

# **New Stereotypes of Hindus in Western Indology**

**First Edition**

Edited by

**Vishal Agarwal**

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## **Dedication**

This book is for Shri Sita Ram Goel (1921 – 2003) whose publications have inspired us to resist the hatred directed against Hinduism and Hindus.



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March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014

Minneapolis, MN





# Preface

By Vishal Agarwal

Hindus comprise approximately 15% of the world's population today. Although as a community, they are concentrated very heavily in India, millions of Hindus have emigrated from their traditional homelands to the western world in the last two centuries. An estimated 2.5 million Hindus live in the United States alone today.

Numerous universities in North America and Europe have established academic chairs and teaching positions towards the study of and research on world religions. However, there is a marked difference between the western academic approaches towards Hinduism on one hand, and those towards other religions (notably the Abrahamic religions and Buddhism) on the other. For other religions, both the practitioner-insider ('emic') and outsider ('etic') perspectives are honored and represented.<sup>1</sup> However, when it comes to Hinduism, the insider voices are hardly represented or respected. In fact, emic presentations of Hinduism are frowned upon and marginalized. Rather than enriching their perspectives by engaging practicing Hindus, western scholars of Hinduism often reject emic perspectives as uninformed, or as informed by nefarious agendas.<sup>2</sup> It appears that Hinduism needs to be saved from the Hindus.

This insulting attitude and arrogance of many western scholars has led to considerable bitterness in their relationship with the diaspora Hindus, who are now right in their neighborhoods, and are no longer a foreign, exotic other. Western Hindus have repeatedly questioned the scholarship, prejudices and motivations of these scholars. But so far, this

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<sup>1</sup> For an accessible discussion on the two approaches, refer: Russel McCutcheon, ed. (1999), *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader*, Cassell (New York and London). Doniger too has a chapter in the book, but clearly, she does not practice what the book preaches. She has the habit of dismissing her Hindu critics as "Hindu nationalists", or as people "who do not even know what we do not know."

<sup>2</sup> For an accessible controversy on this problem, refer: Rajiv Malhotra, "*The Insider/Outsider Game*" (published on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2002), available online at [http://creative.sulekha.com/the-insider-outsider-academic-game\\_100851\\_blog](http://creative.sulekha.com/the-insider-outsider-academic-game_100851_blog) <checked on 29 March 2014>

has not resulted in a dialog between the two sides primarily because the etic scholars have been very dismissive of Hindu voices.<sup>3</sup>

The present book is an analytical review of a popular book by Wendy Doniger, arguably the most influential academic in the field of Hinduism studies west of the Atlantic. Her "*The Hindus, an Alternative History*" published and distributed by Penguin since 2009 has been a phenomenal sales success. Within one year of its release (by June 2010), more than 600 libraries in North America had acquired a copy of the book. The Indian division of Penguin brought out an Indian reprint as well in 2010. Several professors in the United States are using her book as a textbook in their college level classes.

Numerous groups of Hindus, both within and outside India, have protested against the contents of the book, which they find flawed academically in many ways. According to the present reviewer(s), the book presents a very inaccurate, stereotypical, derogatory, and a colonial view of the history of the Hindus.

Some of the detailed chapter reviews that form the bulk of this book had been forwarded to Doniger for her perusal in early 2010. There was no response from her. The editor of an Indian American newspaper wrote to Vishal Agarwal and Wendy Doniger to participate in a discussion in 2010. Whereas the former readily agreed, the latter did not respond. Doniger continues to imagine the Hindus as a dead mummy in a museum whom she can treat as a silent 'object' of study. But the Hindu mummy is not dead. Within the Hindu laity itself, there are several good scholars who can question and challenge her scholarship.

Doniger apparently considers it beneath contempt to engage in a dialogue with Hindus because she has not responded to numerous requests to this effect. A blog reveals:

Those who have expressed a problem with this talking back by the "insiders" deliberately choose to suppress some other realities. **The fact that Doniger refused to engage with Indian academics over her "Hindus" has not been discussed.** Is it a fact that despite being present at the annual

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<sup>3</sup> Aditi Banerjee, Antonio de Nicholas and Krishnan Ramaswamy (2007), *Invading the Sacred*, Rupa & Co. (New Delhi). The book is available online at [http://www.voiceofdharma.org/books/its/invading\\_the\\_sacred.pdf](http://www.voiceofdharma.org/books/its/invading_the_sacred.pdf)<checked on 10 March 2014>

conference of Association of Asian Studies (AAS) held in 2011 at Hawaii, Doniger “declined an advanced written invitation from Dr. Madan Lal Goel of the University of West Florida to participate in a Roundtable Panel on her book, citing prior commitments and busy schedule.” Is it also a fact that when Delhi University Associate Professor and a scholar of Indian civilization, **Dr. Bharat Gupta** had an opportunity to speak with Doniger during a reception hosted by the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS). She again declined his invitation to attend the Panel, with the comment “*I have moved beyond The Hindus.*” If **Doniger** and her ilk refuse to engage in debate with some, among the “others” who have genuinely asked for a dialogue, isn’t it a problem with her and her intellectual progeny – a problem which is perhaps the manifestation of a deep rooted uncertainty with one’s own scholarship and one’s ability to defend one’s intellectual positions and interpretations?<sup>4</sup>

Instead, she has demonized all of her Hindu critics as ‘Hindu Nationalists’, and her acolytes have used the most violent and hateful language against her critics in the forums and blogs that they manage and own. In an article, Aditi Banerjee highlights this problem<sup>5</sup> with Doniger:

“Rather than confront the actual criticisms, Doniger pretends that her only critics are Hindu extremists, and by rebuking this “enemy” she tries to deflect any criticism of her work.

Just as some politicians resort to picking on their weakest critic to discredit all of their critics, Doniger picks one stray comment on the Amazon web site to characterize all of her critics—when asked to describe the Hindu-American response to her book, Doniger exclaims, “My favorite one on Amazon accuses me of being a Christian fundamentalist and my book a defence of Christianity against Hinduism. And of course, I’m not a Christian, I’m a Jew!”

Doniger ignores the prolific response to her work by the American Hindu community, including dozens of published articles, countless public conferences, repeated calls for debate and dialogue between the academy and the Hindu-American community, and a recently published book analyzing the

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<sup>4</sup> See “*Western Indology and Academic Apartheid*” available online at <https://www.indiafacts.co.in/western-indology-academic-apartheid/> <checked on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014>

<sup>5</sup> Aditi Banerjee, “*Oh, But you Do Get it Wrong*,” at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262511> <checked on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014>

representation of Hinduism in American universities. It is totally irresponsible for such a prominent professor, whose career is built on writing about Hinduism, to stereotype and vilify the entire Hindu-American community on the basis of the actions of a few.

Doniger's refusal to address her critics only worsens as the interview proceeds. When asked why Hindus object to her writings, she flippantly replies:

"You'll have to ask them why. It doesn't seem to me to have much to do with the book. They don't say, 'Look here, you said this on page 200, and that's a terrible thing to say.' Instead, they say things not related to the book: you hate Hindus, you are sex-obsessed, you don't know anything about the Hindus, you got it all wrong."

This is a bald lie. The first Part of the book, *Invading the Sacred*, documents and refutes dozens of statements by Doniger, as illustrated by the following:

- "Holi, the spring carnival, when members of all castes mingle and let down their hair, sprinkling one another with cascades of red powder and liquid, symbolic of the blood that was probably used in past centuries." (from Doniger's article about Hinduism in the Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia—Microsoft Encarta subsequently removed her entry in 2004; while we do not know this for a fact, one can reasonably conclude that Microsoft Encarta came to an internal conclusion about Doniger's lack of scholarship and objectivity).
- From a newspaper article in the Philadelphia Inquirer, dated November 19, 2000, entitled "Big-screen caddy is Hindu hero in disguise" written by David O'Reilly, Inquirer Staff Writer: "Myth scholar Wendy Doniger of the University of Chicago was on hand earlier this month to lecture on the Gita. 'The Bhagavad Gita is not as nice a book as some Americans think,' she said, in a lecture titled 'The Complicity of God in the Destruction of the Human Race.' 'Throughout the Mahabharata, the enormous Hindu epic of which the Gita is a small part, Krishna goads human beings into all sorts of murderous and self-destructive behaviors such as war in order to relieve 'mother Earth' of its burdensome human population and the many demons

disguised as humans ... The Gita is a dishonest book; it justifies war," Doniger told the audience of about 150"

Doniger may now claim that she was misquoted, but she has failed to obtain a retraction from the Philadelphia Inquirer.

- Prof. Michael Witzel, Wales Professor of Sanskrit in the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard University posted the following remarks about Doniger's translations to a mailing list and called her translations "UNREALIABLE" [sic] and "idiosyncratic:"

Doniger's "rendering of even the first two paadas [of the Rg Veda] is more of a paraphrase than a translation;"

"In this hymn (of 18 stanzas) alone I have counted 43 instances which are wrong or where others would easily disagree."

"Note that all 3 translations are Re-translations. Mistakes of the type mentioned above could easily have been avoided if the work of our 19th century predecessors (and contemporaries!) had been consulted more carefully ... Last point: Looking at the various new translations that have appeared in the past decade or so: Why always to Re-translate something done 'several' times over already --- and why not to take up one of the zillion Un-translated Skt. texts?" [2]

Is that specific enough?

Nor can Doniger claim ignorance of these examples, having been made aware of them through emails, various conferences, journals and mailing lists by many people, including university professors, fellow scholars, and students.

As a scapegoat tactic to discredit her critics, Doniger plays both the sex card and the race card, without offering any evidence for being discriminated against on the grounds of her gender or her race:

I think I have a double disadvantage among the Hindutva types. One is that I'm not a Hindu and the other is that I am not a male. I suppose the third is that I'm not a Brahmin, but I don't even get there because I'm not a Hindu! I think it's considered unseemly in the conservative Hindu view for a woman to talk about sex—that's something men talk about among themselves.

But her critics have been concerned not with her gender or race but only with the content of her scholarship. Race and sex bias are the “cards” Doniger uses to distract readers who are unfamiliar with the details of the substance of the critiques against her.

[2] Krishnan Ramaswamy, Antonio de Nicolas and Aditi Banerjee, eds., *Invading The Sacred: An Analysis of Hinduism Studies in America* (Rupa & Co., June 2007), p. 66. See also Ailes, Gregory D., *Religious Studies: a Global View* (Routledge 2007), p. 260.

Wendy Doniger is aware of the immense volumes of her criticisms that her book has drawn. Most of these criticisms simply point to factual errors in her book – errors that can be verified objectively by anyone. In her sheer arrogance, the author has not corrected them in reprints, let alone acknowledge them. She has also refused to engage in any conversation with her Hindu critics. This reflects her close-mindedness in seeing the other viewpoint, a far cry from the professed claim of her book.

It is ironical indeed that on one hand Doniger claims to speak for the oppressed sections of the Hindu society (as if they were the white woman’s burden) and yet, she refuses to engage the Hindus themselves in a dialogue as to why they disagree with her book that is about them. Hers is a monologue from the Empress of Indology to her humble objects of study- the Hindus. Quite clearly, she does not consider Hindu discussants at par with herself, and is stuck in a Jim Crow era of her own making – one in which the Hindus are to be segregated from any discussion. It is easy to pontificate about a dead mummy in a museum. What Doniger and other racist Indologists do not realize is that the Hindus are not a dead mummy, and they can question their interpretations about them. The power-play of Doniger and her supporters is not ethical, and does not promote the cause of scholarship.

This compilation is an academic review of “The Hindus”, which in our opinion is a gossip-tabloid level of the history of Hinduism. Discussions on meta-issues surrounding the book, like racism, political propaganda, stereotyping, academic dishonesty, prejudice etc. displayed by the author and her supporters are incidental to this academic criticism except when they relate to actual statements in her book. The ‘Afterword’ of this review gives a brief statement of what appear to us Doniger’s non-academic agendas in writing the book.

The chapter reviews were written at various times between 2010 and 2014 and therefore will have some duplication. But then, Doniger herself can be repetitive – the worst example is her terming the destruction of Hindu temples by Islamic rulers as mere ‘recycling’ which is repeated in different ways eight (8) times in her book. These reviews were written by multiple contributors over a period of four years. Due to this reason, they are stylistically a bit different.

This review, although fairly long, must not be seen as a complete listing of the errors present therein. The chapter reviews are merely illustrative, although some of them (e.g. those of chapters 9 and 16) are more comprehensive to give the reader a better idea of how flawed her book is. Nevertheless, an honest academic would have taken note of these errors a long time back, and corrected them. Doniger does not seem willing to do so.

In this review, we have left out four chapters (2 and 21), not because they are free of errors but because the primary author is focusing on a similar detailed review of her other book, “*On Hinduism*”<sup>6</sup> that she herself designates as “a book of my books.” Sequels to this detailed review will cover “On Hinduism”, and thereafter, her other publications like “*Shiva, the Erotic Ascetic*” or “*Hindu Myths*”.

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<sup>6</sup> Published in India by Aleph (2013) and reprinted in the US by OUP (2014).





## Foreword

### Nothing New or Alternative in Doniger's "Linga", her "narrative of religion"

Prof. Bharat Gupt

**For Hinduism studies**, the 21<sup>st</sup> century opens with an audacious tome by Wendy Doniger, "*The Hindus An Alternative History*", Penguin/Viking 2009. This act of 'courage' or *saabasa* (also done with plenty of *saa-baasa* or tongue in cheek humor), ends up being closer to the ancient meaning of the word *saabasa* as used in Indian law codes, that is, an offence.

After reading only a few pages of this book, I was reminded of something I did in my greener days. In late teens, when I had enough Sanskrit to read Valmiki, I went to my village educated mother, hoping to shock her, with my discovery that Valmiki's Rama when in exile used to hunt the deer, roast the meat and offer it to Sita. My mother, though not pleased at this great news, watched me intently to study my intentions and quickly took away my sadistic pleasure by quoting a line from Tulsidas, of whose Ramayana, she was a daily reader. "*Naanaa bhaanti Raam avataaraa/ Raamayana sbata koti apaaraa*" (Rama has taken many kinds of avatars and Ramayanas are hundred crores in number).

Today I marvel at the profound meaning this rural untutored woman had deciphered from the text of Tulsi that some of us are unable to grasp even though we may have spent a life time of reading and teaching heavy classical texts in Sanskrit and that too sitting on the cushion of a salary. She not only kept 'her Rama' intact, but showed no antagonism, distaste or horror of the 'hunter Rama' who was just another *avatara*, and not somebody who would threaten her faith, demolish the 'myth of the holy cow', endanger notions of Hindu vegetarianism, create doubts about the historicity of Rama, or give a boost to the tension between Hindu attitude to violence in sacrifice and the Hindu ideal of non-violence in life, a favorite theme in Doniger's book.

Myths or stories are many and in many versions. Do they mean to burden us with a past to be carried as a cross or are they meant to liberate us from ignorance and illusion that we ourselves create? Or, are myths are to be interpreted as 'narratives' that aim to make a people,

Hindus specially, uncomfortable, dislocated and even ashamed of their own heritage in order to make them yield to predatory cultures? These are some of the questions that come to mind while reading Doniger's massive volume.

A few days ago, it was Ravidas Jayanti, the birthday of the saint worshipped by the *harijans/dalits* of North India. It was also a full moon day. Was Ravidas really born on that date? Was he born at all? Yes, for his followers, he was a historical figure. But his birthday need not be celebrated on a historically accurate date. However, it has to be on a full (*purNa*) moon day as he is a *purNa* guru, a complete teacher, a knower of the Absolute. The reflection of his completeness is more important than the observance of his actual date of birth. For Hindus, many avatars of the same person are not contradictory to each other and even rural women can grasp the message of each avatara. Essentially, the hunter Rama of Valmiki is the same as the vegetarian Rama of Tulsi, because he is Vishnu incarnating for establishing the *dharmā*.

This seeming contradiction pains all scholars raised on the framework of Abrahamic religions that are based on the so called historical accuracy of the lives of their prophets and the so called historically accurate chronology of the creation of the earth as history as seen by modern science. They classify pagan history as myth, hagiography or 'narrative'. They labor to contrast and evaluate it with a parallel diagram of what is called factual history. In this enterprise they miss the truth of the myth. For them the message of the myth is not important but to show the gap between 'fiction' and 'fact' is the real enterprise.

*The Hindus* is one such elaborate exercise. It is constantly plagued by the dichotomy of what may have been the truth of history and what is actually narrated in the texts, mainly as myths. It is plagued by not only this dichotomy but a host of others. As a matter of fact, the book aims to plague Hindus with a dichotomy brigade.

But what makes the issue of the gap between 'narrative' and 'history' so muddled in this book, is that even the 'facts of history' are not seen not in the total history of India, but are highlighted or suppressed from Doniger's sectarian standpoint. The book claims to speak from the standpoint of all those who have been victims of the Brahmins or high caste Hindus. In short, for Doniger, the primary reality of the Hindus is binary. For her, there are two Hinduisms, one of the upper castes and another of the lower/oppressed/ dalit castes. Is this alterative history, then written to boost the evangelists who are claiming to free Indian dalit

Hindus from their oppressors? Is this book looking upon all Hindus or is it shouldering the burden of speaking for the few subalterns who it claims cannot speak?

In her introduction to *The Hindus*, Doniger says that the book is creating a “narrative of religion within the narrative of history, as a *linga* ... is set in a *yoni*...” (p3). *The Hindus*, thus can be seen as Doniger’s ‘*Linga*’, her narration of Hindu religion fitted into the history of Hindu people which is figuratively the ‘*yoni*’ in which this ‘*linga*’ is placed. Doniger has done, for Hindu religion and history, what may be called in the language of classical logic, the ‘*linga-yoni-nyaya*’. But what *nyaya* or justice does Doniger do to Hindus with this equipment/*upamaana*. Apart from being an example of the dexterity of the author in choosing a very amusing (but for many a rather disgusting) simile, does this figure of speech go deep enough to draw any parallel between religion and history on one hand and the concept of Shiva and Parvati/ of Purusha and Prakriti, of Shiva as the Cause and Parvati as the Created, of the two, seemingly two, but in reality, One.

The reader is disappointed after reading the next few lines. Doniger informs us that ideas of Hindu religion are shaped by the political and economic events including the frequent foreign intrusions. In other words, history is shaping religion. Now, if this old wine was to be served, if this well-known Marxist materialist notion about religion being a product of social needs and environmental imperatives was to be reiterated, why was a profound Hindu symbol of *linga-yoni* invoked?

Nowhere through her bulky book, has Doniger showed how Hindu religious concepts have shaped India’s history. She is at a loss in pointing out how material culture is also a product/manifestation of sustained systems of Hindu thought indigenous and original. She has maintained the standard theory that Hinduism was being constructed (including its very name) by economic and material changes and above all changes made by the cultures of foreign occupants. The *linga-yoni* paradigm thus, fails to illustrate Doniger’s narrative of Hindu religion versus Hindu history. The *linga-yoni* symbol is not just a division into the duality of man and woman or mind and matter but is more than anything else, a sign of consciousness and its manifestations. That Hindu philosophy or *darshana* has also shaped the civilization of the subcontinent is not Doniger’s concern. Doniger’s ‘*linga-yoni*’ are thus no more than a catchy phrase, as she ends up writing neither an account of Hindu beliefs nor of Hindu history.

### *Jacketed in Distortion*

This is an early example in the book of use and throw tactic that the author has undertaken with Hindu symbols, myths, characters and philosophical systems. As a matter of fact, the method in the madness begins with the cover-jacket of the book itself, which shows Krishna riding a *gopika*-horse. This, whether a commissioned design, or some Orissa *patta*-weaver artist's independent creation, turns on its head, the well-known *Krishna-Gopika* relationship based on equality between the divine (*brahma*) and the individual souls (*jiva*), into a master-slave relationship termed as mind-body dichotomy. A captive of hippomania, Doniger reduces the *gopikas* to stand for 'sexual addiction', to be controlled by the mind (Krishna) as the master. I wonder how Doniger forgets that no Indian *darshana* equates the mind with the Sat/Brahma/Nirvana. This is a total travesty of what Krishna says to *gopikas* in the *Shrimadbhagvatam*, or what he says to Radha in the *Gitagovindam*. The mistake made in the beginning of the book about *linga-yoni* symbol in representing it as mind versus matter is repeated here as psyche versus soma duality.

The book ends with the explanation of the jacket. The horse (or should it be seen as a mare?) is projected by Doniger as a combination of two metaphors, the ancient Hindu symbol of sensual pleasures to be reigned by the mind and the medieval symbol of Muslim aristocratic power. These two subtexts for the symbol of the horse/mare (Muslims she claims preferred mares) are welded into the modern Hindu mind as a result of ancient and medieval historical events (the Vedic *ashvamedha* and the conquering Islamic armies with superior cavalry). Such a horse is ridden by Krishna. To the author, this painting is a glorious example of the composite art and a contribution of Islam to Hindu cultural imagination. But if one were to take it seriously, in reality, this painting turns out to be a vandalization of both Hindu and Persian images. Krishna, the Divine is cut down into Krishna the Libertine, and *gopikas*, the human longing for the Divine, are reduced to a bunch of nymphomaniacs. The Muslim conquering power (represented by the horse) becomes a moronic pool of lascivious feminine flesh. May be Doniger wishes to suggest that Hindu libertinism under the garb or divinity and fornication under the power of Muslim empire were respectively the real Hindu and Muslim psychologies inherited by modern India. May be this is the *vyangarth* of the painting, the mock and confuse agenda of the author.

### *Embedded in a Colonial View of Sanskrit and Brahmins*

“But Sanskrit the language of power, emerged in India from a minority, and at first its power came precisely from its non-intelligibility and unavailability, which made it the power of an elite group (p5).” This one sentence is sufficient to lay bare, Doniger’s reiteration of Sanskrit, not as a language revered for its profundity and usefulness (even by the author of *Tolkappium*, the pioneer Tamil work) but as an instrument of domination by the foreign occupants, the Vedic people, who overran what was before them and whose inheritors the Brahmins (in caste or mind) were using Sanskrit till medieval age, to mold whatever was indigenous, creative and fresh into the insipid orthodoxy through ‘sanskritization’ of the desi and local languages. Hence her agenda is to highlight the oppression done by Sanskrit and Brahmins upon others by delving into the vernacular sources, the more oral the better. She admits the exchanges that took place between Sanskrit (read Brahmins) and *bhashaas* (read lower *jatis*), but only to point out the badness of Sanskrit and the goodness of the vernaculars. “The bad news is that some of the vernacular literatures are marred by the misogynist and class bound mental habits of the Brahmins, while the good news is that even some Sanskrit texts, and certainly many vernacular texts, often break out of those strictures and incorporate the more open minded attitudes of the oral vernaculars.”(p7). Net result, Sanskrit is the *dalana* (crusher) vernacular is the *dalit* (crushed). The poisonously divisive implications of this portrayed divide can hardly be lost upon any modern Indian.

An extension of the Sanskrit-Brahmin versus Prakrit-lower *jati* divide is the clubbing of women and animals with the lower castes. Because both most women and of course animals did not know Sanskrit, for Doniger they become the Other of the Brahmins and “primary objects of addiction and the senses that cause addiction are likened to horses; animals often represent both animals and women the lower classes.” (p9). Thus sex and hunt are seen as ancient Hindu’s addiction and to escape from the two, he developed the ideals of (*vairagya*) renunciation and non-violence (*ahimsa*) which he could never apply logically and thoroughly. As Doniger aims to show, The Hindu pathetically swung between *maithuna-mrigayaa* on one hand and *vairagya-ahimsa* on the other. And thereby hangs a tale that Doniger unravels with her alternative acumen.

Her conclusion is clear, Hindu ideals are largely self tortuous and delusionary. “The Hindu sages dreamed of non-violence as people who live all their lives in the desert dream of oasis.” (p11). In the creation of this dichotomy between Sanskrit and the Prakrits, Doniger totally

overlooks the fact that throughout in pre-colonial India, the performing arts, temples, rituals, pilgrimages and sacred sites (*tirthas*), and wandering sermonizers were disseminating the ideas contained in Sanskrit texts to the people in a big way. Hence the divide of the Indian population into Sanskrit and its Other is unhistorical.

### ***A Sermon on 'Hindu Sensuality'***

In making assertions of this sort she knows that she will not be very much liked by the Hindu world, hence she creates right for herself, almost a quasi-holy authority of the dispassionate and outsider academic scholar of Hinduism who will 'cancel out' the prejudices that Hindus may have for their own texts in their piety and which she would be able to provide by relying on the approaches of Marx, Freud, Foucault and Said as applied to Hinduism.

