Kuṣamaṇḍinī, Gaṇeśīnī, Indrāṇī, Varāhī, Vaiṣṇavī, Vajravārāhī, and numerous unsung goddesses such as Nairātmyā, Chinnamuṇḍā, Simhamukhā, Kurukullā, Deḍḍarī, Ṭhanī, Takarī, Rīḍhālī, etc.²² While some expanded their earlier nebulous existence, others became components of the process of spousification, and yet others just managed to resist going into oblivion. Very few of these were ‘mothers’ in the literal sense of the term. Drawing attention to verse 834 of the *Śrī Lalitā Sahasranāmā*, Yoginīs in particular have been characterised as ‘unfettered’ (*Om viśṛinkhalāyai namaḥ* – Salutations to her who is ever unfettered).²³ An important facet of the emergence of these numerous new female divinities is the process of cultural interaction of priestly Sanskritic and tribal elements. Thomas Coburn’s pioneering study of the *Devī Māhātmya* of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (circa sixth century CE) had argued that it was the first comprehensive account of the goddess to appear in Sanskrit – the explanation was sought in terms of Sanskritisation since the basic impulse behind the worship of goddess was of ‘non-Aryan’ and non-brahmanical origin.²⁴ A survey of Śakti sculptures in Madhya Pradesh alone refers to as many as 400 images, and a great majority of their names, such as Charchikā, Umarimātā, Bijasanīdevī, Behamātā, Birasanīdevī, etc., link them with popular aboriginal deities.²⁵

Non-Indic Religiosities in India

With the growing influence of the Arabs, Turks and the Iranians in the Indian socio-economic and political order, especially after the seventh century CE, interactions with Islam became a reality. About the same time, India also became home to the Zoroastrians, who came from modern-day Iran, settled in Sanjan in Gujarat and came to be later known as Parsis. The history of Christians in India goes back to much earlier times – legend has it that St Thomas landed in modern-day Kerala some time in the first century CE. A king of Kerala welcomed Arab traders on the Malabar coast several centuries before another king of the same region created space for the Portuguese, when Vasco da Gama landed on that coast in the late fifteenth century. Such interactions were bound to impact religious identities. While the material interests, especially compulsions of trade links, certainly provided occasions and provocations, political exigencies must have also acted as catalysts in forging mutual understanding between Indic and non-Indic religions. A thirteenth-century bilingual inscription in Arabic and Sanskrit from Veraval (Gujarat) records that during the

reign of Arjunadeva (Chalukya–Vāghela), one *Nākhudā* (Commander of a ship) Noradina Piroja (Nuruddin Firuz) acquired a piece of land with the help of the local residents and funded the construction of a *mijigiti* (mosque) that was designated as a *dharmasthāna* ('a site for religion'). The religious performances at the mosque consisted of daily worship and had provisions of offerings, light, oil and drinks. The juxtaposition of terms such as *mahotsava*, *pūjā*, *dīpa*, *taila*, *pānī*, which are used in the context of temple rituals, with Arabic terms for Islamic religious observances and rituals is in keeping with the way the mosque was being represented as a *dharmasthāna*. Like the sacred site, the divinity too is represented as a locally comprehensible concept. The Batihagarh stone inscription of (Vikrama) Saṁvat 1385 (=1328 CE) and the Burhanpur Sanskrit inscription of Adil Shah dated (Vikrama) Saṁvat 1646 (=1590 CE) are other examples of the Islamic divinity being rendered in the imagery of 'Hindu' deities.²⁶ A Sanskrit text, *Śrī Rehamāna-Prāsāda-Lakṣaṇam*, deals with the principles of the construction of what is called *Rehamāna-Prāsāda* ('the temple of Rehamāna', viz., Allah) or *Rehamāna-Surālaya*. Several Muslim saints and their shrines (*dargāhs*) came to be important sites in several sacred landscapes in different regions of the subcontinent.²⁷

A Sanskrit text entitled *Allah Upanishad* or *Allopanishad* was probably symbolic of cross-cultural pollination between the Hindus and Muslims, most probably during the time of Akbar. It seems to have created a genre that was also adopted by Dara Shukoh (Shah Jahan's eldest son, who lost the war of succession to Emperor Aurangzeb), who not only got the *Upanishads* translated into Persian, but also wrote the *Majma-ul-Bahrain* – a co-mingling of the two oceans of Hinduism and Islam.

Several texts of tantric and astrological hues use such vocabulary that sounds almost Arabic or Persian: '*Khallāsaram ruddamatho duphālīh kuttham tadutthotha divīra nāmā*' and '*syādikavālah īsarāpha yogah*'. These are not verses from the Quran or any Persian text but from *Tājak Nīlakaṇṭhī*, an astrological text in Sanskrit.²⁸ In an illuminating contribution, M.C. Joshi drew attention to the influence of Islam on what he called 'Hindu Tantras', and showed how this may be seen in both the '*mantras* including Quranic *āyats* and *yantras* to be used, respectively, for repeated recitation to achieve various ends and as protective amulets or auspicious charts' for getting desired results. Several examples of Śābara *mantras* have been cited which invoke Ghaznavide Sultan Mahmud, who is compared with deities such as Hanuman and Narasiṁha, and whose blessings are sought to cure an ailing child:

Bismillāhir-Rahimānirrahim
Setā ghoḍā setāpalān, tāpar chadhe Mahmūd sultān/
Kāmrū-deś kā koḍā chalāve
*Gadh Ghazni kā Kotwāl Kahāve//*²⁹

Richard Eaton's study of the medieval city-state of Bijapur (1490–1686) explains how the 'high' tradition of the Sufi masters established links with the folk literature of certain Sufis, largely sung by village women while engaged in various household chores. Full of indigenous themes and imagery, this literature (*chakkī-nāma*, *charkhā-nāma*, *suhāgan-nāma*, *shādī-nāma*, etc.) became a vehicle for the transmission of simple Islamic precepts. This was indeed 'Indian Islam'.³⁰

Lal Ded, the fourteenth-century Śaiva mystic of Kashmir, was a great influence on Sufi Nuruddin in the Valley, and their relationship is described as that between mother and son. *Cīrāppurāṇam*, the most famous work on Islam in Tamil Nadu, was composed by Umaru Pulavar in the seventeenth century. It incorporates Tamil literary conventions and customs and the Tamil landscape into a description of the lives of the Prophet and members of his family. Vocabulary, thoughts and ideas going back to the Saṅgam texts, early medieval Bhakti saints such as the ninth-century Nammālvār, and the twelfth-century Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* by Kampan-inspired Umaru.³¹