But it is not for very long that she can conceal the most compelling reason for writing *The Hindus*, which is to oppose the Hindu nationalists, or the Hindu right, the BJP, the RSS and ABVP. "This book is also an alternative to the narrative of Hindu history that they tell." (p14). Doniger is never fed up of telling (while the rest of the world is of fed up of hearing it from her) the Hindu right about the "the worldly wisdom and the sensuality of the Hindus." (p16). It has totally escaped Doniger that if some Hindus are reacting adversely to the frankness about sensory pleasures that ancient Hindus observed, then should she also examine the ideas of Islamists and above all the Victorian British who were responsible for imposing upon the Hindu majority India, a regime of purist denial for several centuries. Regarding this, her book is a black out.

If Wendy Doniger is so explicit about waging a war against the BJP and associates, then it is obvious to those who know the current scene in India, which political cluster she stands with and wait upon? Can it be any other than the Communist Parties and socialist sections of the Congress Party? Her own statement leaves her with no 'alternative'.

### ***A Re-incantation of Aryan Invasion/Migration Theory and Belittling of Harappa's Culture***

Doniger is still living in the world of make belief that by persistent and continuous repetition through the agency of some academics in US and Leftist admirers (now no longer *jholawallas* (cotton shopping bags) but now limousine owners of rich NGOs) in India, she would be able to sustain the Aryan Invasion/Migration Theory as a

historical fact. The vast research that had been published by 2005 about the discovery of the Saraswati River and thousands of archeological sites discovered on its banks have been slighted by her as that more than anything else demolishes the myth of Aryan invasion/migration. The title of the chapter, 'Civilization in the Indus Valley' makes it clear that she cannot admit Saraswati to rename the civilization as it would result in marking the total change of attitude about that civilization.

Looking at the *raison de etre* of this book, giving a voice to the animals, Doniger's disappoints the reader with her analysis of the seals. She observes nothing more than the obvious that they are, "directly or indirectly related to farming..." (p70). She is disappointed, as expected that seals, "do not seem to have found female animals very interesting, and significantly, no figurines of the cows have been found" (p71). Exulting in this denial to the modern Hindus who would have lapped up the images of *go-mataa*, she proceeds to castigate the archeologists who call these animals sacred and proceeds to quote an authority that these animals are noteworthy because they represent sexual prowess. Asking why a culture cannot depict on seals animals from a utilitarian viewpoint, she implies that we should be content to view them that way, sexy and employable. In fact, de-sacralise the Indus images, is Doniger's message. For the unicorn, a most imposing image, Doniger's comment despite the very obvious horse-like neck and head, is that it is not a horse as "It does not have the proportions of a horse" (72). The denial is compelled by her faith that the Indo Aryans were one's who established image of the horse in Indian iconic history. Similarly she questions why are two human figures in front of a pair of cobras called worshipers. "Why not just two, probably nervous blokes?" (73). Though she does feel this is not just a daily life scene she is not willing to admit that it is an obvious case of Indian snake worship!! Her list of dethroning the deities is long.

The three horned deity is for her "just a guy, or that matter a gal, in a three horned hat" and so on. Her argument takes her to a strange refusal. Doniger who sees a phallus *yatra, tatra sarvatra*, refuses to admit the proto-historic Shiva's erect phallus and suggests that "what appears to be a phallus is in reality the end of the waistband (p74)." She takes pain to show that it was neither Shiva nor the god of what the Vedic people called the *shishna-pujakas*. Clearly, her chronology collapses if either is admitted. She gives a list of ten examples of how the scholars have 'run amok'. Doniger is unaware that there are fully fledged figurines of linga-yoni discovered at Harappan sites.

All the examples are taken by Doniger to deny that images from Indus-Saraswati Civilization could have been sacred or the 'the source of Hindu images.' All the mother goddesses are seen as just big-breasted women. "Big breasts are as useful to courtesans as to goddesses" (p77). To sum it up, Harappans (do not dare call them Saraswatians or Saaraswatas) were food and flesh loving folks. Why their great bath structure in stone could not have been a "hotel, or a hospital, or even a brothel?" We should not retrofit later Hindu images into them. Just retrofitting modern consumerism is as valid, implies Doniger. How it ended is anybody's guess to Doniger all suggestions that it was ended by drought, earthquake, disease, deforestation, flood, or whatever all equally good. Any way it was not a proto Hindu culture, it was neither a *linga* nor a *yoni*. For Doniger, IVC people were precursors of realists in painting. Unlike all ancient people they did not feel like painting gods and goddesses or they had none. Hence the thesis IVC could have been a cradle of later Hindu beliefs is a fiction for Doniger. "How many (Hindu deer) can you see hiding in this (Indus) forest?" (p82). Doniger is awfully confused here. For a moment she admits "stunning" "resemblances" and then hastens to preach against the "false Orientalist assumption that India was timeless" (p83).

Once again it is the politics of this book that overtakes judgment. Harappans cannot be admitted to be early Hindus and continuity of Hindu history an ancient period as it would make the contributions of the invading/migrating/transforming Aryans redundant or inconsequential. The possibility of Vedic people preceding Harappans is anathema to Doniger and notion of Vedics as the founders of Indian civilization with Harappans a later phase is too close to Hindu nationalist thought. Doniger must reject it even if it seems true seeing all the images.

### ***Vedas are Nomadic Songs***

Regarding the Vedic Aryans, Doniger provides us with four the current surmises but without giving any reason fixes the date of circa of their entry into India as 1500 BCE. The Aryan invasion theory she rejects admitting it to be 'politically driven scholarship (p92).' The second guess that they 'strolled in from Caucasus (p92)' she finds the most plausible. Slowly over a century or two, the Vedic Aryans changed linguistic, social and cultural map of India. Aryans like the "Central Asian Turks and of the British Raj, first entered Indian not as military conquerors but as traders and merchants, but in the end, it took force majeure to establish and maintain the control of the subcontinent. (p92)."



Again and again Doniger refuses to see the obvious. Vedic ideas are so fundamental to Indian life and thought, that to suggest that British and Islamic ways can provide a parallel is simply preposterous. The British had to leave and Islam carved out a Pakistan. Even their survival for the period of governance was made possible by huge waves of massive armies (Islam invading again and again over for 900 hundred years) and the British for hundred years by vastly superior military technologies. The migration theory is even less sustainable as all the migrating or even invading people into India before the Islamic, like the Greeks, Shakas, Huns and Persians assimilated into the main stream finding a place in it rather altering its major character according to their foreign identities. Actually, the invasion theory is more politically driven than the migration as it justifies the brutally exploitative Islamic and British invasions.

The third theory, namely that of Vedic people being original to India is dismissed by her outright as political reaction to the first two. She finds no 'linguistic and archeological' evidence for it. In fact it is dangerous in her view as it is "susceptible to exploitation by the particular brand of Hindu nationalism that wants the Muslims (and Christians) to get out of India" (p94).

The fourth theory that Harappans and Vedics are the same is also rejected by her as she cannot accept the origin of Indo-Aryan languages in India and the Rigveda people do not know bricks, writing, seals, plows, mortars, baths and cities. "They had never had them. In the good old days they had always slept on their saddlebags, and once they got to the Punjab they built in wood and straw" (p 95). The final evidence is course the animals (for whom this book is written) and of course the horse unknown to Harappans. "For the horse is not indigenous to India." A horse may have "loped into the Indus Valley from Central Asia or West Asia." "And so IVC could have played no part in the most ancient Hindu text, the Rig Veda, which is intensely horsey" (p97).

All in all, it is the old song; horse and Sanskrit are foreign to India. And yet the book claims to be an alternative history.

The image of the Vedic people as cowboy nomads on horsebacks is strongly etched on Doniger's mind. It was on the saddle on which the Rigveda mantras in their great variety of meters were composed. It was the saddle on which the eight kinds of *vrikritis*, the most complicated system of preserving the mantras, the hundreds of schools of Vedic recitation, the grammar, the music of Sama Veda, and the hundred string harps, were developed. Therefore, the fifth guess that the Rigveda was

conceived prior to Harappans in India, and so, does not mention bricks etc. would be a ridiculously Hindu nationalist posture for Doniger. It cannot be pre-Harappan as the horse is missing on Harappan seals.

The holy horse is indeed writing the history of India from the Aryan migration to the cover of this book.

The Vedic world is projected as that of perpetual violence in religion, in social classes, in men and women, and between the earth and the rampaging people. The Vedics did it all in some sort of intoxication of soma. Doniger gives the impression as if *ashvamedha* was done every month, when in reality it was a rare occurrence. She emphasizes little the daily homa at home which had no animal sacrifice. The picture of Vedics as massive sacrificers is to establish the theory that Buddhism arose precisely to oppose animal depletion which the middle class *vaishyas* its main followers found desirable economically. This is the pet theory of Indian history departments for the last fifty years.

On the subject of polytheism, Doniger is unable to resolve the problem of One appearing as many. To solve the riddle of polytheism among Indians, she goes back to old phrases like henotheism or kathenotheism. She in fact makes the whole issue trivial by suggesting the example of serial monogamy. Vedics (and all Indic religions since then), regard the god they are worshipping at a given time as supreme and the only just as the modern Euro-American male praises his current wife as the ultimate lover. What has been one of the profoundest achievements of Indian Darshana, namely seeing the Truth in many forms, worshipping God both as with Form and without it, regarding all forms as valid, is made the subject of a joke here. This was an opportunity to show how philosophy has shaped history by preventing ugly wars and persecution which is still the bane of Semitic cultures.

In her chapter on the Brahmanas, Doniger has her full freedom to merely to project the rituals of the period as devices that privilege the manipulative brahmins. What else, we have another instance of conflict, that between the king and brahmins. The yagna is now said to have become not the as much as true worship but an imposition by the priestly classes which are 'the foot of the brakes' on the king which is 'the foot on the accelerator' (p141). "Where the Vedas asked, and hoped, that the gods would help them, the Brahmins of these later texts arrogantly assure the worshiper that they can fix anything" (p142).

The *ashvamedha*, Doniger thinks, gave brahmins an exemplary opportunity to provide several such fixes in case of likely accidents that a horse met. “You can fix anything, if you know how and if you are a Brahmin” (p145). Doniger has a poor view of the ritual. For her it is a pretense to just gain very material things (land by the king and gifts by the priests). The spiritual aspect of the *ashvamedha* is overlooked by her and the circumstantial hurdles that come in the way of fulfillment when overcome by other rituals are seen only as ‘fixes’ by her. She uses a similar term for *prayaschittas* later calling them ‘escape clauses’.

### ***Confusions on Karma theory***

In her zest to say something new, Doniger dishes out her reasons for the origin of the doctrine of karma. “The development of the idea of merit or karma as something “to be earned, accumulated, occasionally transferred and eventually realized” owes much to the post Vedic moneyed economy” (p165). Needless to say that much of this observation comes from the cliché that the rise of Buddhism and Jainism coincides with expansion commerce and crafts at a wide scale to which the nomadic Aryans had to adjust in every way so much so that total world view changed.

First of all, the edifice of this view stands on the pedestal of a fiction that nothing at all from Harappans influenced the Vedic nomads. They just kept away from the thousands of Mohenjodaros (literally meaning ‘hillocks of the dead’). It seems that not only the people who left the Harappan cities perished somewhere and hence never influenced them with their commercial irreligious selves.

In tracing the history of the karma theory Doniger first blunders in defining the Vedic notion of death merely as return to the five elements. For her there is no vision of a quest for immortality, or a clear theory of reincarnation in the Vedic *sambitas* as they believed in doing karma or ritual for happiness of the life here and now. “Their primary concerns were vedic: family, offspring, sons, the lineage of the flesh” (p178). Hence the notion of karma could not be larger than the immediate material well-being. What would these untutored nomads want beyond their daily bread? By the Upanishadic times, however, she recognizes that karma has six meanings: action, ritual action, moral action, action with consequences, portion/ *praarabdha* (I am a product of I have been doing), a package of action that can be transferred to others. But the reader is surprised to know that very soon the inheritors of the Vedas developed a sense of disgust with the crowded areas of the new life of commerce and

prosperity and harking back to the simple days on saddlebags, they glorified the lives of the people who renounced all the good things and went into the forest. Their desire to escape was so great that an idea of no return or no rebirth or liberation was also developed so that the Gangetic plains would become less crowded. There is no great Indian thought that Doniger does not trivialize.

### ***Replacing the Four Aims of Life by Conflict between Addiction and Renunciation***

The standard tactic followed in Doniger's book is to regurgitate the old and well known data on all things Hindu with a spin that gives it the look of marvelous new discovery and insight. The classical doctrine of *chaturvarga* or the four *purushārthas* (*dharmā*, *artha*, *kāma* and *moksha*, as the four aims of human life) are supposed to provide for a complete life that reconciles the individual desires and ambitions with social functions and spiritual contentment through a process of moral and spiritual growth. Doniger projects these aims agonizing conflicts on the playground of the Hindu heart. She reincarnates the old Orientalist falsehood about the Hindu as a compulsive sensualist and then proceeds to further discredit him as a psychologically wired ascetic. In both activities of indulgence and abnegation the Hindu is for her, abnormal and violent.

“Hinduism was violent not only in its sensuality but in its reaction against that sensuality ---- violent, that is, both in its addiction and in the measures that it took to curb those addictions sensuality but in the measures it took to curb those sensuality (acknowledging , like Dr. Johnson, that it is easier to abstain than to be moderate” (p194). While the urges of *bhoga* and *yoga* are seemingly contrary, the great success of the Indian systems has been to provide an immense variety of paths to transit smoothly from one to another. Doniger denigrates the whole cultural achievement of these *sādhana* traditions by calling them violent. She had only to read the *shatakas* of Bhartṛihari to see the contemplative mode and moral control that leaves no room for untutored violence in such matters. She does not want to admit the finest achievement of Indian systems, namely that *pravṛtti* and *vishaya bhoga* graduates to *nivṛtti* after a satiation of the former. The higher joys of spiritual life come after a stable *vairāgya* or turning away from the limited pleasures of the world. The hall marks of all pursuits, material and spiritual in the Hindu world are *rasa* (taste) and *ananda* (joy). Doniger ignores them both, deliberately with an agenda. Doniger makes a St. Augustine out of the Hindu seeker.

### ***What do the Animals and Women ‘Speak’ After All?***

Reading through the book, I was unable to discover if Doniger succeeds in telling us about the some specific contributions through distinctive ideas or exemplary action that women have made in the Hindu world or if the animals have had a better deal at the hands of the Hindus. Other than the obvious refrain that they are victimized, Doniger is unable to tell us when or how they rose above the tide. In fact, she only excels in adding some layers to their suffering through dubious psychoanalysis which is not corroborated by the textual or other evidence. Thus Vali, a recognized victim in the Indian tradition, reveals Doniger, is actually killed because Rama wanted to vent on him the anger that he had pent up against his brothers Bharata and Lakshmana. Rama. As Doniger enlightens us through her psychoanalysis of Rama, he subconsciously hated Bharata for taking away his kingdom and he detested Lakshmana for secretly lusting after Sita. “Animals often replace, in dreams, people toward whom the dreamer has strong, dangerous, inadmissible, and hence repressed emotions” (p239). Hindus, courtesy Doniger, are now able to see that lila of the subconscious thinking of their *avatars* which Valmiki and several other great poets left untouched. Hindus also should also realize how they have been really using the animals, that is as scape-goats. “All the fun is in the monkeys” (p 236).

### ***The False Thesis: Hindus habitually Destroyed Hindu, Buddhists and Jain Temples***

In a brave attempt to sanitize the iconoclastic plunder let loose on India by Islamic rulers, Doniger has proposed a thesis that Muslims were doing what the Indians kings has been doing to each other, much before the Muslims arrived on the scene. Far from giving specific instances of Hindus of one sect plundering temples of another sect or of Buddhists or Jains, Doniger overlooks, like Eaton, what the Indian texts say in contrast with the stated practices of the Muslims across the world. As early as the Smriti period, the Manusmriti, in Adhyaaya7 verse 201, says, “*Jitvaa sampuujayet devaan braahmaNaan ca eva dhaarmik-aan/ pradadyaat parihaaraansha khyapayet abbayaani ca.* (After conquering {another state, the victor} should honor the deities, brahmins, and the holy persons by gifts from the wealth collected, and tell the people to live without fear) ”. The local gods and hence their shrines or caves were not to be destroyed, is the clear meaning of the phrase ‘*sampuujayet devaan.*’ All those involved with the arts, crafts and religious activity were to be left untouched as they were not combatants. This is in stark contrast with the ruthless activity of

Islamic invaders who sold into slavery all sections of the Indian population in the markets of Central Asia.

In the latter half of the second millennium CE there have been instances of the Hindu kings taking home the main deity of the conquered city. But it is also well known that the conquering king was obliged make a more glorious temple for the escorted deity in his capitol. There are texts that describe how early and essentially this has to be done to avoid divine wrath. The victor king also invited the scholars and poets by enhanced patronage. How were the Islamic conquerors emulating the Hindus by sacking the temples and burying the deities at the door steps of their mosques?

### ***Spiting Hindu Immigrants to America***

The enthusiasm that Doniger has for reforming Hindus (and thus beckoning them to submit at the springs of knowledge that are found gushing forth in the Euro American departments of Indology and South Asian studies) is best displayed in the chapter called ‘Hindus in America.’ This chapter gives hardly any account of the positive contributions to America by the Hindus and Hinduism since the fifties, something so obvious the whole world but not to Doniger. She shows no interest in exploring how the values and beliefs of Hindus may have helped them to be successful immigrants. On the contrary she has discovered the *Bhagavad-Gita*, Vivekananda and Vedanta (which she pejoratively refers to neo-Vedanta) as *bête noir*. It never occurs to her that doctrine of Vedantic inclusiveness could be the main reason behind Hindus getting peacefully and creatively assimilated into the modern USA in contrast with the tussle that immigrants professing Islam are going through. One does not have to look far for reasons behind Doniger’s underestimation of Vedanta and Vivekananda. The BJP in India elevates Vivekananda as a modern thinker while the Left diminishes him as a reactionary.

### ***More committed to Marxism than Hinduism***

The book aims to be marketed and established with the help of like-minded academics, in the West but more so in India, to bolster the political interests of a waning Marxism and a growing anarchism that is already tearing apart the prosperity of the nation by struggled such as the Maoist war being waged from Nepal to Tamil Nadu.

It is well known that since the infiltration of Mr. Nurul Hasan as the education minister into Indira Gandhi’s cabinet in the early 70’s, the

history and sociology departments of Indian universities were gradually permeated by Marxist teachers who raised a generation of students who painted ancient India as a primitively feudal society which was only culturally enriched and not plundered by the Islamic invaders from Central Asia. The great antagonism that occurred between in medieval times between the ancient Hindu way of life and the values of Islamic invading classes was underplayed or totally negated by the writings of these historians. The inheritance of that rift so tragically agonic to the modern times was laid at the door of the British colonizers by portraying them as the great dividers.

Most of these Marxist scholars were deficient in their study of Hinduism and nearly all of them suffered from the lack of reading evidences from original sources in Sanskrit. In fact, they created an academic culture under which the Indian PhDs are not even now required to learn ancient or medieval languages and hence they habitually rely on the secondary material written in English. Ignorance of classical and medieval languages has now become the hall mark of Indian universities and the national scholarship in general. Doniger has supplied the Left Liberal professors of history, sociology and cultural studies with a book which not only tows their political line but also follows their method of not at all quoting in original language even the crucial sentences essential to substantiate a hypothesis. It furthers the reliance on the English language (and hence the hegemony of the derivative Anglophones in India) in Hindu studies.

### ***A Pillar of Garrulity***

So much of this book is repeating the same ideas from one end to another that the reader begins to suspect Doniger relies like Brahmins (and Goebbels) on the power of mantras. One can imagine that as a teacher giving courses on Hinduism (a subject distant, quaint and mysterious and sometimes repulsive to the monotheism indoctrinated Christian majority of her students), she has developed a style that makes Hinduism entertaining to their mindset by frequent digressions and startling comparisons with American life or modern ideas. But while in a class some things are meant to go unrecorded, in a book they are neither appropriate nor seemly. On the contrary, for a book meant to be widely circulated in India, such antics make a disaster in cross cultural studies and international relations. In the short run they become tiresome as most of this book is. In the long run, such personalized and heavily politicized arguments about Hinduism, set a trend of writing which is unhealthy for Indology studies.

Take for instance, the footnote on the spellings of the word 'pipal'. "The spell check on my Mac tried to correct "pipal" to "papal" through- out, revealing a hitherto unsuspected Eurocentric, indeed philo-Catholic virus deeply programmed into my computer, Microsoft Orientalism (p73)." The key note is set as early as this page. Such frivolity is deliberately and copiously woven into the whole book and to what end is also quite obvious.

***No Itihasa, Darshana or Drishti, but a Srishti of the Torn Apart Hindu***

Doniger has stated that she is not writing a history of Hindus, their historical epochs, dynasties, or movements of people from outside India or within India. She is also not going to write, she avows a history of philosophical concepts. She is using myths to examine the narrative of religion within the narrative of history (her *linga-yoni nyaya*!). For those reader who may not be familiar with the postmodern terminologies like "narrative", what then is she doing? Can that be put into a layman's language?

It seems to me, that leaving aside the tactic of using shocking metaphors, she is delving into the myths of Hindus, and of others like, Buddhists etc., to establish some basic psychological traits she thinks the Hindus have developed as a people. So, here we have, some agonic paradigms of the Hindu mind such as: violence vs ahimsa, sensuality vs. renunciation, Puritanism (read Brahminism) vs. bodily urges, humans vs animals, horses vs cows, upper castes vs. lower castes and males vs females. The Hindu Tree of Life (*kalpataru/nyagrodha/ashvattha*) is replaced in this book by a Cactus Donigerus, professedly full with nectar of diversity and sensuality, but in reality no more than a bundle of flesh piercing thorns. One may ask if Doniger is carrying forward full steam the line of Frazer, Freud and Levi Strauss who reduced the myths of the 'pagans' into simple opposites such as: king vs his murderous successor, spring vs winter, Id vs Ego, hot vs cold, cooked vs. uncooked and so on. Her argument on Hinduism, is a detailed debasing of a lofty metaphysical vision into a schizophrenic agony. Doniger's '*Linga*' is a column, not of light but of darkness, not of consonance but dissonance.



## 1. Introduction

### **The Academic Problems with Wendy Doniger's "*The Hindus: An Alternative History*"**<sup>7</sup> by Vishal Agarwal

"Aldous Huxley once said that an intellectual was someone who had found something more interesting than sex; in Indology, an intellectual need not make that choice at all." Wendy Doniger<sup>8</sup>

"Professor Wendy Doniger is known for being rude, crude and very lewd in the hallowed portals of Sanskrit Academics. All her special works have revolved around the subject of sex in Sanskrit texts ranging from Siva: The Erotic Ascetic to Tales of Sex and Violence...Never one to shy away from sex, she threw herself into the job of translating the [Kama Sutra] ... She was particularly interested by the parts that justify adultery and the list of ways to get rid of a man ... When she was translating it (over a period of a few years and numerous Sanskrit classes), she frequently found herself having to take cold showers." BBC

Wendy Doniger's book "*The Hindus, an Alternative History*" published and distributed by Penguin since 2009 has been a phenomenal sales success. Within one year of its release (by June 2010), more than 600 libraries in North America had acquired a copy of the book. The Indian division of Penguin brought out an Indian reprint as well in 2010. Several professors in the United States are using her book as a textbook in their college level classes.

Doniger claims that her book is about Hindu women, low castes, dogs and horses. But the claim merely appears to be an excuse to indulge

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<sup>7</sup> The Penguin Press: New York (2009). Reprinted in India by Penguin in 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Wendy Doniger (1993). "When a lingam is just a good cigar: Psychoanalysis and Hindu Sexual Fantasies", in Boyer, L. B., Boyer, R. et al. (Eds.) *The Psychoanalytic Study of Society, Vol. 18: Essays in Honor of Alan Dundes*, (pp. 81-103), Hillsdale, US, Analytic Press, Inc. (page 81)

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Wendy Doniger, March 27, 2002,

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/asianlife/tv/network\\_east\\_late/biogs/wendy\\_doniger.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/asianlife/tv/network_east_late/biogs/wendy_doniger.shtml), available at

[http://web.archive.org/web/20020911134952/http://www.bbc.co.uk/asianlife/tv/network\\_east\\_late/biogs/wendy\\_doniger.shtml](http://web.archive.org/web/20020911134952/http://www.bbc.co.uk/asianlife/tv/network_east_late/biogs/wendy_doniger.shtml) <checked on 11th March

2014>

in bouts of lewd descriptions, imaginary rapes, violence, titillating sleaze, drugs, booze and the like - all of which is then superimposed on the Hindus and on their traditions. As usual, she kinks fairly straightforward narratives in Hindu scriptures to present her own gossip-tabloid level interpretations. The over-arching themes of her book are sex and violence, and not women, low castes or animals. In this respect, her book is no different from her areas of focus in the past – (imaginary) sex and violence, except that it is worse than her prior works in many ways.

Medieval India is not her forte, and therefore, Doniger is often seen reproducing (and even amplifying) the errors already present in her secondary and tertiary sources. The book is more than 600 pages long, and the number of errors average more than one per page. There are errors of chronology, of historical dates and sequence of events, geography, verifiable historical facts, proper names, translations of Sanskrit texts and so on. These errors are compounded by strained and agenda driven interpretations that whitewash medieval atrocities on Indians, perpetuate colonial and racist stereotypes about Hindus, attribute many positive developments within the Hindu society to impulses from Christianity or Islam and grossly distort historical evidence.<sup>10</sup>

In her book, Hindu Deities are presented as lustful, Hindu saints are falsely alleged by the author to have indulged in sexual orgies, or to have 'taken actions against Muslims', Hindu worshippers are compared to cheating boyfriends, 'intoxication' is a 'central theme of the Vedas' and Hindu scriptures are presented as a litany of tales of faithful women forsaken by their ungrateful husbands. One wonders if some of these caricatures of Hinduism really reflect the author's own life rather than the culture and traditions of Hindus. Doniger claims to 'love' Hindus or their culture in her book, but this claim appears quite bizarre, perverse and frightening.

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<sup>10</sup> In her more recent book "*On Hinduism*" (Aleph Book Company: New Delhi 2013; reprinted by OUP: 2014), Doniger acknowledges, "Critics complained, justifiably, that the book [*The Hindus*] was stronger in the ancient period (where I know what I am talking about) than in the Mughal, British and modern periods (where I do not, and relied on not always reliable secondary sources)..." (page 574). In reality, Doniger does not seem to know much about the ancient period of India either, as the chapter reviews show.

An earlier collection of essays reveals several flaws in her book.<sup>11</sup> This compilation is more closely tied to the contents of the book and is more comprehensive.

## Types of Flaws in “The Hindus”

The following are broad categories of errors in her book. A specific listing chapter by chapter follows later.

**1. Factual Errors:** This is the least controversial category of problems with her book. For example, if Mt. Abu is geographically in Rajasthan, it could not have been in Gujarat despite her claims! If a certain verse in the Ramayana does not exist, it simply does not exist contrary to Doniger’s spurious reference to it. Unfortunately, “The Hindus” has hundreds of factual errors that have not been corrected by Doniger even though she had been made aware of them as early as 2010. Doniger even goes to the extent of blatant falsification of the historical record. For example, she claims (on page 459) that Bengal’s Sultan Alauddin Husain (r. 1493 – 1519) patronized the Hindu Saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. The historical biographies actually show that the Saint stayed away from the realm of the Sultan to prevent his capture, and the Sultan himself destroyed numerous Hindu temples. See our reviews of chapters 9 and 16 as examples of her factual errors.

**2. Outdated Information:** History is based on inferences drawn upon or interpretations of hard data from literature, archaeology, historical records and so on. More and more data of this type is being brought to light year after year, as far as India is concerned. Unfortunately, Doniger’s sources are often outdated and she has ignored even easily available works of current scholarship. For example, Doniger’s knowledge of the Indus-Saraswati Civilization relies primarily on decades old books, leading to what today would be considered as very amateurish scholarship. Doniger fails to use current specialist literature while writing her chapters on ancient India, resulting in perpetuation of old and outdated theories and facts. A cursory look at the bibliography for chapter 3 reveals that of the 110 endnotes, only 2 are derived from the works from contemporary western Harappanarchaeologists (one each from Kenoyer and Possehl), two from contemporary Indian archaeologists, and

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<sup>11</sup> T R N Rao and S Kalyanaraman (2010), Eds.; *Portrayal of Hinduism in Western Indology*; World Association of Vedic Studies (USA)

half a dozen or so from almost a century old report by Marshall. The rest (approximately a hundred) end notes show her reliance on secondary works of historians of Communist orientation (e.g., Romila Thapar, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya), authors of generalist books in Indian history (e.g., John Keay) and other motley non-specialists in Harappan archaeology. Knowledge of this civilization has been changing practically every year due to ongoing archaeological digs. Doniger's near total unfamiliarity of works of contemporary archaeologists of Harappan culture is apparent, in addition and results in the chapter being full of amusing errors. As an example of her ignorance, we can point out to her *virtual* black-out of sites in the Ghaggar basin, in the Doab and in Gujarat. Throughout the chapter, the impression given is that the valley of river Indus was the center of gravity of that culture, whereas it has now been known for at least 2 decades that 65% or more of the sites were in the Ghaggar valley, Kutch and Saurashtra. When it comes to the Vedic literature, she regurgitates colonial interpretations that have long been rejected with adequate data. See our reviews of chapters 3 – 5 of the book.

In her chapter on Dharmashastras, she claims (p. 304 sqq.) that the first Sanskrit inscription was published by the Indo-Greek King Rudraman. And then she goes on to create a pseudo-history of how the foreign ruler did this to gain legitimacy in the eyes of Hindus (p. 307) etc. One could have appreciated this remark if it were in a book written 30 years ago, but since then, at least 2 chaste Sanskrit inscriptions predating Rudraman's inscription by almost 250 years and attributed to the Brahmin Kanva dynasty have been found in the region of Mathura.

### **3. Perpetuation of Racist and Orientalist Stereotypes:**

Doniger characterizes herself as a 'recovering Orientalist', which is her own choice, but unfortunately a regressive one. She dwells incessantly on caste, curry, suttee and monkeys etc. and depicts the Hindus as the 'horrid, erotic other.' On pages 468-469, Doniger says - "*Mosques also provided a valuable contrast with temples within the landscape of India....The mosque, whose serene calligraphic and geometric contrasts with the perpetual motion of the figures depicted on the temple, makes a stand against the chaos of India, creating enforced vacuums that India cannot rush into with all its monkeys and peoples and colors and the smells of the bazaar and, at the same time, providing a flattering frame to offset that very chaos.*" Doniger's comment has been described by many as both racist and orientalist. She exhibits a real tone deafness to portraying history both accurately and sensitively when she essentializes the Hindu Main Street of Sultanate India as "monkeys and peoples, colors and smells, and chaos" – just a variant of the cow, caste and curry stereotype of India and Hindus. Doniger makes it appear that the large-scale

displacement of temples by mosques was some kind of an architectural blessing on India. It is pertinent to ask if she has similar views on ongoing destruction of Hindu temples by Islamists in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and in Kashmir (India). In fact, towards the beginning of the book itself (p. 40), Doniger makes the following derogatory remark against the Hindus - “*If the motto of Watergate was ‘Follow the money’, the motto of the history of Hinduism could well be ‘Follow the mon3key’ or, more often ‘Follow the horse’.*” Statements like these remind us of racists in the United States comparing President Obama to monkey. One can’t be surprised then by the praise that she has received on a white supremacist web board.<sup>12</sup>

#### **4. Trivializing Hindu Spirituality and Philosophy:**

Spiritual scriptures are not meant to be read literally. They abound in analogies, metaphors and symbolism that convey deeper truths. Unfortunately, Doniger debases profound scriptures like the Upanishads and gives them her own crass and often, an obscene spin.

On page 170-171, Doniger proposes a cute theory as an explanation for the origin of the theory of reincarnation – “*The theory of reincarnation, a recycling not of tin cans but of souls, may reflect an anxiety of overcrowding, the claustrophobia of a culture fenced in, an kind of urban Angst....Is this fear of crowds related to the shock of the new experience of city life in the Ganges Valley? Were there already slums in Kashi (as there may already have been in Harappa)? Is a fear of this sort is what inspired the theory of reincarnation, who precisely was it who was afraid?*” The logic used by Doniger militates against the conclusion drawn by her. Was India or any part of the world really ‘overcrowded’ then? And speaking logically, if there was overcrowding on this earth, why would Indians want dead persons to take rebirth on earth again? They’d want them to go to other worlds and just stay there. Reincarnation is a very widespread belief found in numerous cultures all over the world, including societies that live in sparsely populated and remote islands. Doniger’s views are too speculative because there was plenty of place for cities to expand into the surrounding countryside and forests in this period. In fact, the Buddhist scriptures (Sutta Nipata for instance) makes the Buddha yearn for a good time when there will be continuous human inhabitations that are not interspersed by forested land.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=690954> <checked on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2014>

In another example, while discussing Upanishadic descriptions of the journey of the soul after death, Doniger remarks (p. 175) - “*The people who reach the moon in the Brihadaranyaka are eaten by the gods (as they are eaten by animals in the Other World in the Brahmanas), but the gods in the Chhbandogya merely eat the moon, a more direct way to account for its waning.*” This is an example of Doniger understanding the mystical language of the Upanishads in a very literal way, missing their heart completely. The texts use a metaphorical and poetic language to stress that performance of good karma alone is not adequate because its results are finite. Eventually, these souls that reach the ‘moon’ due to performance of good karma also have to take a rebirth. No heaven is permanent – this is the import of these passages. She caricatures the Yoga philosophy of Patanjali as exercises of mind and body (p. 505). In chapter 18, dealing with Darshanas, she often sacrifices accuracy in favor of literary cutisms.

Doniger’s acolytes and students defend her by marveling at the ‘breadth’ of her scholarship. In reality, her scholarship lacks depth, and is very shallow. Perhaps, Doniger’s self-perception of being an expert on reproduction, sex, rape, seduction itself is a fantasy. For example, Rahul Peter Das, while commenting on another of her books, says:

“Not only [has]....O’Flaherty hardly anything gleaned from such texts, but the little they do have is based on more or less chance finds and also shows an unfamiliarity with these works... .....what she writes does create the impression that she is oblivious of the very complicated issues involved here, and her work in general shows no signs of her having studied Indian theories of reproduction....in more than a rudimentary fashion...Such oversights do make one liable to be wary with regard to her other translations....”<sup>13</sup>

In other words, Doniger does not understand well in Hindu scriptures what she considers her forte (i.e. sex, reproduction). She would have surely lost the debate to Ubhaya Bharati, the wife of Mandana Mishra!

**5. Demeaning Remarks against Hindus and Hinduism:** Doniger makes sweeping disparaging remarks against Hindus and their tradition in her book. For example, writing about the

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<sup>13</sup> Rahul Peter Das (2003), *The Origin of the Life of a Human Being*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Ltd.: New Delhi (pp. 11-12 and fn. 20)

wife of a gambler described in the Rigveda, she says (on page 123) - "*The gambler's wife is one of a more general company of long suffering wives, devoted but often deserted, who people ancient Hindu literature and the society that this literature reflects.*" On the same page, she remarks that women appear only as 'objects' of men in the Rigveda – a factually incorrect claim.

On the next page, Doniger calls the Vedic worshipper's successive praise of different Deities as 'serial monogamy' and then gives this parallel – "*You, Susan, are the only woman I've loved; you are the only one.*" "*You, Helen, are the only woman I've ever loved; you are the only one.*" Comparing a Vedic worshiper to a philandering boyfriend is a perfect example of how Doniger's personal biases and cultural conditioning render her deaf and blind to an ethos totally different from her own. Her flippant analogy, fails to convey the true spirit and intent of a Vedic worshiper, or at least how Hindus have viewed Vedic teachings. What Doniger forgets is that in real example, Susan and Helen are completely different women, and the debauched boyfriend will not reveal his love for Susan to Helen or vice versa. But the Vedic Deities are not separate from each other, and the worshipper's devotion (or lack thereof) to one Deity is not hidden from the other Deities either. Thus, the more appropriate analogy, since she is so enamored by this literary took, would be, "Helen, the only woman I love is my wife, but she is also the mother of my children, the daughter of her parents, the beloved sister of her brother, etc." This, in fact, is a common example that traditional Hindu philosophers and preachers provide to explain the metaphysical concept of God as the One in Many, and the Many in One. The Vedic Deities are born of each other, they merge to constitute one Divinity, their origin is One, they represent different aspects of One truth and so on – all these are some interrelationships of Deities stated in the Rigveda. Surely, Susan cannot be born of Helen or Helen of Susan.

Throughout the book, Doniger credits non-Hindus with numerous good innovations in the Hindu society. Conversely, she blames Hindus for the flaws of others! For example, on page 450, she says - "*In 1350, a century after Raziya's death, the historian Isami objected to her blatant interracial liaison, remarking that a woman's place was at her spinning wheel....The sexism they already had in India, thank you...*". Now, the historian Abdul Malik Isami belonged to a family of Arab nobles who had migrated to India a century earlier. His work 'Futuh-us-Salatin' is in Persian and it can hardly represent the prevalent attitudes of Indians (who were more than 90% Hindus) in those days. To ridicule the sexism of 14<sup>th</sup> century Indians on the basis of his statements is unfair to Indians. For that matter, Isami hated Hindus and even chided Muhammad bin Tughlaq (the then Sultan

of Delhi) for being soft on Hindus even though Tughlaq had occasionally indulged in bouts of temple destruction and slaughter of Brahmins. Will Doniger then say – “The hatred for Hindus they already had in India, thank you...”

On page 458, she blames the Hindus for the practice of veil worn by Muslim women - “*In the culture at large, Hindus adopted a number of Muslim social customs. When the royal women of the Turks and the Rajputs first met, the Muslim women did not keep particularly rigidly to purdah; they joined in the drinking parties and literary salons.....It was after they had lived in India for a while and encountered the Rajput codes of modesty and honor that the women were more strictly concealed by the curtain of purdah and the zenana (harem) and at the same time also adopted some aspects of the Hindu caste system. Hindu women, in turn, adopted a modified version of the Muslim purdah. What a pity that each side took the worst of both the worlds; why not ditch both purdah and caste?*” The examples given by Doniger to show that Hindus and Muslims borrowed the worst from each other do not seem to bear logic because her statements actually seem to suggest (falsely) that Hindus did not borrow anything bad from Muslims, whereas the Muslims borrowed caste as well as purdah from the Hindus. In fact, her generalization only shows her lack of serious research because historians who have looked at the historical data available have reached different conclusions. For instance, it is pointed out that we do not get any reference to purdah in the history of Rajputs prior to the Islamic conquests and there are several instances in history where Rajput women fought in battles as late as the 14<sup>th</sup> cent., and also participated with their menfolk in outdoor games.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, there was no purdah among Hindu women in South India – the area least affected by Islamic rule. Even if the Turkish invaders did not have caste, they had their own systems of social stratifications and differentiations along the lines of ethnic origins. And whereas the Hindu rulers did not accord a second class status to Muslims within their dominions, the Muslim rulers in general accorded a lower status to Hindus than Muslims in their rule. The Turkish looked down upon native Indian converts to Islam, and chroniclers like Barani did not mince words in considering these converts as wretches, and inferior to the true blooded Muslims from Central Asia and Arabia. Surely, this religious discrimination and racism was not due to Hindu influence.

On page 507, she claims that - “[*Shankaracharya's*] philosophy... may have been buoyed up by the need to respond to the monotheist philosophies of Islam...”

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<sup>14</sup> For the relevant academic references, see the review of chapter 16.



Similarly, she credits Christianity with innovative features of the Dvaita philosophy (even though some of them like everlasting hell can be easily credited to Jain sources). She claims that the Vaishnava doctrine of Prapatti might have been an adaptation of Islamic doctrine of surrender to Allah (p. 515). As to why these speculations are wrong, refer to the relevant chapter reviews.

On page 467, Doniger makes the ridiculous remark that Hindu heroes Harihara and Bukka double-crossed the Muslim Sultan who had captured them and converted them to Islam, by reverting to Hinduism when they were able to get more than 1000 miles away from their captor! No Hindu hero escapes her wrath. She alleges that Ramanuja 'took action against the Muslims' (p. 510) when all he did was to retrieve a Hindu icon from Muslim captivity. While discussing the biographies of the trinity of Vedanta (Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhvacharya), all she selects are episodes that can be given a kinky twist, and ones wherein she can accuse these Saints of behaving in an unsaintly manner.

Doniger's worst invectives are of course reserved for cherished Hindu Deities. She portrays Lord Rama as a mentally weak, misogynist and violence prone character who acted unfairly against Shurpanakha. Apparently, according to Doniger, Rama banished Sita from Ayodhya because he was scared of becoming a slave of senses like his father Dasharatha. The Mahabharata has several women characters who act as guides and teachers of kings and sages. But in her chapters on the Mahabharata, all that Doniger seems concerned about is who slept with whom.

**6. Negationism:** Just as the neo-Nazis deny the Jewish Holocaust, Doniger seeks to deny or apologize for the large scale destruction of Hindu shrines, and persecution of Hindus under the rule of Muslim kings in medieval times. *At least 8 times* in her book, she makes the atrocious and historically untenable claim that the destruction of Hindu structures by fanatical Islamic rulers was foreshadowed by supposed destruction of Buddhist shrines by Hindus in ancient India. This claim is made in irrelevant contexts (in chapter on Harappan culture, chapter on Vedic culture etc.) and can only be called pathetic propaganda, and apologia for current day iconoclasm by the Taliban. She perversely terms this religiously motivated iconoclasm as 'recycling' of architecture.

On page 449, she writes - "*He [Muhammad bin Qasim] kept his promises though he did impose the jaziya, a tax on male adults who would have been liable to military service if they had been Muslims; non-Muslims were excused this duty*

*but were required instead to pay for their military protection.”* One wonders - Military protection of non-Muslims from whom? From non-Muslims? What if the non-Muslims did not want the Muslim rulers to protect them from non-Muslims? Jaziya was a poll tax (like the ‘protection money’ extracted by mafia gangs from a helpless society in return of freedom from molestation by the same gang) demanded from non-Muslims because they are infidels living under a ‘Muslim state’.

Sanctioned by the Koran, the tax (often as much as a month’s income every year) was meant to demonstrate that the infidels were inferior to Muslims. It was an instrument to humiliate them and disarm them, exclude them from administration and sometimes induce them to convert to Islam. Doniger does not ask if the Hindus had the option of wielding arms for the Arab state of Sindh and therefore exempt themselves from Jaziya. Doniger’s apologia also falsely assumes that each and every adult Muslim male in India was a member of the Arab army in Sindh.

Throughout the Muslim rule in India, large sections of the Hindu society were forced to disarm themselves (so that they were not a threat to the Muslim rulers) and suffered economic hardships and pressures to convert to Islam as a result. Even as we write, the Taliban are forcing Hindus and Sikhs in parts of Pakistan to pay astronomical amounts of money as Jaziya failing which they are either expelled or killed. Therefore, it is ethically and socially irresponsible of Doniger to peddle these kinds of apologies for this hated poll-tax meant to humiliate the ‘infidels’.

On page 468, she even makes the patently false claim that destruction of Hindu temples motivated them to construct even grander temples, as if Islamic iconoclasm was a blessing upon the Hindus. On the destruction of Hindu temples under Islamic rule, she pens this apologia (page 455) - *“Some Muslim rulers, like some Hindu rulers before them, destroyed Hindu temples. Desecration was not necessarily prompted by bigotry, though some rulers might well have been motivated (or have claimed to be motivated) by religious fanaticism, a hatred of idolatry or polytheism or any religion but Islam. Some, lured by the legendary wealth of temples, did it to get the plunder, and others went for the temples because as we saw in South India, the temples were the centers of political and economic power.”* Doniger’s attempts to equate Islamic iconoclasm with ‘Hindu iconoclasm’ are derived from the writings of apologists of Islam (e.g., Richard Eaton) and Indian Marxists.

A historian Andre Wink, criticizing these views, puts the historical record in its correct perspective – *“Apologists for Islam, as well as*

*some Marxist scholars in India, have sometimes attempted to reduce Islamic iconoclasm in India to a gratuitous 'lust for plunder' on the part of the Muslims, unrelated in any direct way to the religion itself, while depicting Hindu temples as centers of political resistance which had to be suppressed. Concomitantly, instances have been described in the popular press of Hindu destruction of Buddhist and Jain places of worship, and the idea was promoted that archaeological evidence shows this to have happened on a large scale, and hence that Hindu kings could be placed on a par with the Muslim invaders. The fact is that evidence for such 'Hindu iconoclasm' is incidental, relating to mere destruction, and too vague to be convincing."* See our review of Chapter XVI for all these references.

Two pages later, Doniger makes this untenable generalization - *"The difference is not merely that some Muslims may have had the additional invective of iconoclasm but that for the most part during this period the Turks had more power to destroy than Hindus to destroy Turks. But the will, including, in many quarters, goodwill, was there on both sides."* This statement, meant to balance the large scale Islamic iconoclasm with the clearly much fewer instances of Hindu retaliation, is not supported by historical facts. Throughout the book, Doniger castigates and berates Hindus for imagined reasons, and apologizes for the persecutors of Hindus. Doniger's words are as absurd as say, *"The difference is not merely that some Nazis may have had the additional invective of anti-Semitism but that for most part during WWII the Nazis had more power to destroy than Jews to destroy Nazis."*

It is not true that the Hindus everywhere had less power to destroy Muslims at all times. What needs to be pointed out is that even when Hindus ruled parts of India (as in the Vijayanagara empire, Rajput kingdoms, Orissa, Assam, the Maratha Empire etc.) for several centuries after the establishment of Muslim rule over other parts of India, they (Hindu rulers) refrained from any large scale destruction of mosques, forcible conversions of Muslims, massacres of Muslims, imposition of additional taxes on Muslims, defilement of holy books of Islam, disarmament of Muslims, rapes of Muslim women etc. in their domains, due to the tolerant and inclusive nature of Hinduism – a positive characteristic of Hinduism that Doniger will perhaps not permit.

There is contrary evidence to counter the claim that goodwill prevailed at all times between Hindus and Muslims. For instance the often quoted statement of Al Biruni – *"The repugnance of the Hindus against foreigners increased more and more when the Muslims began to make their inroads into their country....Mahmud utterly ruined the prosperity of the country...Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the inveterate aversion towards all Muslims. This is the*

*reason too, why Hindu sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country – conquered by us, and have fled to places which our hands cannot reach yet.”*

On page 546, she claims that there is evidence for fewer than 200 forcible conversions of Hindus to Islam during the reign of Aurangzeb. Entire communities in northern India attribute their Islamic faith to conversion under duress during Aurangzeb’s rule but apparently Doniger expects that we should have a conversion certificate for each and every case from the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**7. Ethnocentrism and Cultural Insensitivity:** On page 133, while discussing the Vedic cremation, she mentions Rigveda 10.16.1 which asks Agni to consume the body being cremated thoroughly, “*The great French Indologist Louis Renou translated the idea of being cooked perfectly as au point, just as one would say of a good steak.*” Doniger obviously knows that beef is an anathema to modern Hindus, and perhaps for this reason, she has made a remark that would be highly offensive to Hindus today, especially when made in the context of their holy scriptures. So much for cultural sensitivity and appreciation of diversity!

Unfortunately, her ethnocentrism (wherein anything Hindu is perceived through the lens of an American lens) leads her to thoroughly misinterpret key episodes and stories in Hindu scriptures, whether it be the Ramayana or the Chhaandogya Upanishad. For example, when Lakshmana says that he recognizes only the anklets of Sita and not any other jewelry (Doniger attributes this episode to Valmiki’s Ramayana, whereas it is actually in Ramacharitmanas), Doniger sees Lakshmana’s guilty conscience and ‘sexual tension’ between him and Rama over Sita. See our reviews of chapters 8 and 9 for more examples of this type.

**8. Irrelevant Meanderings, Reckless Free Association and Omissions:** Quite often, her ‘alternative history’ dwells on topics that are completely un-related to Hindu women, Dalits or even to animals. For example, Doniger devotes 2 pages (pp. 566-568) to a discussion on the elite Muslim women in Mughal harems, and Muslim women in other dynasties. What does this digression have to do with the history of Hindus? This is just one of the dozens of useless digressions in the book that unnecessarily and greatly increase its bulk.

For a book that claims to be an alternative history of Hindus, it is really strange that Doniger almost ignores the contributions of Hindu culture to S E Asia and Central Asia. She devotes a fairly amateurish chapter on the Hindu diaspora, restricting herself to the United States.

And there is practically zero discussion on entire genres of Hindu scriptural traditions like the Pancharatra Agama. She regurgitates instead the century old colonial and racist stereotypes of Hindus and their tradition, repeating the cow-caste-curry-Sati tropes.