Voices from the Ground

The self-professed Anglophile Nirad C. Chaudhuri emerged on the Indian literary scene with his *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, which was published in 1951, when he was in his fifties. The dedication of the book read: 'To the memory of the British Empire in India . . . all that was good and living within us was made, shaped and quickened by the same British rule.' Later, his vituperative onslaught against Hindus made headlines through his *Continent of Circe*, published in 1965. The focal point of this book is that every major 'Hindu dynasty' has followed the path of war to secure and capture new domains, and that violence is very much a part of life in Indian society. We need not endorse this diatribe of a maverick 'cartographer of learning', as Chaudhuri called himself. It would perhaps be more incisive if we contrast this with the outcome of a more recent attempt by Saba Naqvi, a much younger Indian, who undertook a journey 'in search of an unknown India'. Going beyond stereotyped exclusive religious identities and probing some deliberately manufactured fault-lines, Naqvi's *In Good Faith* (2012) brings out an India that defies any straitjacketing of its exclusivist religious identity. It is an India of faraway shrines and practices in quaint little places or in established bastions of orthodoxy, where the most ordinary people battling with their daily problems of bread and butter reach out to a common God.

Naqvi's canvas is large – stretching to almost all four corners of the subcontinent and covering diverse religious communities; her style in somewhat anecdotal *sans* fabrication, and her expressions are experiential and quite forthright. 'By no means an academic work . . . the sum of this work does give an insight into some of India's little-known cultural pockets

and raises questions about how traditions come to exist; and conversely, how they can begin to die or change into something entirely different.³² Out of more than thirty case studies taken up by Naqvi, we give below some examples of common people's religiosities.

Let us begin with Bengal. The Bauls, who have given Bengal some of its most beautiful songs and even inspired Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore to create 'Rabindra Sangeet', constitute a remarkable order of village singers. They are known for their persistent refusal to be bound by any of the conventional established religions, and in the typical *sant paramparā*, abhor all rituals. A famous Baul song of Madan Baul, a well-known Baul singer-composer, attacks formal religions thus:

The way to Thee has been blocked by both temple and mosque;
I hear you call, my God, but I cannot proceed to you,
As the guru and murshid stop me.
The door is fastened with many locks,
Quran, Puran, Tashib and Mala.
The path of initiation is the main problem;
Afflicted as he is, Madan dies crying.³³

In the forests and swamps of the Sunderbans looming over the Bay of Bengal, people worship Bonbibi, who is a Muslim goddess. And this, despite the well-known fact that idol worship in Islam is blasphemy. The 'Durgā-like Bonbibi' is known to have fought Dakshin Ray, a 'tiger god', after which the forests were duly shared by humans and tigers through the intervention of Pir Ghazi Miyan.³⁴

In Andhra Pradesh, Moharram has metamorphosed into something entirely different from known practices of Shia Muslims. Generally associated with a period of mourning, it has been transformed into a joyous celebration. Some tribal communities, such as the Lambadis, Gonds and Pardis, consider Moharram as important as Dussehra and Diwali. A Moharram song written by Balaiah, a Telugu folk poet says:

Recite in the name of Allah,
Then the Devata will bless you.

The *Ashurkhanas* where the *alams*, i.e. copies of the staffs carried by Imam Hussain and his followers at Karbala, are housed have popularised Moharram. The main Bibi ka Alawa *Ashurkhana* procession is about 400 years old – much older than the Ganesh Chaturthi and Durga Puja processions. Inside the *Ashurkhanas*, people are allowed to worship the *alams* according to their own customs without any restrictions. Non-Muslim women pray here to be blessed with children.³⁵

By now, it is well established that the triad of Lord Jagannātha, Subhadrā and Balabhadra installed at Puri grew out of the cult of *Stambheśvarīdevī* of the tribal communities living in the area. The famed

annual *Rath Yatra* of Lord Jagannātha moves with great fanfare. Millions of people take part in this. On its way, the *Rath* stops to pay respects to Salebeg, a Muslim saint-poet and a great devotee. He wrote several *bhajans* (devotional songs) in Oriya praising Lord Jagannātha. While the priests at Puri have maintained their brahmanic hold over the Jagannātha temple, prevented the entry of the lower social orders of 'Hindus', and also closed their portals to non-Hindus completely, they have not been able to eliminate devotional outpourings of the victims of these exclusions. In one of his *bhajans*, Salebeg bemoans:

My father is a Musalman,
My mother a Brahmin,
But I, Salebeg, am only a poor devotee of my Lord Jagannātha.

And, in another song, he expresses his desire thus:

O lord, I have waited the whole year long
To behold you when you step out in your Rath.
Do not deny me this vision,
Cries your devotee, Salebeg.³⁶

The Śrīraṅgam temple in Tiruchirapalli or Trichy in Tamil Nadu has been a bastion of Vaiṣṇavas for several centuries. Śrīraṅganāthaswāmī, the name for Viṣṇu in this sprawling and grand temple complex, is iconographically depicted as reclining on the multi-headed Śeṣa – the king of serpents. Śrī Lakṣmī may be a better-known consort of this presiding deity, but during the Pagal Pathu festival that lasts for the first ten days out of twenty of Vaikuṇṭha Ekādaśī, falling during December–January, Lord Viṣṇu is taken in a ceremonial procession to Thulukka Nachiyar, who is one of the main consorts of the Lord. She is a Muslim, whom the Lord serves during these ten days. Ironically, this 'respected Muslim lady' is housed in a special enclosure in the temple complex, which is otherwise not accessible to non-Muslims. The temple tank of Kapālīśvara, an ancient Śiva temple in Chennai's Mylapore area, is used for the ceremonial immersion of the *panjas* or *alams* carried during the Moharram procession. This practice was also followed, till at least the nineteenth century, at the tank of the Pārthasārathi temple located in the Muslim-dominated Triplicane area of Chennai.³⁷

Making a point that it is important to locate religious shrines in a larger social context and to unravel the multiple levels at which sacred sites interacted with a diverse range of communities, the example of Kesariyaji temple near Udaipur (Rajasthan) has been cited. The main image installed here is worshipped by the Jains as the Jina Ādinātha, while the local Bhils worship it as Kalaji or Karia Baba.³⁸ Evidently, hosts of actors including the mortal *upāsaka* (lay worshipper), the priestly apparatus, as well as artisans and sculptors become important players in creating such multiple

religious identities for one ‘monument’, where the voices emanating from stones need to be carefully decoded.