In a review of one of Doniger's earlier books,<sup>15</sup> another academician concludes with the comments:<sup>16</sup>

"There is a sense in which my criticism of "The Implied Spider" section is the same as my criticism of "Inverted Political Versions." In the former, Doniger piles up examples of metaphorical spiders but without pausing for long to consider the significance of each of these metaphors in the original from which it has been borrowed. Then in "Inverted Political Versions" she tells stories of myths that have been stood on their heads to serve diametrically opposed political ends but does not always spell out very clearly what she takes those ends to be. In both cases, I would have been more convinced had she been more patient (or perhaps plodding) in elaborating the context of the stories that she tells.

....As Doniger herself insists, an analysis of the universal meaning of a myth and its individual message must include an appreciation for the historical contexts in which that myth is articulated.....In *The Implied Spider*, we are offered broad scholarship, entertaining stories and even passionate political arguments, yet there remain many spiders – and other metaphors, myths and political investments – whose cultural contexts are obscure."

The purpose of this quote is to demonstrate that the same problems that scholars have found with her earlier works, exist in this one too. Ludo Rocher says, with regard to *The Hindus*:

"Doniger acknowledges that the book was not meant to be as long as it turned out to be, "but it got the bit between its teeth, and ran away from me" (p. 1). Several pages are indeed filled with "good stories" that are only loosely, some very loosely, related to the history of the Hindu religion. Going into detail on the drinking and other vices of the Mughal emperors, even

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<sup>15</sup> Wendy Doniger (1998), *The Implied Spider: Politics & Theology in Myth*, Columbia University Press (New York)

<sup>16</sup> John E Llewellyn, "The Clinging Spider Web of Context: A Review of The Implied Spider by Wendy Doniger," *Religious Studies Review*, vol. 26, issue 1 (2000), pp. 42-49

though carefully documented, is a case in point (pp. 539-41).  
...When it comes to legal history in the colonial period in particular, there are passages that are bound to raise ... eyebrows.  
... the history of Hindu law was more complex than is represented in this volume. Anglo-Hindu law was far more than "the British interpretation of Jones's translation of *Manu*."<sup>17</sup>

Doniger's book might make an interesting or titillating read for some from a literary perspective. But as a work of scholarship, cultural understanding and historical knowledge, it is quite poor.

**9. Historiographical Fallacies:** Poor historians, like Wendy Doniger, use faulty methodologies in their works of history. Doniger tends to back project the present into the past, connect un-related events distant in time and space without any justification, and use exceptional pieces of data to draw general references and so on. For example, she back-projects the colonial Aryan-Dravidian divide theories into the ancient past.

While she frets much on the non-existence of 'Hinduism' as a category, she has no hesitation in using words like 'Dalit' in old contexts although the word does not have a history beyond a few decades. Even the Marxist historian D N Jha has specifically mentioned Doniger for her ahistorical approach (which applies completely to "The Hindus" as well) –

"Most of these scholars [in the West] affiliated to these departments and a few of their Indian disciples....speak of the science of religion...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 data..."they have studied religion by prioritizing "interior and generally inaccessible personal experiences and religious convictions at the expense of observable and documentable data..."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

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<sup>17</sup>Rocher, Ludo (April/June 2012), ["Review: The Hindus: An Alternative History by Wendy Doniger"](#), *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 132 (2): 302–304

Indian myths and religions, often rousing the Hindu diaspora's ire. But she has shied away from examining their social contexts. The same may be said of several recent publications on Hinduism which do not view religion as a multifactorial historical and cultural process phenomenon not linked to material realities in the ground.”<sup>18</sup> [Emphasis added].

K M Shrimali, another Marxist historian, has the following criticism with regard to *'The Hindus'*:

"There are several issues that need more detailed and nuanced analysis rather than straight-jacketed formulations that we read in *The Hindus*. These concern terminologies and chronologies invoked, perfunctory manner in which class-caste struggles have been referred to — almost casually, complex inter-religious dialogue seen only in the context of Visnu's avatars, and looking at the tantras merely in terms of sex and political power. The work rarely rises above the level of tale telling. **On the whole, this is neither a serious work for students of Indian history, nor for those with a critical eye on 'religious history' of India, nor indeed it is the real Alternative History of the 'Hindus'.**"<sup>19</sup> [Emphasis added].

Throughout her book, “The Hindus,” Doniger tried, but has failed miserably to present a reliable history of the Hindus. Her work is not an ‘alternative history’, but rather, an ‘alternative to history.’

**10. Seeing Real Penises in Imaginary Cigars:** Sometimes, a cigar could represent a penis, but in most cases, it is just a cigar. Unfortunately, Doniger sees a real erect penis even in imaginary cigars. She frequently imagines passages in Hindu texts that do not exist, or translates them in kinky ways that are simply impossible. When Hindus object, she accuses her arch-enemy, the ‘oppressive upper-caste Hindu male’ of having internalized Victorian prudery.

But we Hindus have not sanitized our scriptures to delete references to sex, and Kāma, or desire (of which sex is an important manifestation) remains one of the four goals of the Hindu imaginary. What we object to is Doniger’s attempt to cite non-existent passages from

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<sup>18</sup> D N Jha (2006), pp. 45-46 in “*Looking for a Hindu Identity*,” President’s Address at the Indian National Congress.

<sup>19</sup>Shrimali, K. M. (July–August 2010), page 80 of "[Review of The Hindus: An Alternative History by Wendy Doniger](#)", *Social Scientist* vol. 38 (7/8): 66–81.

Hindu scriptures, to translate verses incorrectly, cherry pick passages, and give a sexual twist to innocuous words and incidents on these ancient texts to suit her own sexual interpretations. For example, in chapter 9, she imagines 'sexual tension' between two brothers – Rama and Lakshmana, blames them for unfairly mutilating Shurpanakha 'when all she asked them was for sex' and terms Sita as 'sexual'. In chapter 11, she accuses Surya of raping Kunti, and almost betrays a jealous tone while discussing the polyandry of Draupadi.

Upon an examination of the original texts, Doniger's descriptions and interpretations invariably turn out to be her own sexual fantasies. On page 124, while commenting on Rigveda 10.162, Doniger remarks – "*It appears that a woman's brother too is someone she might expect to find in her bed, though the Rig Veda severely condemns sibling incest...*" The relevant hymn has no hint of sibling incest. It is all in Doniger's mind.

And it is not just Hindus who are troubled by her obsessive compulsion, an addiction to sex. Non-Hindu scholars have also noted with disdain her penchant see the world through only one aperture – the urethra. For instance, a Greek Indologist Nicholas Kazanas notes, commenting on her book "*Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts*":

"O'Flaherty seems to see only one function, the third one of fertility and sexuality, copulation, defloration, castration and the like: even bhakti 'devotion' is described in stark erotic terms including incest and homosexuality (1980: 87-99: 125-129). Surely, erotic terms could be metaphors for spiritual or mystical experiences as is evidence in so much literature?"<sup>20</sup>

Criticizing her 'Purana Perennis', Hans Bakker says<sup>21</sup> that her books are like fast-food that attract sales, attention and readership. But are devoid of scholarship (and if we may add, they are linked to bad health). Many more references can be cited, but for the sake of brevity, we will leave them out here. The crudeness and lewdness of her interpretations makes her translate profoundly spiritual terms like 'tapas' and 'tejas' as

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<sup>20</sup>Kazanas, Nicholas. Indo-European Deities and the Rgveda. *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 29, nos. 3-4 (Fall & Winter 2001), pp. 257-293. Footnote #14 on page 283

<sup>21</sup>Bakker, Hans T. et al., "*The Skanda Purana, Volume I*." Egbert Forsten: Groningen. 1998.



'inner heat' (wonder what that means!) when a more accurate translation would be 'spiritual energy or power'.

Academics have a right to interpret a tradition in any way they want, but this right comes with a responsibility to be academically honest and rigorous. But it is this rigor and honesty that is truly lacking in Doniger's book, and plagues Hinduism studies in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Suhag Shukla, "*Academic Integrity: It's what is missing at the AAR*", dt. 14 March 2014, available online at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/suhag-a-shukla-esq/academic-integrity-its-wh\\_b\\_4961453.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/suhag-a-shukla-esq/academic-integrity-its-wh_b_4961453.html) <checked on 14 March 2014>



## **A Detailed Review of the Contents of the Book**



## 2. Review of the ‘Maps’ in the Book by Vishal Agarwal

The book has four maps immediately after the Index. Unfortunately, the maps are full of errors. We point some of these errors below:

1. In the first map (‘India’s Major Geographical Features’), the Waziristan Hills area is marked erroneously as ‘Kirthar Range’, which is actually several hundred miles further south.
2. In the second map (‘India from 2500 BCE to 600 CE’), Kashmir is marked north of the river Indus (it should be south of Indus); Baluchistan is marked at the boundary between Sindh and Punjab whereas it is further west; Magadha is marked in northern Orissa and the bordering areas of Bihar (it should be further north, just south of the Ganga); Mithila is marked a bit north-west of its actual location and so on.
3. In the third map (‘India from 600 CE to 1600 CE’), at least four historical sites are marked several hundred miles from their correct geographical location – Janakpur (placed in Himachal Pradesh), Nagarkot (placed in eastern Nepal), Mandu and Haldighati. It appears that Janakpur and Nagarkot have been interchanged in the map.
4. In the fourth map (‘India from 1600 CE to the Present’), Kanpur is indicated as the modern name of the ancient city of Kanauj. This is incorrect and the two cities are distinct from each other.

To conclude, none of the four maps in her book is error-free.

### 3. Review of the ‘Preface – *The Man or the Rabbit in the Moon*’ by Pramod Pathak

Below are a few comments on the Preface in Doniger’s book.

**Pages 1-4:** Wendy herself admits that she is not trained as a historian but trained as a philologist (Page 3) but she desired to write a reference book on Hinduism that will be different from many other books on Hinduism, which she implies to be not run-off-the-mill type but unique and different. To quote her, she took to writing an alternative history of Hinduism “*to show how much the groups that the conventional wisdom says were oppressed and silenced and played no part in the development of the tradition – women, Pariahs (oppressed casts, sometimes called Untouchables) – did actually contribute to Hinduism.....to show the presence of brilliant and creative thinkers entirely off the track beaten by Brahmin Sanskritists and of the diverse voices that slipped through the filter and, indeed, to show the filter itself was quite diverse*” (P 1-2). “*This will not serve as a conventional history (my training as a philologist, not historian) but as a book about the evolution of several important themes in the lives of Hindus caught up in the flow of historical change*” (P 3). She had to deal with those writings in “*a few other places where the arguments were so loony that I could not resist the temptation to satirize them. Many a “fact” turns out, on closer inspection, to be an argument..... I hope that this book will inspire some readers to go back to the sources and decide for themselves whether or not they agree with me*” (P 4).

**Comment:** This statement by Wendy is exactly what inspired the present reviewer who went back to the original texts as suggested by her including her own books not surprisingly to find the untruths, distortions and untenable claims that Wendy has made in the book. When truly a sincere effort is made to verify her assertions by referring to “the sources” presumably meaning original texts Wendy’s shortcomings get so magnified that in spite of her lofty aim and her lofty claim, her entire thesis becomes a hoax. It is a pity that an average reader and even her unsuspecting gullible publisher, however, cannot discern her lack of academic integrity.

Many a ‘fact’ in Doniger’s book turns out to be a sexualized interpretation, and many an interpretation turns out to be her fantasy. She has invented Sanskrit quotations, given wrong references, has gotten the dates wrong, names and places wrong, and has injected the heady mix of kinky sex, rapes, violence, drugs and booze into relatively straightforward passages in Hindu traditions. Ironically, although she is a Jew, her negationist treatment of Islamic rule in India puts the neo-Nazi

negationists to shame. The book is therefore not even a 'history', let alone being an alternative history, unless she meant to fantasize alternate lifestyles in the Hindu society. Or perhaps, it is an 'alternative to history.' As discussed in more detail in the Postscript, her pretense to give a voice to women, oppressed classes and to animals is merely a fig leaf to cover her untenable interpretations, and to cozy up with the Hindu hater bandwagon of India and western Indology. In reality, she has abused her 'objects' of study by depicting them in a very pathetic manner. For that matter, who has authorized her to speak on their behalf and indulge in identity politics?

In our opinion, the book is therefore not a History of the Hindus, but rather, HerStory – a window into her own life and thoughts processes. Sometime in the future, this book and her other books will provide an interesting mass of literature for those researching in mental health.

**Page 5:** Sanskritists since ancient times were and had to be bilingual according to Wendy “*in order to talk to their wives, servants and children. It was through these interactions that the oral traditions got their foot in the Sanskrit door ..... Sanskrit and oral traditions flow back and forth, producing a constant infusion of lower-class words and ideas into the Brahmin world and vice versa. .... It must have been the case that the natural language, Prakrit, and the vernaculars came first, while Sanskrit, the refined, secondary version, artificial language, came later*” (P 5).

**Comment:** There is nothing new in these statements. While she mentions about the “useful term Sanskritization” coined by M.N. Srinivas, way back in 1952, which has been used by the western scholars and some Indian scholars in derogatory sense, she has conveniently overlooked the parallel idea of Greater Tradition and Little Tradition propounded around the same time (around 1952) Aghananda Bharati, an American scholar who opted for Hinduhood, and who was an avowed follower of Adi Shankara, had elaborated on the give and take of the rites and rituals between the kitchen and the altar room – *Yajnasbaalaa*. There is fairly good indication of this give-and-take in sixteen *samskaras* dating back to the Rig Vedic times. These were part and parcel of the social life cutting across the caste and hierarchical lines in the society of those times. Many of these *samskaaras* were no more the domain of male dominated rituals but also of the women folk, only to be solemnized by appropriate *mantras* in Sanskrit.

Sanskrit as a purposefully formulated language is no new discovery. It really dates back to the Rigvedic period. In her own book *The Rig Veda* (1981), she gives translation of the hymn Rig Veda 10.71 which explicitly states that the Vedic seers formulated the speech, Wendy's translation reads as below:

“bRhaspati! When they set in motion the first beginning of speech, giving names, their most pure and perfectly guarded secret was revealed through love.  
When the wise ones fashioned speech with their thought sifting it as grain is sifted through sieve, then friends recognized their friendships. A good sign was placed on their speech.” (RV 10.71.1-2, *The Rig Veda* P 61).

Has she forgotten her own writings in which the discovery she purports to be unique to her study of Hinduism and Sanskrit was indeed a known and accepted fact even in the ancient Vedic times?

There are two clear references to formulation of new language by word *navalyasIm* (?) (RV 8.51.5 and 8.95.5) i.e. newly formed language – *giram*, which was obviously formulated from then existing colloquial language.

**Pages 8-9:** “*Sanskrit texts usually regard women and hunted animals as primary objects of addiction and the senses that cause addiction are likened to horses*”

**Comment:** First of all, this is a very general statement. It must be noted that the word “addiction” is Wendy's own unique erroneous translation of some words in Sanskrit texts such as “aasakti,” because the concept of “addiction,” if at all found in these ancient texts, is only tentative and not well formulated as it is in modern day medicine and modern day world view. About the position of women she contradicts herself in the same paragraph stating, “*Chapter 12 for instance is about women more than about goddesses, while chapter 14 is about goddesses more than about women. And indeed I have often noted the activities of women in other contexts, without explicitly highlighting their gender*” (P 9).

Coming to the Rig Veda with which Wendy appears to be more familiar, as against the major male Gods Indra, Varuna, Maruts, Rudra, Soma, Mitra, Agni, Apam Napat, Ahrubudhnya, Aja Ekapad, Aryaman, Pushan, Yama, Brihaspati, Bhaga, Adityas, Yama, Surya, Ashvins and Dyaus Pitar, the female deities are Ushas, Sarasvati, Aditi, Diti, Indrani, Ratri, Vak, Purmdhi, ILa, Yami, Bharati, Prithivi, Dhishana, Sinivali, Raka.



With give and take on a few names of male and female deities, I have listed 20 male gods and 15 goddesses. Percent wise, they are three-fourth in number of male gods. Now do not ask for proportionate number of hymns devoted to them. The trend has never been equalled anywhere in the world over the last millennia.

The Semitic religions have done away with the goddesses even as angels. The very fact that there are many goddesses in the Vedas who are considered important to be reckoned with shows that there was more status for female gender in the Hindu literature as a reflection of its stature in the society more than Wendy cares to recognize. Let her remember the Hindus elected Mrs. Indira Gandhi as our Prime Minister within two decades of independence of India. India has already had a Lady President, a host of lady Chief Ministers of the States, so is the case all over South Asia, also in Sri Lanka and Pakistan. USA is yet to elect a Lady President even after independence of two centuries and more. No Vedic sacrifice could be complete without participation of a wife. In fact Wendy herself acknowledges this elsewhere in her statement, *“But, in fact, women made significant contributions to the texts, both as the (usually unacknowledged) sources of many ancient as well as contemporary narratives and as the inspiration for many more. Some Hindu women did read and write, forging the crucial links between vernacular language and Sanskrit”* (P 35-36). There are lady seers in the Rig Veda. The female Goddess number keeps on adding in the post Vedic times. In the late literature like Manu Smriti, which Wendy herself has translated: *“There is unwavering good fortune in a family where the husband is satisfied by the wife, and the wife by the husband. If the wife is not radiant she does not stimulate the man; and because the man is unstimulated the making of children does not happen. If the woman is radiant the whole family is radiant, but if she is not radiant the whole family is not radiant.”* (Manu Smriti 3.60-63, Laws of Manu (1991) P 49). Has Wendy forgotten what she translated? This is from the same text of Manu Smriti, stigmatized for *“na stri svatantryam arhati”* (“no woman attains complete independence” - which may be a truism for all cultures or societies of the world in the ancient times,) which talks of radiant wife and does not at all view a woman as “the object of ‘addiction’”.

This above passage from Manusmriti does not at all sound like it assigns the role of “object of addiction” to women. Wendy should go through the original papers published by female duo, Elizabeth Stanton and Suzan Anthony, who waged unrelenting struggle for five decades from 1852 AD onwards till 1900 AD for women’s rights in USA, (this was after a century of freedom of the United States from the British rule,) before throwing aspersions at Hindus or ancient India for the lower status

of women in their history. Wendy has not studied the history of her own country or has conveniently forgotten it while making such irresponsible assertions about the History of Hindus.

In fact, if Wendy were a man, the reader of this book would have dismissed him as a misogynist and a pervert, because her own depictions of the Hindu woman in the book are excessively lewd and debauched.

**Page 11, Para 2:** *“The history of Hinduism, as we shall see, abounds both in periods of creative assimilation and interaction and in outbursts of violent intolerance. .... In their ambivalent attitude to violence, the Hindus are no different from the rest of us, but they are perhaps unique in the intensity of their ongoing debate”* (P 11).

**Comment:** She has not maintained a sense of proportion as a scholar of comparative religions while making such wild allegations about the Hindus and their “outbursts of violence” at slightest provocation or without provocation giving no specific examples from the history, and also unfounded allegations about the status of their women. Such statements are tantamount to defamatory statements. The Hindus’ leaning for non-violence is well acknowledged. Wendy’s view of Hindus is 180 degrees opposite of generally accepted facts about Hindus being viewed as generally non-violent.

Leaving aside the exception of the ‘mythical’ massacre in the Mahabharata war, the only instance of mindless massacre in history committed therein if Mahabharata is viewed as an accurate historical document, there are hardly any instances of mass massacre committed by Hindus among themselves or on “others”. As a result of Kalinga massacre Ashoka the Great turned into a recluse, opted for Buddhism and spread the message of peace. Ravana in ancient times and Afzal Khan in Maharashtra, are on par for being accorded honorable status posthumously. There are many instances when the Hindus let the enemy go unpunished although captured and found treacherous. Prithviraj Chauhan let Mohammad Gori go unpunished. Similarly Pratap Rao Gujar, the army chief of Shivaji the Great, let Bahadur Khan go unpunished. Both of them ultimately paid for it by their lives, but the undercurrent in their chivalry was their attitude of non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi waged unique freedom struggle in the recent times. The worst of all was to let the 90,000 prisoners of war of Pakistan during the 1971 war of Bangladesh go unpunished, untouched. Had they been handed over to Bangladesh, each of them would have been lynched, ripped of his sole

and hanged. They all went back and ungrateful as they were for India's saving their lives they organized terrorists' network against India.

Hindus are not even a fraction as violent as the USA and western civilization which indulged in two world wars within just half a century and unlike Americans who continue to pounce with vengeance on the Afghans killing innocents many times more than the 911 toll. This is not stated to criticize the US foreign policy but to place Wendy's false allegations against the Hindus in a proper perspective. Hindus are definitely different from the rest of the people in the world as non-violent people. Even on the religious front, not a drop of blood was shed when Dr. B. R. Ambedker converted to Buddhism.

Look at the bloody feuds on mass scale between Catholics and Protestants in the mediaeval times, the pogroms unleashed on hapless Jews for centuries, the total decimation of Native Americans in whole of the American continent; the list can be much longer. Wendy's comparison is out of place. Wendy needs to be reminded of the cliché, "while you point your index finger to someone else, three other fingers are pointing towards you." She needs to be mindful of this and study the history of her own religion and race, the history of the Western cultures and Western societies, before undertaking a vengeful attack on the Hindus and their history.

**Page 11, fn.:** *"...but most of India and all of Japan are in the Northern Hemisphere."*

**Comment:** Not just 'most' but all of India is in the Northern Hemisphere.

**Page 15, Para 5:** *"The Sanskrit texts [cited in my lecture] were written at a time of glorious sexual openness and insight, and I have often focused on precisely those parts of the texts...."*

**Comment:** Doniger not just cites passages related to sex in the Hindu scriptures, she actually imagines them in her fertile mind. In that lecture, she had alleged that Lakshmana 'lusted for Sita', and that Rama 'was scared that he will become a sex addict like his father Dasharatha', which is why he turned her out. There is more proof in the writings of Doniger that these pathologies belong to Doniger's mind rather than that

Rama and Lakshmana were addicts. Her perverse and derogatory fantasies have been addressed ably by Aditi Banerjee already.<sup>23</sup>

**Page 16:** *“And so I intend to go on celebrating the diversity and pluralism, not to mention the worldly wisdom and sensuality, of the Hindus that I have loved for about fifty years now and still counting.”*

**Comment:** Her claims that she loves the Hindus (p. 16) is shallow because she seems to know only one type of Hindus – the Hindu fundamentalist or the Hindu nationalist. Every time a Hindu criticizes her book or points factual errors, she hurls back (in a manner reminiscent of McCarthyism) derogatory labels, and looks the other way in disdain, playing the victimhood card. To shield herself from all criticism, Doniger mounts the politically correct bandwagon of ‘women-rights’, rights of the oppressed etc., and also plays victimhood. She has spent five decades depicting the Hindu as the erotic other, but makes much of an egg thrown at her (in the British traditions) by a Hindu whose name she has misspelt, in a public talk where she cast lewd aspersions at some hallowed figures in the Hindu scriptures (pp. 14-15). In fact, the egg missed her and she did not even notice it. But post fact, it is a useful and a convenient propagandist tool to play victim (or play the gender card) and deflect any scholarly or genuine criticism of her shoddily written works. Doniger complains about a single egg that missed her, but she has been abusing Hindu traditions perversely for more than 50 years of her life!

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<sup>23</sup> See “*Oh, But you do get it Wrong*” by Aditi Banerjee available online at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262511> <checked on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2014>

See also our review of chapter 09 in this compilation.

#### 4. Review of the Chapter 1, ‘*Introduction: Working with the Available Light*’ by Pramod Pathak and Vishal Agarwal

**General Remarks:** This chapter lays out Doniger’s methodology, ideology, the scope and the purpose of her book. It also gives a brief preview her political agendas, racism, biases and prejudices that are littered throughout the remaining chapters of her book. This chapter review does not duplicate the critiques of these individual chapters. We will often just point out to parallel statements in the later chapters where these racist and derogatory statements against the Hindus are found in greater detail, and direct the reader to see their critiques there. The purpose of this chapter review is to lay bare her political and anti-Hindu agendas.

**Page 17, Para 3:** *“This book tells the story of Hinduism chronologically and historically and emphasizes the history of marginalized rather than mainstream Hindus.”*

**Comment:** This statement should be seen not as a reflection of the actual contents of the book, but rather an attempt to situate the book in a politically correct milieu. But who really are these marginalized Hindus? Doniger clubs together in this category all women (50% of Hindus); tribal Hindus; non-Hindu minorities; Scheduled Castes or Harijans, now often designated by politicians as Dalits and Shudras or OBCs (all collectively, and excluding their women, another 40%). So that leaves just about 10% of the Hindu population as ‘mainstream Hindus’! Her definition of the ‘mainstream Hindu’ is thus an oxymoron.

From here onwards in the book, it is a downhill ride, with Doniger seeing Hindu women primarily as hypersexualized creatures who are (often willingly according to her descriptions) raped, who are seduced by ‘addicted’ upper caste Hindu males. Entire chapters say nothing much about the Shudra-Harijan-Vanavasi Hindu males who constitute 80% of the Hindu male population. In other words, Doniger’s claim is merely a politically motivated<sup>24</sup> statement and her book does not match up to her spurious claims.

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<sup>24</sup> For an expose of the ideological motivations behind these books, refer to Aditi Banerjee, Krishnan Ramaswamy and Antonio de Nicolas (2007), *Invading the*

**Pages 17-18:** “My aims have been to demonstrate: (1) that Hindus throughout their long history have been enriched by the contributions of women, the lower castes, and other religions;...”

**Comments:** Again, this is just Doniger’s political propaganda because the book refers to their contributions tangentially; and exaggerates and even invents the contributions of other religions to Hinduism.<sup>25</sup> To get a better idea of how women have contributed to Hinduism, there are many better writings available on the net,<sup>26</sup> or in print.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the important role of tribals in laying the foundation of Hindu traditions,<sup>28</sup> and of lower castes<sup>29</sup> in defining our faith has also been discussed in many scholarly works. Doniger’s book does not even refer to these works, showing her ignorance of the relevant literature. She demeans these categories of the Hindu society by projecting them as

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*Sacred – An Analysis of Hinduism Studies in America*, Rupa & Co. (New Delhi). Now available online as a PDF at [http://voiceofdharma.org/books/its/invading\\_the\\_sacred.pdf](http://voiceofdharma.org/books/its/invading_the_sacred.pdf) <checked on 2nd March 2014>

<sup>25</sup> See our reviews of chapters 16 and 18 where we have called her bluff.

<sup>26</sup> See [http://www.hinduwisdom.info/Women\\_in\\_Hinduism.htm](http://www.hinduwisdom.info/Women_in_Hinduism.htm) <checked on 2nd March 2014>. The website is incidentally created by a Hindu woman.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Chandrakala Padia (2009), *Women in the Dharmasastras*, Rawat Publications (Jaipur)

Bhuvan Chandel and Shubhada Joshi (2009), *Women in Ancient and Medieval India*, Centre for Studies in Civilizations, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd (New Delhi)

A.S. Altekar, (1938), *The Position of Women in Hindu Civilization*, The Center Publication House (Benares)

L.K. Tripathi (1998), *Position and Status of Women in Ancient India*, Department of Ancient History Culture and Archaeology (Varanasi)

Jatindra Bimal Chaudhuri (1956), *Position of Women in Vedic Ritual*, Pracyavani Research Series (Calcutta).

Note that some of the above books have women as authors or co-authors, and are published in the same year as Doniger’s book.

<sup>28</sup> Sandhya Jain (2004), *Adi deo Arya Devata*, Rupa & Co. (New Delhi). [Note that the author is a woman].

S.K. Tiwari (2002), *Tribal Roots of Hinduism*, Sarup & Sons (New Delhi)

<sup>29</sup> Harish Ramachandran, Dinesh Kashikar and Manikantan Menon (2001), *The Heritage of Dalits*. Vyakti Vikas Kendra (Bangalore)

M. Arunachalam (1977), *Harijan Saints of Tamilnad*. Gandhi Vidyalayam (Tanjavur).

passive victims of ‘seductions’, ‘rapes’, ‘violence’, ‘rapes’, ‘killings’, ‘beheadings’ etc. – words that are used indiscriminately throughout the book.

Doniger has falsely claimed to speak for these sections of the Hindus, and has actually deprived them of their voices by forcing her own perverse interpretations on their greatness and by ignoring their contributions to Hinduism.

**Page 18, Para 1:** *“(2) that although a number of things that have been characteristic of many Hindus over the ages (the worship of several gods, reincarnation, karma), none has been true of all Hindus, and the shared factors are overwhelmingly outnumbered by the things that are unique to one group or another; (3) that the greatness of Hinduism – its vitality, its earthiness, its vividness – lies in precisely in many of those idiosyncratic qualities that some Hindus today are ashamed of and would deny;...”*

**Comment:** For all her championing of the diversity of Hinduism, it is a fact that Doniger and her fellow Indologists actually stamp out diverse and idiosyncratic opinions and research on Hinduism in their discussion forums, in the publication series that they control, in their institutions that they run and manage and so on. Unless you toe their party line, you are an outcaste, a ‘marginalized entity’ and are immediately branded as a violent, addictive Hindu nationalist. Doniger has persistently refused to engage in conversations with her critics because she considers it beneath contempt to even look at opinions that diverge from her. Therefore, she does not practice what she preaches.<sup>30</sup> The same is true of Wendy’s academic companions.<sup>31</sup> A quick perusal of online Indology lists will demonstrate the arrogance and racism of Western Indologists and their Marxist and other Hindu-hater supporters in India.

And what precisely are these idiosyncratic qualities of Hindus that Wendy Doniger talks about in her book? These, according to her, are

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<sup>30</sup> Vamsee Juluri, “*The Scholars: An Alternative Story about Wendy Doniger and The Hindus*,” dt 18<sup>th</sup> Feb 2014, available online at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/vamsee-juluri/the-scholars-an-alternati\\_b\\_4787082.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/vamsee-juluri/the-scholars-an-alternati_b_4787082.html) <checked on 2nd March 2014>

<sup>31</sup> See Rajiv Malhotra’s “*Wendy’s Child Syndrome*,” available online at <http://rajivmalhotra.com/library/articles/risa-lila-1-wendys-child-syndrome/> <checked on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2014>. See also several other articles in the series ‘Risa-Lila’ easily found through a google search.

sexuality, violence, rapes, subjugation, suppression, beheading, killing and the like, because that is what the book seems to be about. Thanks but no thanks.

**Page 18, Para 1:** “(4) *that the history of tensions between the various Hinduisms, and between different sorts of Hindus, undergirds the violence of the contemporary Indian political and religious scene.*”

**Comment:** This again underlines her hate-filled agenda directed at the Hindus because violence in India is solely pinned on the Hindus, and not on non-Hindus, or non-religious terror groups (like the Maoists). Throughout the book, Doniger has repeatedly emphasized and exaggerated the real or imagined negatives of the Hindus.

We all generalize about people, about groups, about ideologies and so on in our lives. But when this generalization is judgmental, when it is not based on the complete set of evidence available to us and when we are unwilling to consider new or contrary data to revise our judgment, this generalization becomes a stereotype<sup>32</sup>. A stereotype is a highly exaggerated and a negative view of the reality. It is especially resorted to by people who are quick to condemn people different from themselves, or in other words, by people who are themselves intolerant.

Prejudice<sup>33</sup> is rarely expressed explicitly. It is more often demonstrated through creation of stereotypes, through the creation of a hated or a disliked ‘other’, through an ***excessive and obsessive focus on the negatives of this ‘other’, through half-truths, repeated and deliberate misrepresentation*** and so on. Doniger’s “*The Hindus: An Alternative History*” is a textbook case of stereotyping and prejudice.

**Page 21, Para 4:** Referring to the story of Raikva and King Janshruti in the Chhaandogya Upanishad, Doniger says, “*An understanding of the social context of the Upanishads, reintroducing the world into the text, may go a long way to explain not who first thought of the story of Raikva but why the Brahmins were willing to include the story in their texts despite the ways in which it challenged their social order.*”

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<sup>32</sup> Joel M. Charon. 2001. *Ten Questions, A Sociological Perspective*. Wadsworth Thompson Learning: Belmont (California), pp. 247-265

<sup>33</sup> The following study gives a multifaceted view on prejudice and discrimination – Gordon W. Allport. 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.: New York



**Comment:** Again, this is an example of Doniger's pseudo-interpretations that she then repeats in chapter 7. And what exactly is her interpretation? First, following the doctored text (and translation) of Patrick Olivelle, Doniger regards Raikva as a 'non-Brahmin',<sup>34</sup> whereas the Upanishad clearly says that Raikva was a Brahmin. Then, she alleges that Raikva gave spiritual wisdom to King Janashruti in return for sex with the Princess! And finally, she calls Raikva's teaching as pretty commonplace, not really understanding the teaching at all! So, even after (falsely) projecting Raikva as the non-Brahmin teacher of a King, she concludes that his teaching was worthless anyway! Is this how she wishes to acknowledge the contributions of low castes to Hinduism?

**Page 25, Para 1:** In her next political propaganda about Hinduism, Doniger, following Hindu hating Marxist historians like Romila Thapar<sup>35</sup> and D N Jha, claims that Hinduism does not and did not really exist till the British created this identity, and that 'Hinduism' is really a term of convenience to designate this religion. Doniger says, "*Only after the British began to define communities by their religion, and foreigners in India tended to put people of different religions into different ideological boxes, did many Indians follow suit, ignoring the diversity of their own thoughts and asking themselves which of the boxes they belong in...*"

**Comment:** The name 'Hindu' itself might be of foreign origin and might not have been used as a self-referent by the Hindus but this does not mean that their faith did not exist. Doniger refers to an article<sup>36</sup> by David Lorenzen but does not really examine his arguments because

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<sup>34</sup>*The Hindus*, pg. 183

<sup>35</sup> D N Jha himself mentions Romila Thapar's name along with other Marxist historians, and from the context it is clear that he considers her also a 'Marxist historian', although not the best representative of this category. See page 11 of JHA, D. N (1994), *Economy and Society in Early India*, Munshiram Manoharlal (New Delhi).

Thapar and Jha are quoted as one of the Marxist historians in the entry 'Hinduism' of '*A Dictionary of The Marxist Thought*' (Tom Bottomore *et al*, 1983, Harvard University Press, p. 204).

<sup>36</sup> David Lorenzen, "Who Invented Hinduism?", pages 630-659 in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol 41, issue 4 (October 1999). Doniger ignores the recent book by Lorenzen on the same topic. See, David Lorenzen (2006), *Who Invented Hinduism -Essays on Religion in History*, Yoda Press (New Delhi)

they run counter to the Jha-Thapar<sup>37</sup>-Doniger thesis that Hinduism does not exist.<sup>38</sup>

**Page 25:** “...there is no Hindu cannon. The books that Euro-Americans privileged (such as the *Bhagavad Gita*) were not always so highly regarded by “all Hindus,” certainly not before the Euro-Americans began to praise them.”

**Comment:** First, the Hindu imaginary (which Doniger equates to a ‘Brahmin imaginary’ in the book) does have a cannon – the Vedas (and some add the Tantras). Doniger’s choice of the Gita as a text that impressionable Hindus began to appreciate only when the westerners exalted it is most unfortunate, and repeated from western Indologists like Eric Sharpe and Indian Marxist historians. But what is the reality regarding the importance of the Gita in the Hindu tradition?

Arvind Sharma [2000]<sup>39</sup> discusses this idea peddled by Doniger (and others) and explains why it is incorrect. He notes that the Gita was not merely treated as a philosophical text, but it also served as a source of mass devotional-movements in various parts of India. It continued to be commented upon by scholars in different regions, and in different languages throughout the period in which much of India was under the rule of Muslim rulers. The very fact that Wilkins chose to translate indicates that he deemed it a popular or an esteemed text in the eyes of Hindus. No doubt, in the preface of his translation, he mentions how zealously the Brahmins guarded the doctrine of the Gita from even the unsophisticated amongst their own caste. But then, it could be argued that the doctrines of the text were nevertheless communicated to the laity in myriad forms – plays, *harikathas* and so on.

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<sup>37</sup> One may mention articles like ‘*Syndicated Hinduism*’, ‘*Syndicated Moksha*’, ‘*The Ramayana Syndrome*’ etc., by Romila Thapar where she sermonizes on the ‘true’ nature of Hinduism even though her writings betray her Hinduphobia.

<sup>38</sup> For a recent scholarly work debunking the politically motivated thesis that Hinduism does not and did not exist, see Rajiv Malhotra (2014), *Indra’s Net – Defending Hinduism’s Philosophical Unity*, Harper Collins Publishers India (Noida, India)

Rajiv Malhotra has been one of her first cogent and high profile critic, but Doniger has doggedly refused to debate or discuss with him.

<sup>39</sup> Sharma, Arvind. 2000. “Bhagavad-gita, Its Philosophy and Interpretation.” In *Journal of Vaisnava Studies* IX.2 (Spring 2000)

In the Sri Vaishnava community of south India, the Gita has been expounded to people of all castes by the Vaishnava Acharyas after one of their early teachers, Sri Yamunacharya (10<sup>th</sup> century C.E.) wrote his *Gitarthasamgraha* on the text. In Maharashtra, the largely low-caste community of Warkaris has been studying the *Jñaneswari*, a beautiful 700 year old Maharashtri translation of the Gita written by Sant Jñaneshwar around 1290 C.E. The Gita was translated into Braj around 1320 C.E., Malayalam (1400 C.E.), Maithili (1615 C.E.), Gujarati (1620 C.E.), Madhyadeshiya Hindi (1435 C.E.) and into several other vernaculars comprehensible to Hindus of all social strata.<sup>40</sup> Outside India, the text was translated into Javanese as early as in 1000 C.E.

Evidence showing the popularity of Gita amongst various sections of the Hindu society in pre-modern times comes from several other diverse sources.<sup>41</sup> A European observer, Francis Buchanan, notes in 1812 C.E. that the Gita was expounded to the common pilgrims by Maharashtrian Pundits resident at Gaya in Bihar.<sup>42</sup> Another scholar, Dr. Peter G. Friedlander, notes<sup>43</sup> that numerous Gurumukhi manuscripts of Hindi translations of Gita from Punjab, dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries exist, indicating the popularity of the text in that region before the British rule. And finally, one must not lose sight of the fact that the message of Vedanta and other forms of ‘higher’ Hinduism has always been disseminated among the masses by wandering preachers, dramatists and so on in diverse, imaginative and interesting ways. What one needs to keep in mind that though the text of the Gita might not have been well known to the masses first hand, its doctrines were fairly disseminated in

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<sup>40</sup> For a comprehensive description of various commentaries and translations on the Bhagavadgita down the ages, refer CALLEWAERT, Winand M. and Shilanand Hemraj. 1983. *Bhagavadgitanuvada – A Study in Transcultural Translation*. Satya Bharati Publication: Ranchi (Bihar)

<sup>41</sup> Professor Shrinivas Tilak refers to several issues of the Marathi monthly journal ‘Gitadarshan’ in this regard (<http://www.sandiego.edu/theo/risa-l/archive/msg06310.html>)

<sup>42</sup> This is pointed out by Vijay Pinch at <http://www.sandiego.edu/theo/risa-l/archive/msg06304.html>. Note that these links are now underground and the discussion list is no longer accessible to the general public after the Indologists found their racist views come under serious criticisms from lay Hindus.

<sup>43</sup> See his on-line remarks at <http://www.sandiego.edu/theo/risa-l/archive/msg06302.html>

the Hindu society. Perhaps that is why, Basham [1989:82-97]<sup>44</sup> seems to link the Gita with the triumph of Theism in the Indian society.

It is true, that we Hindus are not a ‘people of the book.’ Instead, the correct way to understand the situation is that the Hindus are a ‘people of the sacred library’ which consists of their numerous scriptures. Some Hindus at one point of time read a particular scripture, and at another time, read a different one. This simple fact should not be misused to run down the fact that we Hindus do acknowledge certain scriptures as the primary authority of our faith and traditions.

**Page 27, para 1:** “*Significantly, the definition was needed because different religions have different marriage laws; the horror of miscegenation, always lurking in the **Brahmin heart of darkness**, was exacerbated by the British legacy within the law code.*” [Emphasis added].

**Comment:** This is clear hate speech by Wendy Doniger against Brahmin Hindus, who are characterized as having a darkness in their hearts! What Doniger forgets is that Hindus of all stripes preferred endogamy (but exogamy with respect to Gotra if applicable) and not just the Brahmins.

**Page 29, para 4:** Arguing that the Hindus have no universally shared beliefs and practices, Doniger says, “*The actual beliefs and practices of Hindus – renunciation, devotion, sacrifice and many more – are peripheries that the imaginary Brahmin center cannot hold.*”

**Comment:** A completely meaningless statement that can indeed be applied to a certain extent to all religions. All the three practices mentioned by Doniger are indeed at the center, with a few exceptions here and there. Statements like these are meant by Doniger to ‘prove’ that Hinduism does not exist. In any case, Doniger fails to demonstrate how these practices from the ‘Brahmanical imaginary’ are not exhibited by women and low caste Hindus, who are Doniger’s (imaginary) subject matter of the book.

**Page 34, para 1:** “*Not only did southern ideas go north, and vice versa, and not only did Tamil flow into Sanskrit and Sanskrit into Tamil, but Tamil went North, and Sanskrit south*”.

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<sup>44</sup> Basham, A. L. 1989. *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, Ed. and annotated by Kenneth G. Zysk. Beacon Press: Boston

**Comment:** It was also the Western scholars<sup>45</sup> and not just the Indians or Hindu scholars who promoted the idea of Sanskrit being the original language and the local and vernacular languages followed as the next derived languages. For the last half century or so, many highly recognized scholars have discarded this idea. It is a fact that the so-called Dravidian and Munda elements cannot be isolated from the Rigvedic Sanskrit.

Indian scholar Vishvanath Khaire has been advocating the linguistic bridge “Sam-Ma-Ta,” signifying “Sanskrit-Marathi-Tamil” in reference to this back and forth infusion of words into Sanskrit language and from Sanskrit into Marathi and Tamil language for more than two decades and he has a host of articles and books to his credit. Wendy with access to well-equipped library at her Department in University of Chicago could not have missed his writings. She prefers to ignore scholars like him possibly because their views go against her stand of a) Aryan invasion/migration theory and b) their dating of Rig Veda much earlier than 1200 BCE (p. 9).

As regards the incorporation of absorption of the non-Vedic traditions in the Vedic texts or the so-called Brahminical domain, that too dates back to the Rigvedic times. Rudra, one of the prominent Gods of the Rig Vedic pantheon was drawn from the tribal stratum of the society. The story of seer Nabhanedishtha in the Aitareya Brahmana mentions that Rudra appeared before him and claimed his share in the leftovers of the sacrifice. This story occurs in two prominent texts namely Taittiriya text of Yajur Veda (Taittiriya Samhita 3.1.9.4) and Aitareya Brahmana text affiliated to the Rig Veda (Aitareya Brahmana 5.14). Rudra’s tribal antecedents are evident and well accorded by the statement in the *Apastambha Sranta sutra* (Apastamba Shrautasutra 8.17.11) addressed to Rudra during the Shaakamedha sacrifice, “If he (the sacrificer) does not have enemy, let him say: “the mole is your animal”. The present author can say with personal experience that the tribals in India like the animal mole – *Akhu*- from the bottom of their heart. As she has not quoted this Apastamba Shrautasutratext, let her verify this statement. Similarly Pushan in the Rig Vedic text was the God of cowherds. He wielded goad, astram (Rigveda 6.58.2), pointed stick to control animals. He was offered oblations in the Vedic sacrifices. This line of research if undertaken by

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<sup>45</sup> Kenneth A. R Kennedy (2000), *God-Apes and Fossil Men, Paleoanthropology of South Asia*; The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor; page 81

Wendy, she would not have reached a conclusion that only Brahmins contributed to the composing of the Vedas and the “others” including the tribals were not represented therein.

Another very important and interesting incorporation of the local, non-Vedic, non-Brahminical tradition in the Rig Veda text is about the Indrani-Vrishakapi dialogue hymn (Rigveda 10.86) famous for its amorous contents. There is a tradition in Uttar Pradesh (UP), a northern state in India, which can be traced back to this amorous dialogue between *indrANi-* and *vRZAkapi*. It is reported by BBC correspondent Mark Tully in his book *No Fullstops in India* (1992, P 46). He witnessed this tradition during a marriage procession in a remote village in UP. There were two men dressed in women’s attire with false breasts bulging through their blouses. A third man was dressed as a monkey with a large tail and large penis made of cloth. Initially, all three of them danced making seductive gestures. This was followed by enactment of sexual intercourse and achievement of ecstasy by one of the acting ladies. Thus, the *indrANi-vRZAkapi* dialogue hymns point to the fertility cult, traces of which are found in the current rural marriage customs. The process of assimilation and ritualistic adaptation continued for millennia when the local gods and traditions were sanctified by bestowing these local deities with status of incarnation of the Vedic Gods namely Vishnu and Shiva. All this goes to show that Wendy has not paid attention to the original texts when making her “unique” assertions about the contents of Vedas being purely Brahmanical.

**Page 35, para 2:** Wendy states proudly, “*I have labored all my adult life in the paddy field of Sanskrit, and since I know ancient India best, I have lingered in the past in this book longer than an anthropologist might have done, and even when dealing with the present, I have focused on the elements that resonate with the past, so that the book is driven from the past, back-wheel-powered.*”

**Comment:** Doniger is known for her collecting vast amount of information (and not for her knowledge or depth of insight or even comprehension of the foreign culture she claims to study and write about) from the ancient texts since long. However, her understanding has not come up to the level of command over the Sanskrit language.<sup>46</sup> She makes

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<sup>46</sup> For example, Rahul Peter Das, while commenting on another of her books, says (pp. 11-12 and fn. 20, reference given below): “Not only [has]....O’Flaherty hardly anything gleaned from such texts, but the little they do have is based on more or less chance finds and also shows an unfamiliarity with these works...”

gross mistakes in interpreting those texts and drawing untenable conclusions. In the Vedic literature her ambit is limited only to the Rig Veda. Even there her scholarship is doubtful. The chapter-wise reviews of her book will reveal many of these glaring errors that should cause her and the publisher a lot of embarrassment. Suffice it to say even an undergraduate student is not expected to show so much shoddiness in his term papers as Doniger's book has.

**Page 36:** “...the women were forbidden to study the most ancient sacred texts, the *Vedas*.”

**Comment:** This is not true for all times. For a refutation of this view, refer to our critique on chapter 05 of this book.

**Page 40:** “If the motto of Watergate was ‘Follow the money’, the motto of the history of Hinduism could well be ‘Follow the monkey’, or more often, ‘Follow the horse.’”

**Comment:** This statement is as derogatory to the Hindus as a white supremacist comparing President Obama to a monkey. Doniger's supporters claim that there is nothing demeaning in this racist remark because she is referring to Hanuman. This defense is dishonest and disingenuous because nowhere does the context of this remark refer to Hanuman.

In fact, on pages 468-469, Doniger says - “*Mosques also provided a valuable contrast with temples within the landscape of India....The mosque, whose serene calligraphic and geometric contrasts with the perpetual motion of the figures depicted on the temple, makes a stand against the chaos of India, creating enforced vacuums that India cannot rush into with all its monkeys and peoples and colors and the smells of the bazaar and, at the same time, providing a flattering frame to offset*

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.....what she writes does create the impression that she is oblivious of the very complicated issues involved here, and her work in general shows no signs of her having studied Indian theories of reproduction....in more than a rudimentary fashion....Such oversights do make one liable to be wary with regard to her other translations....”

In other words, Doniger does not understand well in Hindu scriptures what she considers her forte (i.e. sex, reproduction). She would have surely lost the debate to Ubhaya Bharati, the wife of Mandana Mishra!

See: Rahul Peter Das (2003), *The Origin of the Life of a Human Being*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Ltd.: New Delhi

*that very chaos.*” Doniger’s comment is quite racist and orientalist. It is simply unbelievable that even in this age, a scholar can essentialize the Hindu Main St. of sultanate India as “monkeys and peoples, colors and smells, and chaos” – just a variant of the cow, caste and curry stereotype of India and Hindus.

**Page 46, para 2:** Consistent with her theme of projecting Hinduism as violent and intolerant, Doniger claims, *“People have been killed in India because they did or did not sacrifice animals, or had sex with the wrong women, or disregarded the Vedas, or even made use of the wrong sacred texts, but no one was impaled (the Hindu equivalent of burning at the stake) for saying that god was like this rather than like that.”*

**Comment:** How many Hindus have been killed for sacrificing or not sacrificing animals, or for disregarding the Vedas, or for using the wrong sacred texts? Doniger forcibly superimposes European crusades, inquisitions, Catholic-Protestant civil wars on the history of Hindus without providing a shred of evidence. There is simply no evidence that any significant number of Hindus or non-Hindus were killed for the above reasons. This is just a deliberate attempt to project the Hindus as intolerant. Throughout the book, we see repeated attempts by Doniger to depict the Hindus (even women like Sita) as violent.