Sacred Spaces: Conflicts, Tensions and Desecrations

Amidst narratives of mutual accommodation, inter-sectarian and intra-sectarian rivalries have never been absent in India. Nor can one deny the demolition of the places of worship and persecution of the followers of one faith by those of another in inter-religious divides. Even a hurried perusal of the eighteen *mahāpurāṇas* brings into focus their utterly sectarian character. The three Gods of the Trinity depicted therein were in competition with one another and would never miss an opportunity to run down their opponents. Alternatively, the followers of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Maheśa (Śiva) would glorify and eulogise their *iṣṭadevatās* to such great heights that the other deities would feel considerably dwarfed. The *asuras* of the *R̥gveda* had by now got completely transformed. They were no longer ‘gods’ symbolising the ‘good’. Instead, they were given the singular identity of ‘demons’ who represented ‘evil’ that needed to be annihilated. No wonder, *deva-asura saṅgrāmas* – conflicts between *devas-suras* (gods) and *asuras* (demons) – seem to be a recurring motif of several Puranic narratives. Śaiva–Vaiṣṇava conflicts assumed such massive proportions that the city of Kāñchī was literally divided into two distinct quarters, viz., Śiva Kāñchī and Viṣṇu Kāñchī inhabiting the Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas respectively. Persecution or ridiculing of Buddhists and Jains by the trans-Vindhyan Bhakti movement leaders between the ninth and thirteenth centuries can be noticed in several literary compositions. The *Mattavilāsaprahasana* (attributed to the seventh-century Pallava king Mahendravarman) and the *Periyapurāṇam* (‘The Great Purāṇa’) or *Tiruttonṭarapurāṇam* (‘The Purāṇa of Holy Devotees’) composed by Śekkilār (twelfth century), a Vellāḷa from Tonḍaimaṇḍalam and a minister of the Choḷa king Anapayan identified with Kulottuṅga II (1133–50 CE), are just two such works.³⁹ Many of these sectarian conflicts got manifested in iconographic transformations as well that enveloped even non-brahmanical religious systems. To illustrate, Śaiva–Jaina tensions during early medieval times in Karnataka resulted in the Lakulīśa image being decorated with a club in his hand.⁴⁰

Within these narratives of tenuous relations of Śaivas/Vaiṣṇavas vs Buddhists and Jains, one must also take note of some recent writings that have focused on identities of *Śramaṇic* religions in Tamil-speaking south India between the sixth and eleventh centuries CE, whose presence is prolifically noted in Tamil inscriptional, archaeological and literary records. Nearly two decades ago John Cort edited a volume, suggestively titled *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History* (1998), which took into account the ‘challenging, borrowing, contradicting, polemicising, appropriating, and modifying that goes on across religious

boundaries'. Leslie Orr's contribution in this anthology deals with Tamil epigraphic evidences from the eighth to the thirteenth century which shows that the Jains were far from being annihilated despite the Bhakti saints treating them as 'the Other', and works out the interactions of Jain and 'Hindu' 'Religious Women'.⁴¹ More recently, Anne E. Monius' study of two Buddhist texts of the same period, viz., *Maṇimēkalai* and *Viracōḷiyam*, has also located the relevance of the Buddhist religious community within broader sectarian groups with different devotional affiliations. Both Buddhist texts suggest a profound ethics of compassion that impacted brahmanical religiosities. Thus, the king of Pūhar in *Maṇimēkalai*, for example, remains a follower of Viṣṇu but converts his royal prison into an abode of ascetics.⁴²

The long history of India is replete with numerous examples of conquerors stamping their authority and suzerainty over the conquered through the utilisation of old monuments and symbols and refashioning them, quite often to humiliate the vanquished. And, mostly, to serve their own political interests. The pillars of Emperor Aśoka occupy a distinctive place in the history of Indian monuments. It is by now fairly well established that the emperor made use of many pre-existing pillars, which may have been the remains of a 'pillar cult', for the dissemination of his message of '*dhamma vijaya*' (conquest through *dhamma* – righteous conquest). The famous 'Shore Temple' of the Pallavas (seventh–eighth centuries) at Mahabalipuram near Chennai was originally dedicated to Viṣṇu. Later it was converted into a Śaiva temple.⁴³ Similarly, one of the *ayaka stambhas* of the Buddhist *stūpa* at Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh), which constituted the most important architectural characteristic of this Buddhist monument, was removed and installed in the neighbouring grand temple as Amaraliṅgeśvara – a Śiva *liṅga* – by the thirteenth-century Kākatiya monarch. During the long-drawn political struggle (sixth to eighth centuries) between the Pallavas and the Chālukyas, victors of every generation would lift some monumental remain as a war trophy and install it at a prominent place in his own empire as a symbol of his victorious power, or even engrave his own record in a famous monument inside the territory of the enemy, as a perpetual reminder of the humiliation afflicted on the adversary. Such examples of transformation/distortion of religious monuments and remains can always be multiplied.⁴⁴

With such a long history of 'theological iconoclasm', the 'temple desecration and destruction' by the Ghaznavids, Ghorids and the Mughals from the tenth century onwards can be located in historical perspective. This wanton destruction cannot be denied. Locating it within a larger historiographical context, Richard Eaton has undertaken an extensive documentation and mapping of as many as eighty instances of temple desecration between 1192 and 1760 CE. Arguing that this phenomenon was not undertaken indiscriminately but in such cases where it was strategically

imperative in so far as it happened in the territories of powers that came in the way of the state-building exercise.

Temple desecrations also occurred when Hindu patrons of prominent temples committed acts of treason or disloyalty to the Indo-Muslim states they served. . . . These patterns also suggest points of continuity with Indian practices that had become customary well before the thirteenth century. Such points of continuity in turn call into serious question the sort of civilisational divide between India's 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' periods first postulated in British colonial historiography and subsequently replicated in both Pakistani and Hindu nationalist schools.⁴⁵

Notwithstanding this grand saga of religious madness inherent in inter- and intra-sectarian rivalries, inter-religious acrimonies sometimes leading to physical violence and even extermination of adversaries, and humiliating acts of desecration of sacred spaces even if rationalised in terms of political expediency or mere continuation of Indian practices; one feature that stands out quite prominently concerns the great space that has always been accorded to voices of dissent and alternative visions. No wonder, Amartya Sen could postulate the perennial '*argumentative Indian*', whose unthreatened existence may be located even in the *Rgveda*. Though, as seen above, Indra was supreme therein, there was no dearth of people who ridiculed him and made fun of his alleged exploits. The famous 'Frog Hymn' of the *Rgveda* which compared brahmins with croaking frogs was also an early attempt to ridicule the Vedas and their reciters. There is a long litany, even in the Sanskrit textual tradition, that questions the authority of the Vedas.⁴⁶