**Page 48, para 2:** *“The Parsis did not in fact dissolve into Islam and Hinduism; they remained Parsis and indeed were often caught in the crossfire during the riots that followed the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.”*

**Comment:** Rather than crediting the proverbial Hindu tolerance for the fact that the Parsis, fleeing Islamic persecution in Iran, found refuge within the tolerant Hindu society and survived, Doniger puts Islam and Hinduism at the same level in their treatment of the Parsis! Contrary to what Doniger seems to imply, the Parsis were not molested to any significant scale during the partition riots.



## 5. Review of the Chapter 3, “*Civilization in the Indus Valley: 50,000 to 1500 BCE*” by Vishal Agarwal

### General Comments:

This chapter deals with the Harappan Civilization (also called the ‘Indus Saraswati Civilization’ or the ‘Indus Valley Civilization’). One wonders why Doniger even wrote this chapter herself, instead of assigning it to one of her graduate students who would have done a better job. For example, a cursory look at the bibliography for this chapter is embarrassing – of the 110 endnotes, only 2 are derived from the works from contemporary western Harappan archaeologists (1 each from Kenoyer and Possehl), two from contemporary Indian archaeologists, and half a dozen or so from almost a century old report by Marshall. The rest approx. 100 end notes show her reliance on secondary works of India’s agenda driven Communist historians (e.g., Romila Thapar, Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya), authors of generalist books in Indian history (e.g., John Keay) and other motley non-specialists in Harappan archaeology. Knowledge of this civilization has been changing practically every year due to ongoing archaeological digs, and Doniger’s near total ignorance of works of contemporary archaeologists of Harappan culture makes the chapter outdated and amateurish, in addition to being full of laughable errors, some of which will be pointed out in this review. As an example of her ignorance, we can point out to her *virtual* black-out of sites in the Ghaggar basin, in the Doab and in Gujarat. Throughout the chapter, the impression given is that the valley of river Indus was the center of gravity of that culture, whereas it has now been known for at least 2 decades that 65% or more of the sites were in the Ghaggar valley, Kutch and Saurashtra.

Good scholarship requires skepticism but Doniger verges on cynicism and fantasy when she starts questioning the quite reasonable interpretations that archaeologists of this culture have given to the artifacts unearthed during excavations. Her cynicism sounds quite hypocritical, considering that her own standard methodology is one of making reckless Freudian free associations between disparate facts (in different eras and geography) to consistently paint a pornographic picture of the Hindu culture. Other than her witty remarks and cute English phraseology, the chapter really adds nothing new to our knowledge or understanding of the Harappan Culture.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the origins of Hindu religious practices to Harappan times. Due to her ignorance of the relevant technical literature (as mentioned above), she does not mention several remarkable parallels between Harappan artifacts and Hindu artifacts in later times. And when archaeologists (i.e., those quoted by her) do point to these parallels, her skepticism about these reasonable identifications sometimes borders on cynicism. Doniger's omissions and attitudes result not just from her limited acquaintance with technical literature on this topic, but also from her attachment to the racist Aryan invasion theory (which becomes clear when we read chapter 4 of her book) that holds that the superior white skinned Aryan invaders overpowered brown skinned natives of the Indus Valley Civilization. As in the rest of her book and in her other writings, here too Doniger tries to dodge academic debate by simply lampooning her critics as 'Hindu Nationalists.

Let us now look at some specific errors.

**Page 67, para 1:** *"But from about 2300 BCE the first urbanization took place, as great cities arose in the valley of the Indus River....."*

**Comment:** Incorrect. First, archaeologists date the beginning of urbanization as early as 3200 BCE.<sup>47</sup> And second, evidence of beginning of urbanization is not restricted to the valley of the Indus River. Digging in the Ghaggar basin has revealed evidence of urbanization around the same dates as in Harappa.

**Page 67, para 1:** *"...the Indus Valley Civilization or the Harappan Civilization (named after Harappa, one of the two great cities in the Indus, the other being Mohenjo-Daro...."*

**Comment:** Doniger is also not aware that archaeologists now talk of not 2, but at least 5 great cities of this civilization with the added three sites of Ganeriwala, Dholavira and Rakhigarhi.<sup>48</sup> Doniger fails to mention the third name "Indus-Saraswati Civilization" that is now increasingly being used in literature. As an archaeologist remarks –

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<sup>47</sup>McIntosh, Jane R. 2002. *A Peaceful Realm- The Rise and Fall of the Indus Civilization*. Westview Press: Boulder (Colorado), p. 12

<sup>48</sup> Gregory Possehl, *The Indus Civilization - A Contemporary Perspective*, Altamira Press (2002), p. 247

“...Suddenly it became apparent that the “Indus” Civilization was a misnomer – although the Indus had played a major role in the development of the civilization, the “lost Saraswati” River, judging by the density of settlement along its banks, had contributed an equal or greater part to its prosperity. Many people today refer to this early state as the “Indus-Saraswati Civilization” and continuing references to the “Indus Civilization” should be seen as an abbreviation in which the “Saraswati” is implied.”<sup>49</sup>

The culture is called ‘Harappan Culture’ because it is an archaeological convention to name cultures after the first type site discovered.

**Page 67, para 2:** Explaining why civilization first arose in the Indus plains and not on the Ganges plains, she speculates (following the old Marxist theories repeated in Wolpert’s popular but antiquated book that regurgitates colonial theories)–“*The Indus Valley plain.....not so rich as that of the effluvial plain of the Ganges, for instance, required no iron tools to clear and settle while, on the other hand, the silt from the river floodings provided sufficient natural fertilizer to create the surplus that makes civilization possible.*”

**Comment:** The view that the Ganges plains were thickly forested is now rejected and it is believed that the Upper Ganga Plains area was mainly savannah grassland with forests here and there and the Middle Ganga Plains had relatively thicker forests but there were enough open spaces.<sup>50</sup>

Archaeologists also question the premise whether iron tools were necessarily needed to cut the forests because slash and burn is a more effective way of getting rid of forests.<sup>51</sup>

**Page 67, para 4:** “*The civilization of the Indus Valley extends over more than a thousand sites, stretching over 750,000 square miles, where as many as 40,000 people once lived.*”

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<sup>49</sup> McIntosh, p. 24

<sup>50</sup> Rakesh Tewari, “Myth of Dense Forests and Human Occupation in the Ganga Plain”, pp. 102-116 in *Man and Environment*, Vol XXIX, No. 2 (2004)

<sup>51</sup> Dilip Chakrabarti, “Beginning of Iron and Social Change in India”, pp 329-338 in *Indian Studies: Past and Present*, Vol 14 (1973)

**Comment:** It is a ridiculous statement that only 40,000 people lived in the IVC. Doniger refers to Gavin Flood's book<sup>52</sup> which does not make this claim at all! The number of 40,000 people is normally taken to be the approximate population of the city of Mohenjo-Daro alone, not the entire civilization. In any case, why should Doniger reference a non-specialist work on this topic instead of publications by competent archaeologists? Most of her references that she cites are similarly non-appropriate and it appears that she is merely trying to 'pad' her bibliography.

**Para 67, page 4:** Explaining the extent of the "*civilization of the Indus Valley*", she says of the southern limits - "*....down to the port of Lothal in the delta on the sea.*"

**Comment:** Incorrect statement. Lothal is about 200 miles away from the delta of the Indus river. The extent of the culture as stated by Doniger is completely incorrect and she leaves out the entire Gangetic Doab, northern Afghanistan, Jammu region etc.

**Page 68, para 2:** "*....a number of dice have been identified....from Harappa and elsewhere....This is a fact of great significance in the light of the importance of gambling in later Indian civilization, from 1200 BCE.*"

**Comment:** Inconsistent claims are made in her book. In chapter 5, Doniger dates the Rigveda from 1700-1500 BCE (on page 103) and then quotes from this text the gambler's hymn (p. 121) and says that gambling was a major pastime in the Rigvedic period. Now she says that Rigveda (where gambling is mentioned as pastime) is from 1200 BCE. Isn't this a difference of at least 300 years (from 1500 to 1200 BCE) if she claims here that gambling became important from 1200 BCE?

**Page 74, para 3:** "*The discovery at Indus sites of a number of polished, oblong stones, mostly small but ranging up to two feet in height, and probably used to grind grain, has led some scholars to identify these stones as replicas of the erect phallus (linga) of Shiva and the vagina (yoni) of his consort...There are so many assumptions here that it makes your head spin....*"

Doniger then makes other speculations to suggest that these have nothing to do with the worship of Shiva.

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<sup>52</sup> Gavin Flood. 1996. *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge University Press (UK)

**Comment:** Harappan culture sites have yielded very convincing examples of linga-yoni, clearer than what Doniger seems to be aware of.<sup>53</sup>

**Page 77, para 2:** Wendy refers to feminine terracotta figurines unearthed in Harappan contexts and speculates – “*Big breasts are as useful to courtesans as to goddesses. Are the buxom centerfolds of Playboy magazine fertility symbols...?*”

**Comment:** Quite a jejune remark, typical of Doniger.

**Page 79, para 2:** Doniger questions the identification of the Great Bath at Mohenjo Daro with the bathing tanks of Hindu temples in later times with the remarks – “*Well, it’s a big building, true, but why couldn’t it be a dorm, or a hotel, or a hospital, or even a brothel?*”

**Comment:** A very silly and immature comment, ignoring the architectural features of the site. Doniger should explain why the site could have been a brothel. Here is a description of the site, which makes it clear why archaeologists believe that it played a religious function –

“Ascending the grand staircase into the citadel at Mohenjo Daro, visitors entered the complex. The visitors were probably required to purify themselves in the bathroom at the top of the stair. From here a zigzag route led into the heart of the complex: along a street, turning to enter one of the two doors of the building on one’s left, and passing through an antechamber into the pillared courtyard within which lay the Great Bath ... This is a large rectangular basin, carefully constructed so as to be watertight. An outer baked brick shell held an inner wall, with mud brick packing between them. Within this a thick layer of bitumen (natural tar) provided a seal within which the bath was constructed of closely fitted bricks placed on edge, the gaps between them filled with gypsum plaster. Steps led down from the courtyard to a ledge running across each end of the bath and thence down into the water.

Scholars seem by and large united in considering that this was a religious structure, connected with ritual bathing. Ritual purification has played a key role in religion in the Indian subcontinent over the last 2,500 years and must presumably have done so 2,000 years earlier. Clockwise circumambulation (pradakshina) has been an important form of worship in the subcontinent for several millennia

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<sup>53</sup> B B Lal (2002), *The Saraswati Flows On*, Aryan Books International (New Delhi), p. 118

and it is possible that the colonnade was used to perform this act of worship around the Great Bath. A large well lay in a room to the east of the colonnade while around the east and northern sides were a series of bathrooms, where perhaps the worshipper might ritually wash before entering the bath itself.”<sup>54</sup>

**Page 80, para 1:** *“The stupa is indeed a strong hint that the structure underneath it might have been religious, for Buddhism shares with other religions (including, notably Hinduism and Islam) the habit of sacred recycling, putting one religious building on the site hallowed by another, the funeral baked meats served cold for the wedding breakfast that follows.”*

**Comment:** The comment is simply another example of Doniger’s perverse logic (a more charitable explanation would be reckless free association). Hindus are not known in general to have destroyed Buddhist monuments on any large scale, whereas the Muslim rulers did in fact indulge in large scale destruction of Hindu temples – a plain historical truth. In some cases, when entire Buddhist populations of an area adopted Hindu traditions, they may have converted their local Buddhist shrines to Hindu ones. In contrast, Muslim mosques were built for *minority* Muslim communities in the midst of a sea of Hindu population after the destruction of pre-existing Hindu temples at those sites by invading fanatical Muslim rulers.

The absurdity of Doniger’s facile parallels may be demonstrated from the following example: “Daryl dies and his widowed wife Susan, being without support, re-marries a caring man Michael after a while. There is another man William whose wife Sarah is raped by Jeffrey and William is unable to protect her from Jeffrey. Looking at these two cases, a scholarly lady named Ms X. O’Flaherty remarked – “Both the cases are similar because after all, the husbands of Susan and Sarah are both sharing their wives with Michael and Jeffrey.”

Any objective observer would consider this observation of Ms X. O’Flaherty as the product of a sick and a perverse mind. Wendy Doniger’s comment is no different – her statement shows that it is the product of a mind filled for hatred with Hindus, or with a perverse understanding, or with both.

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<sup>54</sup> McIntosh, p. 109

**Page 83-84:** In these concluding paragraphs, Doniger lists some other Harappan- Later Hindu parallels like the Pipal leaf, conch shells etc.

**Comment:** Doniger conveniently leaves out the other parallels between Harappan and Vedic cultures that are noticed in contemporary archaeological literature, showing that her knowledge of Harappan Culture is clearly quite antiquated. Some of these parallels are:

1. **Fire Altars:** “An unexpected feature of Indus worship has been the discovery, doubted at first but repeated now at many sites including the recent excavations at Rakhigarhi, of the sacrificial hearths known as fire altars. Fire altars are a central feature of the religion of the Indo-Aryans, and their apparent discovery has fueled the cause of those who are convinced – wrongly, as I and many other scholars believe – that the Indus people were also Indo-Aryans, while it has proved an embarrassment to those who don’t support this view. But are the Indus hearths really fire altars in the Vedic sense? The similarities have been overemphasized and the shared elements of fire and animal sacrifice are too common, being found in many religions, to be a culturally diagnostic link.”<sup>55</sup>
2. **Domestic Shrines:** “....In some settlements, namely Kalibangan, Banawali and Lothal, the houses also included a room set apart as a domestic shrine, a feature also common in modern Indian homes, although such shrines have not been found at Mohenjo Daro.”<sup>56</sup>
3. **Weights and Metrology:** “The most common Indus weight was equivalent to about 13.7 grams. Taking this as the basic unit the Indus people used smaller weights that were  $1/16$ ,  $1/8$ ,  $1/4$  and  $1/2$  of this basic unit and larger ones that were multiples of 2, 4, 10, 12.5, 20, 40, 100, 200, 400, 500, and 800 times the basic unit. The basis for the whole weight system was probably the ratti, around 0.109 gram, the weight of a seed of the gunja creeper (*Abrus precatorius*), equivalent to  $1/128$  part of the Indus basic unit. The ratti is still used in India as a jeweler’s weight and was the basis, among other things, for the weight standards of the first Indian coins that were first issued in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. A number of the early states issued coins of 1 or 2 karshapanas, a karshapana being 32 rattis, so these coins were equivalent to the Indus weights of  $1/4$  and  $1/2$  the basic unit.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> McIntosh, p. 121

<sup>56</sup> McIntosh, p. 100

<sup>57</sup> McIntosh, p. 125

4. **Yogic posture terracottas:** Even though referring to Marshall's report, Doniger fails to mention that both Harappa and Mohenjo Daro have yielded terracotta figurines in yogic asanas.<sup>58</sup> Some of these clearly show the Namaste gesture of Hindus today.
5. **Burial Customs:** "In most of the burials, the body was fully stretched in the north south direction, with the feet pointing towards south – the direction associated with Lord Yamaraj in the later Hindu tradition."<sup>59</sup> Fractional burials and cremation are also attested in Harappan culture – again paralleled in the Rigveda.
6. **Urban planning patterns:** The ratios of the dimensions of Harappan settlements often correspond to those recommended in later Hindu scriptures on architecture (Vastushastras).<sup>60</sup> The orientation of the streets also demonstrates concern for the principles of these texts.
7. **Feminine Ornaments:** Sindhoor in women's hair parting; Harappan ornaments and ornaments worn by women in that region today<sup>61</sup>
8. **Harappan and modern carts in that region today:** Transportation vehicles in the Indus region still resemble the images of vehicles in Harappan art.<sup>62</sup>
9. **Agricultural Practices:** "Striking parallels exist, however, between the rural economy of later India and that which we can reconstruct from Indus evidence. The Early Indus field discovered at Kalibangan, for example, was ploughed in exactly the same pattern as is used in the region today...The tools and equipment by the Indus farmers, such as ploughs and solid-wheeled carts drawn by bullocks, are still in use today. The same is true of many other tools and domestic equipment, underlining the antiquity of agricultural practices in the Indian subcontinent and the strong similarities that exist between the daily lives or ordinary people in Indus times and today – 4,500 years later."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Lal, p. 127

<sup>59</sup> McIntosh, p. 118

<sup>60</sup> Michel Danino, "New Insights into Harappan Town-Planning, Proportions and Units with Special Reference to Dholavira", pp. 66-79 in *Man and Environment*, vol. XXXIII, No. 1 (2008)

<sup>61</sup> Lal, pp. 82-89

<sup>62</sup> Lal, pp. 107-110

<sup>63</sup> McIntosh, p. 200



**Closing Remarks on Chapter 3:** The three main flaws in this chapter may be summarized as follows –

1. A completely out of date acquaintance with the nature and spread of the Harappan Culture due to an almost completely reliance on antiquated works of non-specialists.
2. A cynical attitude is shown by Doniger towards archaeologists when they adopt the most parsimonious interpretations of archaeological data while comparing Harappan artifacts to later Hindu traditions.
3. An ignorance of deep parallels between Harappan and Hindu religious and cultural patterns, as a result she is unable to justify the inclusion of this chapter in her book, which deals with the history of Hindus.

It is perhaps apt to close the review with the following remarks from a leading archaeologist because they also show precisely what Doniger's chapter fails to demonstrate –

“It has recently been written that the Indus Civilization ‘provided the structure for the later Indian civilization’ and that ‘all the people of the subcontinent are, in one way or the other, inheritors of the Indus Civilization.’ This strong emphasis on the role of the Indus Civilization as laying down the foundations of the later developments of Indian history and culture rests on a large number of archaeological features, especially those related to agriculture, crafts, internal and external trade, communications, social and political framework, religion, and art forms.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Dilip Chakrabarti, *The Oxford Companion to Indian Archaeology*, OUP (2006), p. 211

## 6. Review of the Chapter 4, “*Between the Ruins and the Text: 2000 – 1500 BCE*” by Vishal Agarwal

### General Remarks on the Chapter: The Aryanist presumptions of Wendy Doniger

There are three main theories on the relationship between Indo-Aryans or the Vedic Peoples (‘IA’ for short) on one hand and the Harappan Culture (‘IVC’ for short) on the other.

1. The first theory is the Aryan Invasion Theory and its euphemistic variants such as the Aryan Migration Theory. We will denote them all by ‘AIT’ in this critique. According to these theories, the IA languages arrived in India towards the end of the Harappan culture, or after the collapse of the Harappan culture. Therefore, the Harappan culture is essentially non Vedic or the Vedic elements are not prominent in the Harappan culture. In this theory, the entire Vedic literature postdates the collapse of the Mature Harappan Culture, i.e., it postdates 1700 BCE (or 1500 or even 1200 BCE in other variations).
2. The second theory states that the Indo-European languages (‘IE’) originated in India and diffused from there either before or during the Harappan period. According to this theory, frequently called the ‘Out of India’ (OIT) theory, the Vedic Aryans are essentially the same peoples as the Harappans. In this theory, the Vedic literature coincides with the Harappan culture in chronology although the Rigveda may even precede the Mature Harappan period.
3. The third theory is somewhere in between, and argues that the Vedic peoples may have originated outside the Indian subcontinent but subsequently entered the region before the rise of the Harappan Culture. This theory argues for a greater antiquity of the time of split of IE languages to yield Indo-Aryan languages than is conventionally believed. A natural corollary of this view is that the Harappan culture was predominantly, if not completely Vedic Aryan. This theory states that the bulk of the Rigveda was created prior to the rise of mature Harappan culture around c. 2600 BCE within India and that by that time, the Vedic Peoples had already resided in northwest India for a considerable period

of time. The other Vedas coincide chronologically with the Mature Harappan and Late Harappan periods (see Postscript for more details).

Doniger lists these and many other theories about the Harappan – Vedic connection (or a lack thereto) and favors the invasionist version i.e., the first of the three theories listed by us above. She tries to give evidence (mainly copied from Marxist historian Romila Thapar's works) on why theories 2 and 3 are incorrect. But Thapar herself has often regurgitated antiquated theories found in books written a century back,<sup>65</sup> and therefore, Doniger's treatment of this topic acquires the faults of its sources.

The present reviewer does not subscribe to either of the first two theories but is open to the third. None of the evidence cited by Doniger-Thapar for dismissing the third theory is convincing or compelling. The reason that they believe in the evidence they cite is that they are not familiar with zoological, botanical, archaeological and other branches of literature that are essential to consider before drawing any conclusions on this matter.

**Page 87, para 1:** *“Sanskrit and Iranian (or Avestan) formed one of the oldest subfamilies [Indo-Iranian] within this larger group [Of Indo-European languages].”*

**Comment:** Misleading. In the Cladistic tree of Indo-European languages created by IE linguists, the Indo-Iranian family is actually one

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<sup>65</sup> For example, many of the Thapar-Doniger arguments are found already in the book which was actually written before the discovery of the Harappan Culture (!): Maurice Winternitz (1962 reprint), *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. I, Part I, (Introduction and Veda), Third Edition, Translated from the Original German Edition (1907) by S. Ketkar,. University of Calcutta, Calcutta. The same antiquated arguments are found repeated uncritically in the works of other Indian Marxist historians (D. N. Jha) whose historiographical agendas tie in with the political agendas of the Communist political parties of India. Unfortunately, even the supposedly non-political Indologists seem to subscribe to similar Aryanist models. See for example:

Thomas R Trautmann. 2010. *India – Brief History of a Civilization*. OUP: New York. This book dismisses the first two theories on Aryan origins with the cursory remark that horses and chariots are not present in Harappan contexts whereas they feature prominently in the Vedic literature.

of the more innovating/younger languages,<sup>66</sup> even though the Iranian and Indo-Aryan languages are attested before all the other IE languages.

**Page 88, para 3:** “*Antigods, Asuras (whose name incorporates the word asu, “breath”), are the equal and morally indistinguishable elder brothers and rivals of the gods in the Indo-European period (when Ahura Mazda, the “great Asura,” is the chief god of the Avesta), but they later become totally demonic demons...*”

**Comment:** Ignorant generalization. The statement, made in the context of Rigveda by Doniger is misleading and inaccurate. In the early family books of the Rigveda, ‘asura’ means, ‘Lord,’ and only in the later books does it start acquiring a negative meaning. There is no class of gods in the Rigveda denoted by ‘Asura’.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, it is inaccurate to state (on the basis of later Vedic literature) that the Asuras were equal and morally indistinguishable brothers and rivals of gods in *the Indo-European period*.

Doniger is also wrong in translating the name ‘Ahura Mazda’ as “the great Asura” because Iranists usually translate the word as ‘Lord Wisdom’<sup>68</sup> and not as the “great Asura” as Doniger does.

**Page 89, para 4:** “*...the theory that the Vedic people invaded still has general currency.*”

**Comment:** Incorrect. Amongst specialists (especially archaeologists), the invasion theory has actually lost general currency. Only non-specialists seem to hold on to it due to academic inertia. It appears to have general currency for Doniger because that is the theory that she prefers to believe in. Most Indologists now prefer more ‘politically correct’ and confused models like the Aryan Migration Theory, ignoring the archaeological evidence to the contrary.

**Pages 92-93:** Doniger refers to the Aryan Migration theory as a merely a ‘politically correct’ variant of the Aryan Invasion Theory and

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<sup>66</sup> This may be verified even from diagrams on the Internet. See for example <http://anthropology.net/2008/02/05/the-indo-european-language-tree/the-indo-european-branches-of-the-language-tree/>

<sup>67</sup> See Wash Edward Hale 1986), *Asura in the Early Vedic Religion*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Ltd. (New Delhi)

<sup>68</sup> F B J Kuiper, “Ahura Mazda, Lord Wisdom,” pp. 25-42 in *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol. 18 (1976)

quotes Martin West favorably who argues that Indo European languages spread through “*aggressive migrations*” because “*there are constant references to battles and descriptions of fighting in the Indo-European poetic and narrative traditions.*” [i.e., invasions].