One of the cardinal contributions of the Jainas has been their exposition of the *Syādvāda*, which was a direct and the most potent onslaught on all notions of the absoluteness of Truth, especially the ones that were enshrined in Vedic traditions. The Jaina view, on the other hand, focused on the relativity as well as infinite-sidedness of Truth – *ananta-dharmātkameva-tattvaṃ*, as they called it. Truly speaking, this was intellectual *ahimsā* of the highest order which treated multifarious alternative point of views with the utmost respect. That it was no wordy promise is shown by the more than 1500-year long debates amongst Jainas of different hues on the question of women's potentiality to achieve salvation.⁴⁷

The Idea of Indias

Given this long history of undulating formations of religions in India, one might get the impression that the lives of the common people revolved around just that. But the ground reality has all through been far from that. Even in the *Rgveda*, when people of different clans and tribes were invoking scores of forces of nature as their divinities, the material concerns were never forgotten. Signs of rank materialism can be seen in the demands

for cattle (the chief form of wealth at the time), horses and sons (patriarchy seems to be quite pronounced) made to almost all the deities. The millennia-long histories of the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent show that they have been known through several identities, and sometimes all at the same time. Mlecchas in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (circa 800 – circa 700 BCE), for example, were called so because they had subterranean burials of a different shape and spoke a different language than was the case with the ‘Sanskrit’ speakers, whom we generally tend to identify as ‘Aryans’.

Once, speaking on the occasion of the launch of the Linguistic Survey of Punjab under the joint venture of the Punjab government’s Language Department and Punjabi University, Patiala, the noted litterateur Hazari Prasad Dwivedi drew attention to the perils involved in naming linguistic identities – his argument being that very often such identities are not only thrust upon by outsiders but also in a somewhat contemptuous manner: for example, the Bengalis calling the language of the people of Bihar as ‘*khoṭā bhaṣā*’ or some people of Bihar identifying Maithili as ‘*chhikāchhikī*’.⁴⁸ We may, in this context, remind ourselves how some tribal groups mentioned in the *R̥gveda* were castigated by ‘Sanskrit’ speakers as ‘*mṛdhrvāchīs*’ (speakers of false/corrupt language). The exercise of establishing identities has been quite onerous. Getting to know about self-perceptions is all the more problematic. Ethnic, linguistic, regional, cultural, sectarian, etc. – these have been some of the modes in which people have been situated. Diversities in each such label have recently been expounded by Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya by retrieving ‘voices from India’s ancient texts’.⁴⁹

Two points, however, need to be underlined: first, considerable accent on the so-called ‘regional’ identities that seem to be subsuming other identities; second, even when religious identities are sought to be invoked, they are far from being monolithic and often ‘sectarian’ in character. Of the ‘regional’ identities, their expositions in the Saṅgam literature and Rājasekhara’s *Kāvyamīmāṃsā* provide two temporal and spatial poles. The composition of Saṅgam poems, if not their compilation into anthologies which may have taken shape at a later date, has been dated to the period between 300 BCE and 300 CE and located in the modern state of Tamil Nadu. Rājasekhara was a *kavirāja* at the court of Mahendrapāla of the Pratihāra family with its sway over Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, and is generally placed in the late ninth/early tenth century. The five *tiṇais* of Saṅgam texts are eco-geographic and cultural zones that were distinguished on the basis of their landscapes, flora and fauna, peculiar forms of economic activity for subsistence (agriculture using irrigation and plough cultivation in *marutam*), their cultural equipment, their principal communities (*kuravar* in *kuṟiṇṇi*, *idaiyar* in *mullai*), and also their deities (Mayon = Kṛṣṇa in *mullai* and Varuṇa in *neytal*). *Tiṇais* also constituted a literary genre since each had its distinctive poetic mood – romantic dalliance of the *kuṟiṇṇi* (forest tract), separatism of the *palai* (arid zone),

and conjugal as well as illicit love of the *marutam* (settled agrarian tract).⁵⁰ Following Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Rājasekhara's *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* too talks about regions on the bases of *vr̥tti* (*nṛtya-gīta-kalāvīlāsa-paddhati*), *pravṛtti* (*veśa-vinyāsa-krama*) and *rīti* (*vachana-vinyāsa-paddhati*). Essentially, it is an attempt to establish regional identities by taking cognisance of people's lifestyles – their dress, hairstyle, language and speech, their love for dance and songs, and so on. Religion as a factor is apparently of no consequence in these criteria.⁵¹

Coming to religious identities *per se*, we need to take note of the following. (i) Not too long after the *mahāparinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, his followers got split into several sects – Theravādins, Sarvāstivādins, Mahāsāṅghikas, etc., which in turn were further split into several sub-sects, which rarely identified themselves as Buddhists. (ii) The case of the Jainas is no different – while the Digambaras, Śvetāmbaras and Yāpanīyas represented the better known sects, the medieval Śvetāmbara Jainas were characterised by a division of the monastic community into several rival lineages or *gachchhas*, which argued vociferously over who among them represented the true practice and understanding of the teachings of Mahāvīra.⁵² (iii) When Islam entered India, we talked more about the ethnic identities of its followers, viz., Arabs, Turks, Turuṣkas, Afghans, Iranis, Turanis, Uzbegs, Mongols, Mughals, and so on, and not of Muslims or Mussalmans. (iv) We had to deal with the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British and the French as traders before encountering them as Christians. (v) Indeed, even amongst the so-called 'Hindus', sectarian labels alone mattered, which they displayed through their forehead marks. Broadly, they were Śaivas, Śāktas, Vaiṣṇavas (with their further sub-divisions), rather than omnibus 'Hindus'. This was the case at least till the arrival of the Arabs (seventh–ninth centuries), who were the first to use the expression 'Hindu', but that too in a geographical and ethnic sense rather than religious. One would look in vain for any reference to a 'Hindu' in any pre-Arab text. No wonder, some distinctive stages in the evolution of Sanskrit texts-based religions have been identified as 'Vedism', 'brahmanism', 'Puranic religion', and so on.

Where Do We Stand Today?

The Anthropological Survey of India had launched 'The People of India' (POI) Project in 1985. Colonial ethnography studied communities in isolation and covered British India and a few Princely States. In contrast, the POI project covered the whole country, each state and union territory. The project aimed at studying the impact of change and the development process on all communities and to establish linkages that brought them together. In the process, it could identify 4,635 communities, 325 languages belonging to 12 different language families with incidence of bilingualism as high as 65.51 percent, and as many as 24 scripts all over

India. Further, the Survey identified 91 eco-cultural zones – obviously several Indian states had multiple cultural zones (e.g., six each in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, and as many as seven in Tamil Nadu).⁵³ Evidently then, poly-religious, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic identities that have evolved over several millennia, have defined India. This can truly be called THE IDEA OF INDIAS, with India in plural. India of diversities, of conflicts and tensions.

Can we rest content with that? Perhaps we can do so only at our own peril. This Idea of Indias has been under severe threat since the late 1980s, when the movement for the 'Grand temple of Lord Rama at Ayodhya' was launched by chauvinistic 'Hindu nationalists'. Recall that our present prime minister Shri Narendra Modi also identified himself with such an appellation not too long ago. Till the mid-1980s, both Śrīraṅgam and the Rock Fort temples at Trichy used to send their elephants to the Nathar Vali *dargah* for the annual Moharram procession. The practice has now stopped. In 1990, Chennai recorded its first communal riot in recent history. The reason: the Vinayaka Chaturthi procession passing through the Muslim-dominated Triplicane area raised provocative slogans and went on a rampage that resulted in three deaths. The grand old legend that the Śiva Līṅga Cave at Amarnath was discovered by a Muslim shepherd named Adam Malik is now being contested. Baba Ramdeo ji, a folk hero of Rajasthan (with his temple at Pokharan in Jaisalmer district), who has been worshipped by lower-caste Hindus and Muslims for the last several centuries, has been brahmanised – the lower-caste *pūjārī* has been replaced by a brahmin priest and the Baba is now being projected as an *avatāra* of Lord Rama with his *pir* aspect being completely purged. In a sort of proselytisation attempt, quite real and concrete, gods and goddesses of numerous *adivasis* (tribals) in Gujarat, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Bundelkhand, Manipur and Odisha are being 'Hinduised'.⁵⁴

The last three decades have seen violent cultural policing in the form of prescriptions of dress code for women; protests against the celebration of Valentine's Day; 'honour' killings and 'love jihad' against Hindu-Muslim marriages (very often fake ones); burning of churches in Gujarat, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and now even Delhi; passage of anti-conversion laws in several states under the charge of the 'Hindu nationalists'; and the latest vociferous campaigns of the so-called '*ghar wapsi*' ('return of the prodigal' – a euphemism for re-conversion) and '*shuddhikaran*' ('purification'). 'Cow vigilantism', or anti cow slaughter, largely targeting Muslims and other religious minorities, often under fake pretexts, is being pursued with vigour and the not-too-concealed support of the state. Nathuram Godse, the killer of the Father of the Nation, is being hailed as a 'patriot' and his statues are being installed. The entire Indian cultural landscape is being transformed radically and lamentably into a regressive mould. The space for dissent is diminishing by the day. The

voices of 'reason' are getting feebler quite rapidly. Are we going to lose the millennia-old 'argumentative Indian'?

The last three decades have also seen a new cult of 'sants' and other religious preachers entering our living rooms through television channels such as 'Aastha' and 'Sanskar', where new-age religious *gurus* are encashing the growing sense of insecurity and anxiety creeping into the minds of the large populace of this nation due to the neo-liberal and market-oriented economic policies. Religious fundamentalisms of all hues are marketing themselves in huge packages. All religious fundamentalisms are rooted in patriarchal and anti-women discourses. These *dharma ke saudagars* (merchants of *dharma*) are spewing venom, for they seem to have forgotten the dicta of Aśoka's edicts and the *Mahābhārata*. King Piyadassi, Beloved of the Gods, said in his Rock Edict XII:

Growth of the essentials of Dharma is possible in many ways. But its root lies in restraint in regard to speech. . . . Truly, if a person extols his own sect and disparages other sects with a view to glorifying his sect owing merely to his attachment to it, he injures his own sect very severely by acting in that way.⁵⁵

And the great epic, too, reiterates in the same strain:

*dharmam yo bādhathe dharmo na sa dharmah kudharma tat /
avirodhī tu yo dharmah sa dharmah satyavikrama //*

Dharma that stands in the way of another dharma is not dharma at all. It is evil dharma. O one for whom valour is based on truth! Dharma that does not conflict with anything is the right dharma.⁵⁶

Those who claim that the entire world was originally inhabited only by the Hindus and utterances such as 'everyone is a born Muslim' are two sides of the same coin.

The decades since the 1980s have also rejuvenated V.D. Savarkar and M.S. Golwalkar, whose vision of India stands in total contrast to the Idea of Indias mentioned above. While the RSS supremo has, of late, been openly talking about 'Hindu *rashtra*', our 'Hindu nationalist' prime minister masquerades as '*Vikas Purush*' – the 'Development Man'. Behind this facade of 'development' they are out to create a 'monolithic Hinduism', which it has never been. Homogenising several identities into a single mould is being undertaken brazenly. More importantly, the 'nation' is also being sought to be identified with a particular religious identity: BEING HINDU IS BEING INDIAN. Some people seem to have arrogated to themselves the right to impose such a religious identity upon others – calling the Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, etc., 'Hindus' despite their protestations. The Sikhs had once proclaimed loudly – '*maans gau ka khaayenge, Hindu nahin akhwaayenge*' ('we shall eat beef and would not let anyone call us Hindus'). Iconographic changes according to the

changing times have been known all through. No wonder, as recently as 2015, a transgenders' establishment near Kolkata created Durgā in the form of *Arddhānarīśvara*. However, when the followers of all non-Indic religions (Islam, Christianity, etc.) are maliciously demonised and labelled as 'the Other', and with these new demons in mind new iconographies are being created, where Rāma, Durgā and even Gaṇeśa are given violent and ferocious forms, questions are bound to arise. The Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), with their slogan of 'Hinduise India and militarise Hinduism', constituted only a fringe of the early twentieth-century nationalist movement in India. They represented 'fragmented nationalism' then. And now they stand for fascistic 'homogenisation' in the name of a singular religious identity. Today there is every danger that they may come to occupy the centre stage and demolish the millennia-old 'IDEA OF INDIAS' in the same way as they demolished the sixteenth-century Babri Masjid at Ayodhya on 6 December 1992. We need to have the 'Idea of Conflicts and Tensions' inherent in numerous diverse identities, for, in such conflicts, tensions and struggles lie the potential seeds of fresh and enriching creation, maybe of compassionate humanism.