**Comment:** Doniger overlooks the fact that the Aryan Migration theory was proposed as a replacement for the Aryan Invasion Theory precisely because the archaeological record failed to uncover any tell-tale signs of invasions, and not because of political correctness. Archaeologist Jonathan Kenoyer states – “... there is no archaeological or biological evidence for invasions or mass migrations into the Indus Valley between the end of the Harappan phase, about 1900 B.C. and the beginning of the Early Historic Period around 600 B.C.”<sup>69</sup>

Even the Marxist historian Romila Thapar says—

“There is virtually no evidence of the invasion and the conquest of northwestern India by a dominant culture coming from across the border. Most sites register a gradual change of archaeological cultures. Where there is evidence of destruction and burning it could as easily have been a local activity and is not indicative of a large-scale invasion. The borderlands of the northwest were in communication with Iran and Central Asia even before the Harappa culture with evidence of the passage of goods and ideas across the region. This situation continued into later times and if seen in this light when the intermittent arrival of groups of Indo-European speakers in the northwest, perhaps as pastoralists or farmers or itinerant traders, would pose little problem. It is equally possible that in some cases local languages became Indo-Europeanized through contact.”<sup>70</sup>

**Page 94, para 1:** “*It [The theory that the Vedic people originated in India] has the additional disadvantage of being susceptible to exploitation by the particular brand of Hindu nationalism that wants the Muslims (and Christians) to get out of India: ‘We were always here, not just since the Rig Veda, but much, much earlier. This land was always ours.’*”

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<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Mark Kenoyer (1998), p. 174 in *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*. Karachi: Oxford University Press

<sup>70</sup> Romila Thapar (2000), p. 82 in “Imagined religious communities? Ancient history and the modern Search for a Hindu identity,” In *History and Beyond*, pp. 60–88. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

**Comment:** From the reference cited by Doniger, it is clear that she relies on the testimony of Michael Witzel, the Harvard Professor who is often taken as a Hindu Hater. In reality, the opposite theories (= Aryan Invasion, Aryan Migration) are susceptible to abuse by an even greater number of dangerous ideologies:

1. White supremacism<sup>71</sup> and Nazism<sup>72</sup>
2. Some forms of Hindu nationalism<sup>73</sup>
3. Minority (Jain and Sikh) fundamentalism in India
4. Indian Church Ideologies that want to pit different social classes of Hindus against each other<sup>74</sup>
5. Islamism<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>[http://www.duke.org/awakening/chapter29\\_09.html](http://www.duke.org/awakening/chapter29_09.html)

See also pp. 138-139 in Wilhem Halbfass, (1988), *India and Europe, An Essay in Understanding*, State University of New York Press: Albany (New York).

<sup>72</sup> Wilhem Halbfass, (1988), *India and Europe, An Essay in Understanding*, State University of New York Press: Albany (New York), pp. 139-140

<sup>73</sup> R C Majumdar, the doyen of Nationalist historians, as well as Veer Savarkar, the father of Hindu Nationalism, both assumed the AIT as a given historical fact. This is clear from their writings.

<sup>74</sup> Katti Padma Rao (1997), *Charvaka Darshan: Ancient Indian Dalit Philosophy*, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute. Madras

The Christian leader, Dr. K. Rajaratnam insinuates in the introduction: “The Dalit- the Dasyas (sic)- the slaves were thrown out of society for ages, lock, stock and barrel – except as untouchable labourers on the land which was once their own land but now totally alienated from their ownership. On the other hand, the conqueror community, also has, over ages, assiduously sustained a separate identity of its own, and is a part of the mainstream society only as its leader and sustainer of a system that negates life to millions, denies justice and equality in the society as a whole and continues to preside over the destiny of the society of India, and beckoning righteously to everybody else, every now and then towards national integration, but itself not integrated!” [pg. xiii]

He adds – “In cases where clearly superior thought forms of life and philosophy existed, they were absorbed into the Aryan system, thus totally destroying the identity of the life systems and thought forms of the original inhabitants of the land. It can be said that the emergence of Hindu society, as a dominant social and cultural system of the country the identity of the original religions, cultures and social systems, is the most successful of the earlier experiments in the world’s history.” [p, vii].

<sup>75</sup> E.g. “The reader may note that numerous Arabic roots exist in other languages without the least change. But then there were other roots which underwent metamorphic changes, distortions and mutilations which have to be removed by means of definite phonetic laws discussed in this book. Therefore, the reader is

6. German Nationalism<sup>76</sup>
  7. Hate-filled Dalit ideologies<sup>77</sup>
  8. Indological McCarthyism and Euro-Centric Biases<sup>78</sup>
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requested to study the book minutely, carefully and with an open mind. In particular, Sanskrit is a very difficult language and requires more patient study than other languages.....It is beyond a shadow of doubt that Sanskrit is clearly and cogently traceable to Arabic.” pp. v-vii in Sheikh Mohammad Ahmad Mazhar (1982), *Sanskrit Traced to Arabic*, Nusrat Art Press, Rabwah: Faisalabad (Pakistan)

<sup>76</sup> “It is in Germany that the European versions of the Aryan myth find their beginnings. Within a pedigree that included Nordic gods and human Goths, Lombards, Angles, Saxons, and Burgundians, German scholars ranked as highest their affiliation with the Franks. It was through Frankish genealogy that earlier lineages were traced to Trojans and ultimately to Noah’s son Japheth, who some believed had settled in Germany after the Deluge. Hildegard of Bingen even claimed that Adam and Eve spoke German! It was around this pivot of linguistic affinity that many notions of Germanic identity revolved. German humanists argued for German autochthony, ascribing their descent from powerful rulers of earlier times who manifested their might in regions far distant from the Rhine.....An original language (Ursprache) was the hallmark of the original race (Urvolk) in the minds of many nationalistic Germans in the period of Enlightenment and early years of romanticism. They made no distinction between the language and biological race in defining themselves as distinct from non-German populations of different idioms and origins. A few German scholars clung to the venerable notion that Hebrew was the original language of humanity from which German and other languages called Japhetic were derived, but their voices were seldom heard.” Page 80 in Kenneth A. R. Kennedy (2000), *God-Apes and Fossil Men, Paleoanthropology of South Asia*, The University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor)

<sup>77</sup>The Dalit Ideologue Udit Raj says, in an article dt. 27 December 2001 in the daily newspaper *The Hindustan Times* (URL = <http://www.hindustantimes.com/nonfram/271201/detide01.asp>) - “Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in his book, *The Discovery of India*, that Aryans had come from Central Asia. Even Lokmanya Tilak said so. Many historical findings prove that Aryans were foreigners. Indeed, if we look at the Hindutva forces, their supra-racism is much too expressed. I have never seen people of the same religion hating and discriminating against their own co-religionists as it is prevalent in the Hindu society. And is it not a truth that the Aryans hated the indigenous Dravidians?”

<sup>78</sup> “Bryant's historiographical critique is more provocative in the sense that it proposes to mitigate "a type of Indological McCarthyism creeping into areas of western, as well as certain Indian, academic circles, whereby anyone reconsidering the status quo of Indo-Aryan origins is instantly and a priori dubbed a nationalist,

9. Hinduphobia<sup>79</sup>
10. Communism and Marxism<sup>80</sup>

Which of these ideologies does Wendy Doniger subscribe to? In other words, Doniger's subscription AIT and AMT theories has even more dangerous political implications.

**Page 95, para 1:** *"It is hard to fit the ruins of the IVC into the landscape of the Rig Veda. The Rig Veda does not know any of the places or artifacts or urban techniques of the Indus Valley. None of the things the Veda describes look like the things we see in the archaeology of the Indus. The Rig Veda never mentions inscribed seals or a Great Bath or trade with Mesopotamia, despite the fact that it glories in the stuff of everyday life."*

**Comment:** Doniger borrows most of these arguments from Communist historian Romila Thapar's *"Early India"*, and therefore replicates her errors. Let us consider them one by one.

**URBAN IVC vs. RURAL VEDIC CULTURE:** The logic used by Indologists to contrast the seemingly nomadic Rigvedic culture with apparently urban Harappan culture suffers from faulty logic. Before entering the Indian subcontinent around 1700 BCE, the Vedic Aryans should have passed through the urban BMAC culture. Therefore, it is for these Indologists to explain why the Rigveda still does not know of any urban techniques. Also, the Rigvedic Aryans were settled in the area occupied by Mature Harappan culture for a few centuries before the Rigveda assumed its final form. Once again, it is for these invasionist

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a communalist or, even worse, a Nazi". Arguing forcefully for rigorous examination of the arguments put forward by Indian scholars against Aryan migrations, he believes that most Indologists in western academia would be willing to "change their views if appealed to with informed reason and arguments that address all the evidence". To put it most charitably, it is naive to think that the "ignorance" in influential western circles of indigenous writings on the Aryan question can be made to go away simply by producing a book about such writings, which Bryant has tried to do." - Nayanjot Lahiri. 2001. "Are You Aryan and Elite?" In *"India Today"*, issue dt. 19 November 2001. Available online at <http://www.india-today.com/itoday/20011119/books.shtml>

<sup>79</sup> We may take the writings of Meera Nanda as an example of this.

<sup>80</sup> Examples are the works of D N Jha, Romila Thapar, R S Sharma, R C Thakran, Suraj Bhan, Vijay Prasad, Vinay Lal etc.



Indologists to explain why the Rigveda still ‘does not know of the places or artifacts or urban techniques of the Indus Valley.’

This argument also overlooks the surprising continuity of architectural ratios, directional layout of cities etc., that one finds between the Harappan towns on one hand, and the Vedic astronomy<sup>81</sup> and later Hindu architectural texts<sup>82</sup> on the other. The most parsimonious explanation is that the Harappans and the Vedic peoples were one and the same.

It is also wrong to claim that the Harappan civilization was an ‘urban’ civilization. As recently as the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, 90% of the Indian population lived in villages. The percentage of village dwellers in Harappan culture must have been even higher. In fact, many scholars like Bhagwan Singh and R S Bisht see adequate evidence of an urban culture in Rigvedic verses.

**GREAT BATH:** This feature is found only in 1 site (Mohenjo-Daro) and not in the hundreds of others known in the Harappan Culture. So, its absence in the Rigveda does not mean anything. Further, some archaeologists argue that the Pushakarini (the word used for temple ponds

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<sup>81</sup> “...the site upon which Mohenjo-Daro was founded was selected because of its position on the Indus and the direction of the early Harappan settlement in the valley towards the rising point at the summer solstice. The horizon outline of the Kirthar range provided conditions for establishing a natural calendar starting at the point of the winter solstice in the valley of their predecessors. The special importance of the number seven and its celestial manifestation may have influenced the orientation of the axes towards the Pleiades and the star Aldebaran, whose setting point could be observed at the horizon.” Page 37 in Holdger Wankze. Axis Systems and Orientation at Mohenjo-Daro; pp. 33-44 in M Jansen. M. and G. Urban (1984). *Reports on Field Work Carried out at Mohenjo-Daro (Interim Reports Volume II)*, Pakistan 1983-84 by the IsMEO-Aachen-University Mission. German Research-Project Mohenjo-Daro (RWTH Aachen), Istituto Italiano Medio Ed Estremo Oriente (Roma).

The author notes that the streets were oriented towards these stars which were still observed very brightly in the horizon from the town in 2000 BC. Pleiades is the constellation given a lot of prominence in Vedic scriptures and is stated to arise in the east. Many more publications can be cited.

<sup>82</sup> Michel Danino, 2005. Dholavira's Geometry- A Preliminary Study. *Puratattva*, No 35: 76-84. Many other publications can be cited.

in later Sanskrit literature) is actually attested in Rigveda itself and therefore the 'Great Bath' is an example of this Pushkarini.<sup>83</sup> When one realizes that the 'Great Bath' is actually a fancy name given by archaeologists to what was essentially a small, artificial water tank or body, and that ponds are mentioned in the Vedic texts, even this supposed dichotomy between the Vedas and Harappan culture disappears.

**SEALS:** Many arguments can be given to dismiss Doniger's contention that the evidence of seals from Harappan contexts shows that the culture was not Vedic.

First, the Vedas are primarily religious texts whereas the function of the Harappan seals is not really known. It is unclear if the seals had any religious role to play, and most archaeologists seem to believe that they were used in trade. That being true, why should religious scriptures mention seals at all? After all, the Vedas hardly deal with trade.

Secondly, it is not as if the seals are found littered all over Harappan sites. Most of the seals come from a very few sites (like Mohenjodaro) and emerge from the most unlikely spots like garbage heaps.<sup>84</sup> So when they are not scattered all over the Harappan culture, why should a religious text like the Rigveda mention them?

Third, the seals always tend to show male animals, never females of the species. Curiously, male animals were sacrificed in Vedic ceremonies, not females.

Fourth, it has been suggested that these 'seals' were actually amulets mentioned in the Atharvaveda as 'manis'.<sup>85</sup>

Fifth, many of the themes depicted on the seals actually find an echo in the Vedic motifs. E.g. a scholar remarks –

“... One of the most problematic aspects of the seals is when they appear to contain concepts or ideas which are later found in the

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<sup>83</sup> R S Bisht. Harappans and the Rgveda, Points of Convergence. Pages 397-442 in G C Pande (ed), *The Dawn of Indian Civilization upto 600 BC*, History of science, philosophy, and culture in Indian civilization. Volume I Part 1, PHISPC Center for Studies in Civilizations (1999)

<sup>84</sup> See the introductions to the 3 volume corpus of Harappan seals edited by Asko Parpola et al.

<sup>85</sup> K N Shastri, “The Vedic Valley Civilization and the Atharvaveda,” Pages 157-158 (only a summary is provided) in R N Dandekar (1969), *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth International Congress of Orientalists*, New Delhi, January 4-10, 1964 (volume III, Part I), Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (Poona).

Rigveda. Thus, the strange theme of the bison copulating with the recumbent female with a plant sprouting from her head, referred to above and coming from Chanhudaro, may be compared with the Vedic theme of the union of heaven and earth (dyavapṛithivī), the latter represented as the Earth Mother (mātā bhūmī) and the former by the bull of heaven (dyaur me pita). Thus, a Harappan theme may find echoes in the Rig Vedic hymns to Parjanya (RV V.83), where Parjanya is likened to a thundering bull sprinkling Earth with his semen and fecundating her, thereby causing plants to grow."<sup>86</sup> Likewise, the cultic object placed below the nose of the Unicorn in the seals has been likened to the Soma filter in the Vedas – “In 1985 Iravatham Mahadevan (MAHADEVAN 1985:165-186) proposed that the object placed under the nose of the so-called ‘unicorn’ on the Indus Valley stamp seals (fig. 1) could be interpreted as a sacred filter used in the Soma ritual as described in the RgVeda. He based his interpretation on the fact that the two basic elements pictorially most emphasized in this object, namely: the ‘flow’ depicted by the parallel zigzag lines drawn on the upper vessel; and the ‘drops’ depicted in and around the lower bowl, correspond fairly precisely to the two central features of the Soma sacrifice as described in the RgVeda. These are pavamana, the ‘flowing (one)’ and indu being the ‘drop’, mentioned in almost every hymn of the Ninth Mandala dedicated wholly to Soma. This has led to Mahadevan’s conclusion that the Harappan cult object is in fact a filter device, the upper vessel acting as a strainer and the lower perforated bowl as a sieve.”<sup>87</sup>

To conclude, the evidence of seals does not disprove the Harappan-Vedic relationship when all the facts and interpretations are taken into consideration.

**TRADE WITH MESOPOTAMIA:** The Rigveda mentions ocean and oceanic trade several times and talks about seafarers bringing wealth from trade.<sup>88</sup> It is perhaps not out of place to mention here that some

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<sup>86</sup> Raymond & Bridget Allchin (1997), *Origins of a Civilization – the Prehistory and Early Archaeology of South Asia*, Viking (New Delhi), p. 202.

<sup>87</sup> Elisabeth C. L. During Caspers (1993), “Another Face of the Indus Valley Magico-Religious System,” pp. 65 – 86 in Adalbert J. Gail and Gerd J. R. Mevissen, *South Asian Archaeology 1991*, Franz Steiner Verlag (Stuttgart)

<sup>88</sup> G V Davane (1960), “An Analytical Study of Samudra in the Rigveda,” pp. 33-35 in *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth International Congress of Orientalists (New Delhi, January 4-10, 1964)*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (Poona).

B R Sharma (1967), “Vedic Aryans and Sea Voyage,” pp. 104-110 in *Veda Samikṣa*, ed. by E R Sreekrishna Sarma, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati

archaeologists actually hold that the importance of trade between Harappan and Mesopotamian cultures is grossly exaggerated.<sup>89</sup>

**Page 95, para 1:** *“It never refers to sculptured representations of the human body.”* [Therefore Vedic Aryans could not have lived in the Indus Valley].

**Comment:** There is no consensus in the scholarly community as to whether Vedic Deities were conceived in human iconic forms or not. Many scholars do believe that the realistic anatomical details of Deities in some Vedic verses pre-suppose their icons, whether human or anthropomorphic, as early as the Rigvedic period.<sup>90</sup> Several scholars have noted the parallels between these images carved on seals etc., with Vedic religious motifs, as noted above. Clearly then, Wendy Doniger is off the mark.

**Page 95, para 2:** *“Many of the words that the Rig Veda uses for agricultural implements, such as the plow, as well as words for furrow and threshing floor and, significantly, rice, come from non-Sanskritic languages, suggesting that the Vedic people learned much of their agriculture from communities in place in India before they arrived. But the Indus people, who obviously did have plows and mortar, presumably would have had their own words for them.”* [Therefore Vedic Aryans could not have lived in the IVC].

**Comment: AGRICULTURE** - It is somewhat of a myth that the Rigvedic Aryans were predominantly nomadic and pastoral whereas the Harappans were predominantly agricultural. In the last 150 years, Indologists have deliberately twisted agricultural words in the Rigveda to mean something other than what they mean in later times, to emphasize the settled agriculture described in the Rigveda. A recent book however, highlights that there is plenty of agricultural imagery in the Rigveda.<sup>91</sup> Conversely, the Sorath Domain of Harappan culture was predominantly rural and likewise, pastoralism was at least as important as agriculture in Mature Harappan period.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> One may refer to the relevant works of archaeologist Dilip Chakrabarti in this regard.

<sup>90</sup> See pages 74-75 in Jyotsna Chawla. 1990. *The Rgvedic Deities and Their Iconic Forms*. Munshiram Manoharlal (New Delhi)

<sup>91</sup> Narayan Laxman Jategaonkar (2000), *Krishni Mandala in Rgveda*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai (India).

<sup>92</sup> Walter A., Fairservis Jr. 1997. Views of the Harappans – The Transitional Years. Pages 167 – 173 in Jagat Pati Joshi. 1997. *Facets of Indian Civilization, Recent*

In the AIT paradigm which assumes that the Aryans arrived into the Indus basin around 1700 BCE, we cannot explain the following: In their march from their supposed homeland in the Pontic Steppes starting around 3500 BCE, the these peoples supposedly passed through the Andronovo culture (which shows settled agriculture, including irrigation), then through a nomadic region, then through BMAC (urban, agricultural) and thence into the Indus valley region. Therefore, if the Rigveda still had to borrow Indic terms for agriculture (and not from Andronovo and BMAC), it is for these Indologists to explain as to why the borrowing occurred in the Harappan culture alone! But if we assume that the Rigvedic Aryans arrived much earlier, the problem vanishes.

**PLOUGH:** Doniger’s argument presumes that the Indo-Aryans did not have the plough and adopted this agricultural implement from the ‘Dravidians’. She presumably refers to the fact that in the Rigveda, two of the words used for the plough, namely ‘lāṅgalaṃ’ and ‘sīraṃ’ are said to be of Dravidian origin by some scholars like Masica, but of uncertain origin<sup>93</sup> or of Austroasiatic origin by other scholars.<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately for her, these are not the only words that the Rigveda uses for the plough. Mantras 1.117.21 and 7.22.6 use the word ‘vrika’ for plough, and this word is clearly of Indo-European origin.<sup>95</sup> The word ‘karsati’ for ploughing is also said to have an IE origin.<sup>96</sup>

Another Rigvedic word is ‘phāla’ (ploughshare) and this has cognates in modern Iranian languages, indicating a proto-Indo-Iranian

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*Perspectives – Essays in Honour of Prof. B. B. Lal.* Aryan Books International: New Delhi.

On page 171 he says: “*Economics: a heavy emphasis upon cattle-raising as a source of wealth in the Indus core area; minimal sedentary village farming in that area and significantly a shift to greater importance in regions such as Gujarat; a goods and service economy created by the polity which extends to exchanges with non-Harappan people as well as inter-regional Harappan contacts, which includes the acquisition of luxury items.*”

<sup>93</sup> Gy Wojtilla. Notes on Indo-Aryan Terms for “Ploughing” and the “Plough”, *JIES* vol 14 (1986), pp. 27-37

<sup>94</sup> Gy Wojtilla. The Sanskrit Terminology of the Plough. *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungarica*, Vol 42, Nos. 2-3 (1988), pp. 325-338

<sup>95</sup> Jaan Puhvel. 1981. *Analecta Indoeuropaea*. Innsbruck: p. 120

<sup>96</sup> Gy Wojtilla (1986), op. cit.

form.<sup>97</sup> So how does Doniger explain IE words for plough in the Rigvedic vocabulary?

**FURROW:** Doniger refers to the word ‘sitā’ used for furrow of a ploughed field in Rigveda. This word is said to have a Dravidian etymology. But once again, several linguists disagree. One suggests that the word has a north Mesopotamian origin.<sup>98</sup> Another word for ‘furrow’ in the Rigveda is ‘karsa’, which again some scholars derive from an Indo-European root.<sup>99</sup>

**MORTAR and THRESHING FLOOR:** Doniger presumably refers to the Rigvedic word ‘ulukhala’ (mortar) and ‘khala’ (threshing floor) which are said to have Dravidian origins. However, other Indo-Europeanists like Paul Thieme considers this word a variant of ‘urukhara’ (having a broad ‘uru’ + threshing floor ‘khar’) which is transparently Indo-Aryan.<sup>100</sup>

**RICE:** The Rig Veda does not mention rice at all. It first appears in the Samhita of Atharvaveda. Significantly, Rice is marginally attested in Early Harappan and Mature Harappan contexts and becomes significant and well attested only in post Mature Harappan (or late Harappan) period.<sup>101</sup> Archaeologists are clearly divided as to whether domesticated rice it is present in the Mature Harappan phase. However, it is well attested at Pirak (one of the supposed entry points of Aryans into the Indian subcontinent from Afghanistan) around 1700 BCE. Therefore, if the Vedic Aryans had come to India around that time, as the conventional AIT/AMT theories hold, then why is it that rice is not mentioned at all in the Rigveda?

The archaeological and literary evidence concerning agricultural vocabulary can actually be harmonized by assuming that the Rigveda

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<sup>97</sup> Southworth, *Linguistic Archaeology of South Asia*. Routledge Curzon: London and New York: 2005, p. 73

<sup>98</sup> Puhvel (1981), op. cit., p. 123

Vaclav Blazek, *The Diffusion of Agricultural Terms from Mesopotamia*. *Archiv Orientalni*, No. 60 (1992), pp. 16-37

<sup>99</sup> Gy Wojtilla (1986), op. cit.

<sup>100</sup> Paul Thieme. *Review of The Sanskrit Language by T Burrow*. *Language* 31 (1955): 428-448

<sup>101</sup> H Fujiwara et al, “Rice and Ragi at Harappa – Preliminary Results by Plant Opal Analysis,” pp. 129-142 in *Pakistan Archaeology*, vol. 27 (1992)

belongs to pre-Harappan and Early Harappan phases (with some late portions belonging to the Mature Harappan and Late Harappan periods) whereas the Samhitas of Yajurveda and Atharvaveda belong predominantly to the Mature Harappan and Late Harappan Phases.

**Page 95, para 3:** “*The Rig Veda also mentions lions (10.28.11), though the Vedic people had to invent a word for “lion” (and to borrow a word for “peacock”).*” [Therefore the Vedic Aryans could not have lived in IVC].

**Comment:** Both these arguments are non-sequitur. Let us take them one by one.

**LION:** There no clear representation of the lion in Harappan contexts although it is mentioned in the Rigveda.<sup>102</sup> This absence is surprising, because even to this day, the Gir Forest in Saurashtra (the region is home to dozens of Harappan sites) is the only place in Asia where wild lions still roam free. In contrast, the tiger is frequently represented in the Harappan contexts but finds no mention in Rigveda, although it is mentioned in the later Samhitas of the Vedas. But can we read much into this dichotomy between the Harappan and the Vedic cultures? The Vedic word for the lion is ‘Simha’ which is sometimes said to be a loan word from either Dravidian or from Austro-Asian languages (linguists are not agreed on this).

Historically, the Lion has had a very wide geographical range, and existed all over the Balkans and Greece and in Asia from Turkey to northern India (across Iran, Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia).<sup>103</sup> Therefore, it defies logic as to why the Vedic Aryans would borrow the word ‘simha’ for Lion from Dravidians or from Austric language speakers when they should have encountered the creature much before reaching the Indian subcontinent.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Rigveda mentions the lion as ‘simha’. Verse 5.83.3 compares the sound of thunder and a lion’s roar. The lion is said to dwell in the hills (1.154.2; 2.33.11), roaming wild, a dreadful wild beast who was chased with hunters (5.15.3) and then trapped (10.28.10). See pp. 40-43 in B B Lal (2005), *The Homeland of the Aryans*, Aryan Books International (New Delhi).