Notes and References

- 1 For a detailed understanding of Marxian historical materialism *versus* Weberian 'religious anchorage' and its more recent appearance in the form of Mircea Eliade's 'phenomenological' approach to religious ideas and practices, focusing on 'autonomy of religion' as an independent 'determinant' of both human 'ideas' and 'material conditions', see Krishna Mohan Shrimali, 'Kosambi and the Religious Histories of India', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Many Careers of D.D. Kosambi: Critical Essays*, LeftWord Books, New Delhi, second revised edn, 2012, pp. 86–133. Our reluctance to concede 'autonomy of religion' must be distinguished from the *autonomous* role of 'human consciousness', which is a subject for separate discussion.
- 2 '*Saptasindhu*' is used at one place in *Rgveda* (henceforth *RV*), VIII.24.27. References to the so-called 'seven rivers' are scattered and their identification with present-day rivers are fraught with conflicting interpretations. Sometimes even the much eulogised Sarasvati is included amongst these 'seven' and located somewhere in Afghanistan.
- 3 K.M. Shrimali, 'The *Rgveda* and the *Avesta*: A Study of Their Religious Trajectories', in Irfan Habib, ed., *A Shared Heritage: The Growth of Civilisations in India and Iran*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 28–29.
- 4 Cf. J.C. Heesterman, *The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration*, Mouton, The Hague, pp. 222–23.
- 5 Rhys Davids has suggested that Sakka and Indra are independent conceptions; cf. G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, Luzac & Co., London, 1960, Vol. II, p. 965.
- 6 B.N. Goswamy, *The Spirit of Indian Painting: Close Encounters with 101 Great Works, 1100–1900*, Penguin Books India, Gurgaon, 2014, pp. 212–15.
- 7 R.N. Dandekar, *Select Writings*, Vol. I, *Vedic Mythological Tracts*, Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1979, pp. 53–61. Dandekar clarifies that 'magic' is not to be understood in its vulgar, popular sense. Rather, it should be taken as one of the

- three stages (other two being 'religion' and 'science') in the evolution of human thought, particularly in respect of man's relationship with the world. On Varuṇa's *māyā*, see also Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, *Lokāyata: A Study in Ancient Indian Materialism*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1959, pp. 622–65. Also Wash Edward Hale, *Asura in Early Vedic Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1986.
- 8 R.C. Hazra, *Rudra in the Ṛg-Veda*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, Kolkata, 2003.
 - 9 In addition to the classic work of Sukumari Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony: A Comparative Study of the Indian Mythology from the Vedas to the Purāṇas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1970, see also: Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1973; Anita Raina Thapan, *Understanding Gaṇapati: Insights into the Dynamics of a Cult*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1997; Nilima Chitgopekar, *Encountering Śivaism: The Deity, the Milieu, the Entourage*, Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1998; Richard D. Mann, *The Rise of Mahāseṇa: The Transformation of Skanda-Kārtikeya in North India from the Kuṣāṇa to Gupta Empires*, Brill, Leiden/Boston, 2012.
 - 10 Dharmanand Kosambi, *Bharatiya Sanskriti aur Ahimsa*, translated from Marathi by Vishwanath Damodar Sholapurkar, Hemachandra-Modi Pustakmala Trust, Bombay, second reprint, 1957, pp. 145–48.
 - 11 On the concepts of *vana* and *kṣetra*, see Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer, 'The *vana* and the *kṣetra*: The Tribal Background of Some Famous Cults', in Heidrun Bruckner, Anne Feldhaus, Aditya Malik, eds., *Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer Essays on Religion, Literature and Law*, Manohar, Delhi, 2004, pp. 353–82.
 - 12 Cf. Diana L. Eck, *Banaras: City of Light*, first published by Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1983, reprinted by Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 209–10. It is generally accepted that though some Purāṇas occasionally mention Śiva's *avatāras*, the mechanism was not accepted universally by the Śaivas. For some relevant allusions and their discussion, see Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation: The Wilde Lectures in Natural and Comparative Religion in the University of Oxford*, Faber and Faber, London, 1970, pp. 88–89.
 - 13 John Clifford Holt, *The Buddhist Viṣṇu: Religious Transformation, Politics and Culture*, first published by Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, reprint, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2008.
 - 14 M.C. Joshi, 'Goddess Cybele in Hindu Śākta Tradition', in B.N. Saraswati, S.C. Malik and Madhu Khanna, eds., *Art, The Integral Vision: A Volume of Essay in Felicitation of Kapila Vatsyayana*, D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, 1994, pp. 203–09. A reference has been made here to an inscription dated 491 CE from Chhoti Sadri (Rajasthan) mentioning a goddess riding a chariot drawn by lions.
 - 15 M.C. Joshi, 'On the Presence of a Brahmanical Tantric Goddess in Jainism', in Adalbert J. Gail and Gerd J.R. Mevissen, eds., *South Asian Archaeology 1991: Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe held in Berlin*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1993, pp. 473–80.
 - 16 For further details, see K.M. Shrimali, 'Religions in Complex Societies: The Myth of the "Dark Ages"', in Irfan Habib, ed., *Religion in Indian History*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2007, pp. 56–61, specially fn. 42 and 43.
 - 17 Despite our great fondness for the philosophy and theology of the Buddha, we shall refrain from getting into the details of that in the present context. And yet we do feel the need to recall that in the long history of India's philosophers and thinkers, he perhaps remains exceptional and unequalled in attaching primacy to human mind. Since he came to be known as *mahābhiṣaja* (the great physician)

- because of his understanding of human suffering, its cause, diagnosis and its treatment, there may have been a kernel of scientificity in his discourse. This probably accounts for modern-day psychologists' fascination for him.
- 18 Rajan Gurukkal, 'From the Royalty of Icons to the Divinity of Royalty: Aspects of Vaiṣṇava Icons and Kingship in Medieval South India', in Ratan Parimoo, ed., *Vaiṣṇavism in Indian Arts and Culture*, Books and Books, New Delhi, 1987, p. 123. For another discourse involving more extensive discussion of links between a feudal milieu and south Indian Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva Bhakti saints (*Ālvārs* and *Nāyanārs*, respectively), see M.G.S. Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthat, 'Bhakti Movement in South India', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order: State, Society and Ideology in Early Medieval India*, reprint, Manohar, Delhi, 2002, pp. 385–410.
 - 19 For an intensive discussion of the material base of this powerful movement of new Śaivas, see R.N. Nandi, 'Origin of the Vīraśaiva Movement', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order*, pp. 469–86.
 - 20 R.S. Sharma, 'Material Milieu of Tantricism', in D.N. Jha, ed., *The Feudal Order*, pp. 441–54; M.C. Joshi, 'Historical and Iconographic Aspects of Śākta Tantrism', in Katherine Anne Harper and Robert L. Brown, *The Roots of Tantra*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002, pp. 39–55.
 - 21 Such 'binary' categorisations need to be revisited, for these labels are very subjective and relative. For other examples of similar subjectivity, see Sontheimer's discussion of 'ugra' ('fierce', 'ogre-like', 'shocking') and 'saumya' ('peaceful', 'auspicious') in 'Hinduism: The Five Components and Their Interaction', in Heidrun Bruckner, Anne Feldhaus, Aditya Malik, eds., *Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer Essays on Religion*, p. 402.
 - 22 Cf. Rana P.B. Singh, ed., *Sacred Geography of Goddesses in South Asia: Essays in Memory of David Kinsley*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2010.
 - 23 Nilima Chitgopekar, 'The Unfettered Yoginis', in *Invoking Goddesses: Gender Politics in Indian Religions*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 82–111.
 - 24 Thomas B. Coburn, *Devī Māhātmya: The Crystallisation of the Goddess Tradition*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984; see specially the Prolegomenon. Other works that highlight the goddess tradition in early medieval times are: Alain Danielou, *Hindu Polytheism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964; D.C. Sircar, ed., *The Śakti Cult and Tārā*, University of Calcutta, 1967; Cheever Mackenzie Brown, *God as Mother: An Historical and Theological Study of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, Hartford, 1974; H.C. Das, *Tantricism: A Study of the Yoginī Cult*, Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1981; John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, eds., *The Divine Consort*, first published in 1982, reprinted in India by Motilal Banarsidass, 1984; Vidya Dehejia, *Yoginī Cult and Temples: A Tantric Tradition*, National Museum, New Delhi, 1986; David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Vision of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, University of California Press, 1986, Indian edn, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1987; Elisabeth Anne Benard, *Chinnamastā: The Aweful Buddhist and Hindu Tantric Goddess*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1994; Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*, Princeton University Press, 1994, Indian reprint, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 1998; Tracy Pintchman, *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1994; Steven J. Rosen, ed., *Vaiṣṇavī: Women and the Worship of Krishna*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1996; Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Divinity and Deviance: Women in Vīraśaivism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996; Douglas Renfrew Brooks,

- Auspicious Wisdom: The Texts and Traditions of Śrīvidyā Śākta Tantrism in South India*, Manohar, Delhi, 1966; David Kinsley, *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine: The Ten Mahāvidyās*, University of California Press, 1997, Indian edn, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1998; Masakazu Tanaka and Musashi Tachikawa, eds., *Living With Śakti: Gender, Sexuality and Religion in South Asia*, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka, 1999; N.N. Bhattacharyya, ed., *Tantric Buddhism*, Manohar, Delhi, 1999; Nilima Chitgopekar, ed., *Invoking Goddesses: Gender Politics in Indian Religions*, Har-Anand Publications, New Delhi, 2002; Ellen Goldberg, *The Lord Who is Half Woman: Ardhanārīśvara in Indian and Feminist Perspective*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2002; David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī: 'Tantric Sex' in its South Asian Context*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2003; Miranda Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, Princeton University Press, 2006, Indian reprint, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, 2007; Geoffrey Samuel, *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008.
- 25 O.P. Misra, *Mother Goddess in Central India*, Delhi 1985; see also Maheswar Neog, *Religions of the North East*, Delhi, 1984, chs. 5, 10, 11 and 12. R.N. Nandi's *Religious Institutions and Cults in the Deccan*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973, pp. 114–17 and Ram Bhushan Prasad Singh's *Jainism in Early Medieval Karnataka*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1975, pp. 23–60 show the incorporation of mother goddesses and tantric practices as a result of land grants even in the puritanical non-brahmanical religions in the trans-Vindhyan regions.
 - 26 D.C. Sircar, 'Veraval Inscription of Chaulukya-Vāghela Arjuna, 1264 AD', *Epigraphia Indica*, Vol. 34 (1961–62), Delhi, 1963, pp. 141–50; Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims*, Manohar, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 70–78, specially fns. 29, 31 and 32.
 - 27 For *dargahs*, such as those of Nathar Vali in Trichy and another Sufi saint at Nagore in Tamil Nadu, and encounter between Hindus, Christians and Muslims in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, see Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, specially chs. 3 and 4.
 - 28 Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, *Bhasha, Sahitya aur Desh*, Bharatiya Jnanpitha Prakashan, New Delhi, second edn, 1998, p. 16.
 - 29 M.C. Joshi, 'Islam in the Hindu Tantras', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bombay*, Vol. 58, 1983, pp. 51–56. See also Romila Thapar, *Somanātha: The Many Voices of a History*, Penguin/Viking, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 160–68.
 - 30 Richard M. Eaton, 'Sufi Folk Literature and Expansion of Indian Islam', *History of Religions*, Vol. 14, No. 2, November 1974, pp. 117–27, reprinted in Richard M. Eaton, *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 189–99. See also Babli Parveen, 'The Eclectic Spirit of Sufism in India: An Appraisal', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 42, Nos. 11–12, November–December 2014, pp. 39–46.
 - 31 Vasudha Narayanan, 'Religious Vocabulary and Regional Identity: A Study of the Tamil *Cirappurāṇam*', in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, eds., *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2000, reprinted in India by India Research Press, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 74–97. Kampan is ascribed to the ninth century in this. There is, however, greater consensus on his placement in the twelfth century. This essay has also been reprinted in Richard M. Eaton, ed., *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2003, pp. 393–410.
 - 32 Saba Naqvi, *In Good Faith: A Journey in Search of an Unknown India*, Rupa

- Publications, New Delhi, 2012, pp. 21–22. This work captures the spirit of the television serial 'Mera Bharat', which Saba's father Saeed Naqvi made for Doordarshan in the mid to late 1980s.
- 33 Ibid., p. 37.
 - 34 Ibid., pp. 31–32; for a different version of this legend and extensive discussion of the 'Cult of Pir' designated as 'Pirism' in Bengal, see Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*, first published by Princeton University Press, 1983, reprinted in India by Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, n.d., chapter 6.
 - 35 Saba Naqvi, *In Good Faith*, pp. 60–66.
 - 36 Ibid., pp. 67–72.
 - 37 Ibid., pp. 73–81.
 - 38 Cf. Michael W. Meister, ed., *Ethnography and Personhood: Notes from the Field*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur, 2000, p. 24, cited in Himanshu Prabha Ray, 'The Archaeology of Sacred Spaces in India: From Multi-Religious Sites to Monuments', Presidential Address to the Indian Archaeological Society Meeting (2013), *Purātattva*, No. 44, 2014, p. 2. See also, Himanshu Prabha Ray and Kapila Vatsyayana, eds., *Sacred Landscapes in Asia: Shared Traditions, Multiple Histories*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2007.
 - 39 Richard H. Davis, 'The Story of the Disappearing Jains: Retelling the Śaiva–Jain Encounter in Medieval South India', in John E. Cort, ed., *Open Boundaries: Jain Communities and Cultures in Indian History*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998; Indira Viswanathan Peterson, 'Śramaṇas Against the Tamil Way: Jains as Others in Tamil Śaiva Literature', *ibid.*, pp. 163–85. For a recent enumeration of these Śaiva–Vaiṣṇava sectarian conflicts and the hostile attitude of the Bhakti saints towards the Buddhists and the Jainas, see Noboru Karashima, ed., *A Concise History of South India: Issues and Interpretations*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2014, pp. 106–11, 153–54.
 - 40 For some more details of diverse religious identities and sectarian tensions and conflicts, see Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Interrogating "Unity in Diversity": Voices from India's Ancient Texts', General President's Address, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Platinum Jubilee (75th) session, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2014 (Aligarh, 2015), pp. 10–13; and D.N. Jha, 'Of Conflict, Conversion, and Cow', in D.N. Jha, ed., *Contesting Symbols and Stereotypes: Essays on Indian History and Culture*, Aakar Books, Delhi, 2013, pp. 52–63.
 - 41 Leslie C. Orr, 'Jain and Hindu "Religious Women" in Early Medieval Tamil Nadu', in John E. Cort, ed., *Open Boundaries*, pp. 189–212.
 - 42 Anne E. Monius, *Imagining a Place for Buddhism: Literary Culture and Religious Community in Tamil-Speaking South India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 2001. It may not be out of place to mention that the 'ethics of compassion' (*karuṇā*) has a long history and goes back to the Buddha himself. It may have also provided foundational roots to his idea of all-pervasive *ahiṃsā* towards both humans and animals. Even in the Buddha's recognition of the economic importance of cattle, whom he called *annadā*, *vannadā* and *sukhadā* – givers of food, beauty and happiness respectively, possibility of his innate *karuṇā* at work cannot be ruled out completely.
 - 43 John R. Marr, 'Note on the New Excavations at the Shore Temple, Mahabalipuram', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 3, October 1991, pp. 574–76.
 - 44 Richard Davis, 'Trophies of War: The Case of the Chalukya Intruder', in Catherine

- B. Asher and Thomas R. Metcalf, eds., *Perceptions of South Asia's Visual Past*, Oxford & IBH Publishing, New Delhi/Bombay/Calcutta, 1994, pp. 161–77.
- 45 Richard M. Eaton, 'Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States', in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence, *Beyond Turk and Hindu*, pp. 246–81; this essay has also been reprinted in Eaton's *Essays on Islam and Indian History*, pp. 94–132. See also Romila Thapar, 'Destroying Shrines', *Frontline*, 9 January 2015, pp. 51–56.
- 46 For a recent enumeration of such allusions, see D.N. Jha, 'Eternal India and Timeless Hinduism', in D.N. Jha, ed., *Contesting Symbols*, pp. 32–36.
- 47 Padmanabh S. Jaini, *Gender and Salvation: Jaina Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of Women*, first published by the University of California Press, 1991, reprinted in India by Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi, 1992.
- 48 Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, *Bhasha, Sahitya aur Desh*, pp. 45–52.
- 49 Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, 'Interrogating "Unity in Diversity"', pp. 10–13. A case for diversity in religious practices has also been made on the basis of form and structure of early 'religious' architecture in Himanshu Prabha Ray, 'The Archaeology of Sacred Spaces'. However, Ray's indiscriminate use of 'Hindu temple' throughout this article is absolutely unwarranted and not acceptable.
- 50 Cf. Noboru Karashima, ed., *A Concise History of South India*, p. 45; Rajan Gurukul, *Social Formations of Early South India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2010, pp. 77–94, 136–54; Vijaya Ramaswamy, *Historical Dictionary of the Tamils*, The Scarecrow Press, Maryland/Toronto, 2007, pp. 278–81. Recently an attempt has been made to study textual evidence on *tiṇais* in the context of material remains from excavated burial and habitation sites belonging to the iron age and early historic period in the Thondaimandalam area of Tamil Nadu (cf. Smriti Haricharan and Naresh Keerthi, 'Can the *tiṇai* help understand the Iron Age Early Historic Landscape of Tamil Nadu?', *World Archaeology*, Vol. 46, No. 5, December 2014, pp. 641–60). The study brings out some of the perils involved in establishing a direct correlation between the two sets of evidence.
- 51 Pandeya Rameshwar Prasad Sharma, *Rajashekhara aur unka Yuga*, Bihar Hindi Granth Academy, Patna, 1977, chapters 2 and 3.
- 52 P. Granoff, 'Other People's Rituals: Ritual Eclecticism in Early Medieval Indian Religions', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 28, No. 4, August 2000, pp. 399–424.
- 53 K.S. Singh, *People of India: An Introduction* (National Series, Volume 1), Anthropological Survey of India, Calcutta, 1992, pp. 13–16, 102–07.
- 54 Cf. Dharmendra Kumar and Yemuna Sunny, *Proselytisation in India: The Process of Hinduisation in Tribal Societies*, Aakar Books, New Delhi, 2009. See also Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion*, first published in 2011 by State University of New York, Albany, Indian edition, Dev Publishers & Distributors, New Delhi, 2014, where distinction is made between 'missionary' and 'proselytising' religions and Hinduism is put under the former category.
- 55 D.C. Sircar's translation in *Inscriptions of Āśoka*, Publications Division, New Delhi, fifth edition, 2009, p. 42.
- 56 *Mahābhārata*, Critical Edition, VI.131.10 (*Āraṇyakaparva*); translation by Bibek Debroy, *The Mahabharata*, Penguin Books India, New Delhi, 2011, Vol. 3, p. 144.

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