<sup>103</sup> Bernhard Grzimek (ed.), *Grzimek’s Animal Life Encyclopedia Vol 12*, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company (1975), p. 354. See also the webpage <http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Lion>

<sup>104</sup> Amusingly, the Marxist historian Romila Thapar has proposed without offering any evidence that the lion was not present at all in Harappan India and was imported in later times. If that be the case, then why would the Vedic word

Linguists like Dolgopolsky in fact argue that *\*singh* is a Proto-Indo-European word that survives in the Vedic ‘simha’.<sup>105</sup> Other scholars also show that it is perfectly straightforward to give an Indo-Aryan etymology to the word and in fact it appears that the Dravidian and the Austric languages have borrowed their own words for Lion from the Vedic equivalent. It may be noted here that the Lion has never existed in areas currently occupied by speakers of Austric and Dravidian languages in India.<sup>106</sup> In summary, we cannot trust Doniger when she says that the Vedic Aryans ‘invented’ the word for the lion.

**PEACOCK:** The natural range of the Peacock has comprised the Indian subcontinent and S E Asia (including Indonesia). The word for peacock in the Vedas is ‘mayura’ and is said to have been borrowed from the Dravidians (and this is what Doniger seems to be hinting at) or even from Austric languages.

Doniger stresses the ‘horsey’ character of the Rigveda, but the same text actually compares the horse to a peacock, something which is unlikely if they Vedic peoples were ‘not at home’ with the peacock. For example, Rigveda describes the horse of India as Mayuraroman (with hair like peacock feathers) and as Mayurashepa (with a tail like a peacock’s plumage).<sup>107</sup>

Once again, linguists are not sure if the word mayura is indeed a Dravidian loan word, with some (e.g. Hans H Hock) suggesting that it is onomatopoeic word. Other scholars argue that it is a pan-Indian word that is of a colloquial origin and is most likely a loan from Indo-Aryan languages to Dravidian and Austric languages (note that the Dravidian ‘mayil’ is found only in Tamil, whereas the northern Dravidian languages like Kannada and Telugu have other words for the peacock).<sup>108</sup>

So quite clearly, this argument about the peacock does not shed any light on the origin of Indo-Aryans either.

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for the lion have a Dravidian or Austro-Asiatic etymology at all? See her chapter in the following book: Valmik Thapar, Yusuf Ansari and Romila Thapar (2013), *Exotic Aliens – The Lion and the Cheetah in India*, Aleph Book Co. (New Delhi)

<sup>105</sup> Cited on p. 114 by Edwin Bryant (2001), *The Quest for the Origins of Vedic Culture*, Oxford University Press, New York.

<sup>106</sup> Shrikant Talageri (1993), *Aryan Invasion Theory and Indian Nationalism*, Voice of India (New Delhi), p. 213

<sup>107</sup> Krishna Lal, “Peacock in Indian Art,” pp. 1-11 in *Journal of the Oriental Institute (Baroda)*, Vol. XXIII, Nos 1-2 (Sept – Dec 1973)

<sup>108</sup> Talageri (1993), p. 207



**Page 96, para 1:** “*The Vedic people knew the elephant but regarded it as a curiosity; they had to make up a word for it and called it “the wild animal with a hand” (mrigahastin).*” [Therefore the Vedic Aryans could not have lived in IVC].

**Comment:** Wrong on both counts. Doniger again borrows these arguments from Marxist historian Romila Thapar’s “*Early India*”, who merely regurgitates colonial works and misses out clear-cut contrary evidence from the Vedic texts themselves.

Let us take the elephant. Mrigahastin is not the only word used to refer to the elephant in the Rigveda.<sup>109</sup> The word ‘ibha’ occurring five times in the Rigveda is traditionally (by Yaska in Nirukta and Sayana in his Rigveda commentary) taken to mean the elephant although this sense is disputed by some modern scholars.<sup>110</sup>

Another word that the Rigveda uses for the elephant is ‘varana-mrga’ (e.g. Rigveda 8.33.8). There is no reason to believe that this word did not originate from an Indo-European source.

Elephants have always been indigenous in the areas that are occupied historically by speakers of Austro-Asiatic languages, like the Indian subcontinent (or the eastern parts of the subcontinent) and S E Asia. And yet, these languages also have the following words for elephants: Khmer ‘tang’ (meaning ‘hand’), Stieng ‘tong’ (meaning ‘hand’), Javanic ‘liman’ (meaning, ‘hand’).<sup>111</sup> Quite clearly then, the use of the word ‘mrigahastin’ by the Vedas to denote an elephant does not mean that Vedic Aryans originated from the west of the Indian subcontinent where elephants were not native animals.

Classical Sanskrit has several other words for the elephant and they are not necessarily from non-IA sources.

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<sup>109</sup> As an aside, it may be mentioned that the Vedic Samhitas -e.g., Atharvaveda Paippalada Samhita 2.8.5; 6.20.8 etc. and Atharvaveda Shaunakiya Samhita 4.3.2 etc. mention the snake as ‘toothed-rope’ (datvatii-rajju). Does this mean that the Vedic Aryans had never encountered snakes in Steppes, Central Asia or in the Afghanistan before they entered the Indian subcontinent?

<sup>110</sup> J Clifford Wright, “Vedic ibha, ibhya and Cl. Skt. Ibha,” pp. 275-282 in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Sanskrit and Related Studies (Sept 23-26, 1993)*, The Enigma Press, Cracow (Poland), 1995

<sup>111</sup> Vaclev Blazek, “Elephant in Indo-European Languages,” pp. 147-167 in *Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual UCLA Indo-European Conference (Los Angeles May 26-28, 2000)*, Institute for the Study of Man, Washington DC (2001)

**Page 96, para 1:** “*But they do not mention tigers or rhinoceroses, animals familiar from the Harappan seals.*” [Therefore the Vedic Aryans could not have lived in IVC].

**Comment: RHINOCEROS** - Doniger again borrows these arguments from Marxist historian Romila Thapar’s “*Early India*”, who merely regurgitates these from colonial works and leaves out current literature in this subject. Let us take these one by one.

First, the rhinoceros is definitely mentioned in the Vedic texts<sup>112</sup> starting from Rigveda 10.86.18 as ‘parasvat’ (clearly an Indo-Aryan word, also used for this animal in Ashokan inscriptions) and as Parasvat and Khadga in other Samhitas like Kathaka Samhita 5.7.11, Taittiriya Samhita 5.5.21.1, Atharvaveda (Shaunakiya) Samhita 6.72.3, Madhyandina Samhita 24.39, Maitrayani Samhita 3.14.21 etc. Interestingly, Madhyandina Samhita 25.28 and Maitrayani Samhita 3.14.10 state that the Rhinoceros should be sacrificed to the Deity Ishana, an interesting statement because the creature figures on the ‘Pashupati’ seal found in the IVC culture. There is evidence from Harappan sites that the meat of Rhinoceros was eaten, and the same is also mentioned or indicated in the Rigveda etc. Clearly then, Doniger is wrong on the (non) Vedic character of this creature.

**TIGER:** The argument about non-mention of tiger in the Rigveda assumes that the Vedic Aryans came from regions where tigers were not present, and first encountered the tiger in Harappan culture. Even if this were true, they could have still mentioned it in the Rigveda! Surely, the Vedic Aryans occupied much of the Harappan realm by the time the Rigveda was compiled, even within AIT paradigms. Therefore, the non-mention of the tiger in the Rigveda is a very weak argument to prove that the Vedic Aryans came to India from outside. In any case, the restriction of the habitat of the tiger to the Gangetic plains and its absence in Central Asia (the purported origin or temporary residence of the Vedic Aryans before they entered the Indian Subcontinent) is a recent phenomenon. Zoologists hold that the tiger was present in early historical times all the way from Caucasus to Amur basin in northern China.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, it is completely wrong to argue under the false paradigm that

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<sup>112</sup> Joachim Bautze, “The Problem of the Khadga (Rhinoceros unicornis) in the Light of Archaeological Finds and Art,” pp. 405-433 in *South Asian Archaeology 1983*, eds. Janine Schotsmans and Maurizio Taddei, Vol I, Istituto Universatario Orientale Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici, Naples (Italy), 1958

<sup>113</sup> Bernhard Grzimek (ed.), *Grzimek’s Animal Life Encyclopedia Vol 12*, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company (1975), p. 347

Indo-Aryans first encountered the tiger upon entering the Indian subcontinent. Finally, Talageri disputes that the tiger is not mentioned in the Rigveda. Even if the word does not occur in the hymns themselves, the Rishi of Rigveda 9.97 is named 'Vyaghrapada Vasishtha'. He points out that the word 'vyaghra' is not a loan word and has cognates in Iranian (babr) and Armenian vagr).<sup>114</sup>In short, Doniger's arguments about rhinoceros and tiger cannot determine the exact origin of Vedic Aryans.

**Page 96, para 1:** "*Nor are there any references to unicorns, mythical or real.*" [Therefore the Vedic Aryans could not have lived in the IVC].

**Comment:** Doniger again borrows these arguments from Marxist historian Romila Thapar's "*Early India*", who merely regurgitates these from colonial works such as that of Maurice Bloomfield. Note that the seals showing the Unicorn are not found in Early Harappan phase, with the exception of the site of Kunal, where the seals found do not have the writing characteristic of those found at other sites in the Mature Harappan phase.

The identity of the unicorn on the seals is not known. Many speculations have been made with regard to the identity of this 'unicorn':

1. It is a mythical creature – the unicorn because the Harappan seals depict other mythical creatures like tigers with horns.
2. It is a stylized representation of a bull with the horns in profile, due to which only one horn is visible (just like the fact that only 1 ear is visible in these seals).
3. It is a composite animal which is part horse (the slender body and elongated neck) and part bull (the tail and legs, and no mane).
4. It is a horse with the horn added to it.

It is interesting to note that in Mesopotamia, we come across very clear-cut representations of hump-less auroch cattle that are shown only with a single horn.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Shrikant Talageri (2000), *The Rigveda a Historical Analysis*, Aditya Prakashan (New Delhi), p. 125

<sup>115</sup> Caroline Grigson, "Some Thoughts on Unicorns and other Cattle depicted at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa," pp. 166-169 in *South Asian Archaeology 1981*, ed. By Bridget Allchin, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (UK), 1984  
See also Fig 23.5 in Asko Parpola's paper "New Correspondences between Harappan and Near Eastern Glyptic Art," pp. 176-195 in the same publication.

It is my opinion that the so called unicorn on Harappan seals is a similar depiction of the auroch cattle – the aggressive, untamable, humpless wild ancestor of modern domesticated cattle.<sup>116</sup> These cattle had huge horns growing forward and up (just as shown on the unicorn seals) and had no hump. They were considered sacred animals in many cultures and were found in a vast region in Eurasia including the area occupied by the Harappan culture. Even in translations of the Bible, the words for auroch like creatures were sometimes mistranslated as ‘unicorn’.<sup>117</sup>

In the Rigveda, the Deity Indra is most frequently compared to a bull. Scholars like Iravatham Mahadevan have identified the pedestal stand in front of the ‘unicorn’ in seals as a ‘soma filter’, whereas the Vedas describe Soma as the favorite beverage of Indra. If this identification is correct, the ‘unicorn’ seals are actually a representation of Indra. The Auroch cattle eventually became extinct in the Harappan Culture area, just as the Soma creeper became unavailable.

**Page 96-97:** *“Nevertheless, the spread of the Central Asian horse (and, after around 2000 BCE, the chariot, for people rode astride for a long time before they began to drive horses) suggests that in general, when Indo-Aryan speakers arrived from somewhere, horses trotted in at the same time, and the archaeological record supports the hypothesis that Indo-European speakers did in fact ride and/or drive, rather than walk, into India. For the horse is not indigenous to India. There is archaeological evidence of many horses in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent only in the second millennium BCE, after the decline of the IVC. Horse bits and copper objects were used in Maharashtra, and horse paraphernalia (such as bits) south of the Narmada during or after this period suggest an extensive network of horse traders from northwestern India.....*

*The IVC had no horses of its own, so could not have been Indo-European speakers. And so the IVC could have played no part in the most ancient Hindu text, the Rig Veda, which is intensely horsey.” [Therefore the Vedic peoples could not have lived in the IVC].*

**Comment:** False. Once again, Doniger relies on Thapar and replicates her errors. To quote my own publication where I have summarized the evidence very briefly –

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For pictures of the Ishtar gate depicting the auroch (‘unicorn’), see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ishtar\\_Gate\\_Dragon.JPG](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ishtar_Gate_Dragon.JPG)

<sup>116</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aurochs>

<sup>117</sup> <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/aid/v2/n1/unicorns-in-bible>

“However, the sum total of evidence attests to the presence of horse in Harappan contexts, and this is contested now only by very few zoo-archaeologists (e.g., Richard Meadow) with vested interests in opposite theories that they have propagated for 3 decades. In summary, horse bones have been found in Harappan and pre-Harappan levels (Thomas and Joglekar 1994; Lal 1998: 109–13) at Kuntasi (Dhavalikar et al. 1996: 297–330), Surkotada, Lothal, Ropar (Dutta 1984), Kalibangan, Shikarpur (Thomas et al. 1995), Malvan etc. Horse figurines have emerged in Rakhigarhi, Lothal, Nausharo and several other places, and painted horse on pottery sherds at Kunal (Bisht et al. 2000: 49). And horse remains have been unearthed not just in Harappan contexts, but also in non-Harappan chalcolithic sites in the interior of India from strata predating the supposed time of arrival of Aryans at or after 1500 BCE. For instance, in Kayatha, a site in Central India excavated in 1968, a part of a horse jaw was unearthed from a level dated to 2000–1800 BC and a few other bones from levels dated from 1800–1600 BCE. (Alur 1990: 188–91). Likewise, Hallur in Karnataka has yielded horse bones at levels dated to 1500 BCE which is too early for the arrival of Aryans in this part of India (ibid.: 144). This same scholar concludes (ibid.: 93–4), working within the Aryan invasion paradigm –

“Historical and Archaeological evidence is there to prove that Aryans brought horses along with them during their migration. But this should not lead one to conclude that India had no horses of its own. The local breed was there, not only in Karnataka (Hallur) but all over in India as evidenced by the excavation reports of Navadatoli, Kayatha, Malvan, Peddabankur and Pochampad. Perhaps the Aryan horses were a different breed, when compared to local animals.”

Numerous other reports on Kayatha, Malwa and other chalcolithic cultures in the interior of India attest the presence of horse between 2000–1500 BCE. So whether an Aryan migration took place or not, it is clear that the elite dominance model cannot explain the Aryanization of India because horse was already present in India and there is no proof for the arrival of the chariot.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Vishal Agarwal, “What is the Aryan Migration Theory,” pp. 1-46 in *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Archaeology*, Vol 2, No.1 (Summer 2005)

To summarize, the horse argument of Doniger does not really amount to anything in deciding the origins of Vedic Aryans.

**Page 99, para 2:** *“The absence of equine imagery therefore [makes it hard to believe].....that the hippophiles who composed the Veda would exclude the horse from the stable of animals that they depicted on their seals.”* [Therefore the Vedic peoples could not have lived in the IVC].

**Comment:** False Argument of Silence: First, the horse is not entirely absent in the art of Harappans, as discussed above. Second, it does seem odd that the two animals extolled in the Vedas, namely the cow and the horse, are conversely completely absent in the imagery of Harappan culture.

Horse figurines have emerged in Rakhigarhi, Lothal, Nausharo and several other places, and painted horse on pottery sherds at Kunal.<sup>119</sup> And the seals do not depict many other animals (e.g., Dog, Onager, cat, most birds including the peacock, snakes etc.) even though they are mentioned in the Rigveda and other Vedic scriptures. So once again, this is an argument of silence. We cannot know the reason unless we understand the purpose of the seals.

**Page 100, para 2:** *“A good example of this possible fusion [of Harappan and Vedic cultures] is the case of bricks. The authors of the Rig Veda did not know of bricks; their rituals required only small mud altars, not large brick altars. But later, around 600 BCE, when the Vedic people had moved down into the Ganges Valley and their rituals had become more elaborate, they began to build large brick altars....The use of bricks and the calculations in the Vedic ritual may therefore have come from a Harappan tradition, bypassed the Rig Vedic period, and resurfaced later.”*

**Comment:** Doniger again borrows these arguments from Marxist historian Romila Thapar’s *“Early India”*, who merely regurgitates these from antiquated works.

Doniger-Thapar selectively use the non-mention of certain items in the Rigveda to postulate that the Vedic Aryans arrived in India after the collapse of the Harappan culture. But this logic does not explain why the

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<sup>119</sup> Bisht, R.S., Dorje, C., Banerji, Arundhati (eds) 2000. *Indian Archaeology 1993-94 – A Review, Explorations and Excavations*. New Delhi: The Director General, Archaeological Survey of India

bricks are not mentioned in the Rigveda and are first mentioned only in later Samhitas like the Taittiriya Samhita. The Rigvedic peoples were spread all over greater Punjab, and it is impossible that they would not have encountered cities (and bricks) of the Harappans. Therefore, it is indeed odd that they have not mentioned bricks altogether.

Doniger's contention that the Harappan tradition of bricks bypassed Rigvedic Aryans only to surface again later seems a very arbitrary and ad-hoc logic. The entire scenario can be explained more cogently by assuming that the Rigveda belongs to Early Harappan (with overlap to Early Mature Harappan) and the Yajurveda and Atharvaveda Samhitas largely belong to the Mature Harappan phase. This hypothesis may be supported with the help of following observations:

1. Fire altars made of bricks are actually found in Harappan contexts.<sup>120</sup>
2. Many of these fire altars have configurations described in Vedic literature.<sup>121</sup>

In fact, a notable scholar has shown how the arrangement of hymns in Rigveda itself follows the pattern of laying out of bricks in the Agnichayana Vedic rite.<sup>122</sup>

Finally, All Harappan cities are not made of bricks.<sup>123</sup> So even if the Rigvedic Aryans passed through ruins of Harappan cities, there is no reason that the Rigveda should necessarily mention them.

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<sup>120</sup> "An unexpected feature of Indus worship has been the discovery, doubted at first but repeated now at many sites including the recent excavations at Rakhigarhi, of the sacrificial hearths known as fire altars. Fire altars are a central feature of the religion of the Indo-Aryans, and their apparent discovery has fueled the cause of those who are convinced – wrongly, as I and many other scholars believe – that the Indus people were also Indo-Aryans, while it has proved an embarrassment to those who don't support this view...." Page 121 in McIntosh, Jane R. 2002. *A Peaceful Realm- The Rise and Fall of the Indus Civilization*. Westview Press: Boulder (Colorado)

<sup>121</sup> V. H. Sonawane and R. N. Mehta (1985). Vagad – A Rural Harappan Settlement in Gujarat. *Man and Environment*, vol. IX, pp. 38-44

<sup>122</sup> Subhash Kak. *The Astronomical Code of the Rgveda*. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers: New Delhi (2000)

<sup>123</sup> Gregory Possehl. 2002. *The Indus Civilization – A Contemporary Perspective*. Alta Mira Press (Oxford, UK), p. 248

Interestingly, some Indologists like Michael Witzel and linguists like Alexander Lubotsky believe that the Vedic word for brick 'Ishtika' is derived from a 'Central Asian Substrate language' spoken in an area of Central Asia that the Aryans passed before entering the Indian subcontinent. In this scenario, it seems even more ludicrous that the oldest Aryan scripture, the Rigveda, is silent about bricks, whereas the later scriptures like Taittiriya Samhita, suddenly mention Ishtikas. The most parsimonious explanation is that the bricks were unknown or were not important to the Rigvedic Aryans (= early Harappans, early Mature Harappans) in their religion but became important in the religion when the Yajurveda (Mature Harappan) was compiled, and this was the time when bricks were used on a large scale for construction.

In conclusion, Doniger's argument is non-sequitur when all the multifarious views on these matters are considered and her treatment of the issue is naive.

**Page 101, para 2:** *"Hinduism, like all cultures, is a bricoleur, a rag-and-bones man, building new things out of scraps of other things.....So too Hindus built their temples on (and out of) Buddhist stupas as well as on other Hindu temples, and Muslims their mosques on Hindu temples (and Buddhist stupas), often reusing the original stones, new wine on old bottles, palimpsest architecture."*

**Comment:** A very perverse analogy that Doniger has repeated several times in her book (in chapters 3, 4, 9, 16 etc.) without any context, as if to push a political agenda. She wrongly equates the systematic, religiously motivated large-scale vandalism of Abrahamic traditions with the random, rare and politically motivated partial destruction of shrines by Hindu and Buddhist rulers. See my review of chapter 16 of her book to find out the absurdity of her arguments.<sup>124</sup>

## Concluding remarks on chapter 4:

### ***1. Relationship between Vedic Literature and the Indus-Sarasvati (Harappan) Culture:***

This short review is not the right place to examine the precise relationship between the Vedic and the Harappan cultures. What we have shown, fairly successfully, is the non-tenability of arguments given by some

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<sup>124</sup><http://vishalagarwal.voiceofdharma.org/articles/thaah/THAAF-16.pdf>



historians to exaggerate the dichotomy between the two. The bulk of evidence, if we ignore the paradigms of AIT and AMT, seems to indicate that the Rigveda corresponds largely to Early Harappan and somewhat to the Mature Harappan Phases, the Yajurveda and Atharvaveda (i.e. portions not borrowed from the Rigveda) largely with the Mature Harappan and somewhat to the Posturban Harappan Phases. The chronological definition of these designations is given in the table below, following Possehl:<sup>125</sup>


#	Dates	Period
1	3200 – 2600 BCE	Early Harappan
2	2600 – 2500 BCE	Early-Mature Harappan Transition
3	2500 – 1900 BCE	Mature Harappan
4	1900 – 1300 BCE	Posturban Harappan

This brief criticism of the chapter shows that there is really no evidence to support the Aryanist theory of an Aryan invasion of India around 1500 BCE. Promoters of this racist theory cherry pick and distort data, ignoring counter-evidence and even distorting the historical record.

## ***2. Is Wendy Doniger a Neo-Nazi or a White Supremacist Icon:***

Wendy Doniger seems to be a hero among Nazis! Check out the site where they post their hateful messages. Someone posted asking what could be done to spread hatred against Asians and another person responded claiming that they could use Wendy Doniger's book if the original poster meant Indians when (s)he asked about Asians! The URL where this conversation is noted is - <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=690954>

Quote:

Originally Posted by **jorrdannn** 

*I go to a school which is heavily diverse and liberal, (dont worry im leaving for texas in 4 months). I expressed my beliefs particularly on asians and recieved many 'dont hate' speeches and was called a joke. How do I get my point across standing alone?*

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<sup>125</sup> Table 1.2 on Gregory Possehl, “The Indus Civilization: An Introduction to Environment, Subsistence, and Cultural History,” pp. 1-20 in *Indus Ethnobiology*, ed. By Steven A Weber and William R Belcher, Lexington Books, Lanhan (Maryland), 2003

*Use references by Professors who have written about Asians. Not sure which group of Asian you are talking about (Middle Eastern, Indian, Far Eastern), but Prof. Wendy Doniger of the University of Chicago has written a lot about Indians and Hindus that annoy them. She is a true White Nationalist soldier which is why Microsoft Encarta targeted her and once removed her article from their encyclopedia.*

*Check her out though --  
<http://divinity.uchicago.edu/faculty/doniger.shtml>*

*I should also add that she is one of the WNs who is from the left (there is another thread which deals with the subject of whether one can be a White Nationalist and a Communist). Her method is primarily to point out the negative influence that Hindus have had on the world in general, but this does not mean that she does not highlight White pride. She does that too in her books when she gets the chance.*

*If you were talking of Middle Eastern Asians, you should be able to use the works of any number of scholars. If it is the far-eastern Asians you speak about, then it is a little more difficult to find scholarly stuff on them.*

*Using authoritative works by Professors always convinces most students. That is what you should do." Unquote*

The reader will find this odd that Doniger, a Jew, is considered as a 'true white nationalist soldier' who often highlights 'White pride' in her writings. But stranger things are known to have happened in history. We leave it to the reader to decide Doniger's ideological affiliations. The one fact that is very clear to me is that her book and many of her other writings demean Hindus.

## 7. Review of the Chapter 5, ‘*Humans, Animals and Gods in the Rig Veda*’ by Vishal Agarwal

### General Comments on chapter 5: Imposing her life on the Vedas

In another chapter, Doniger states that the main actors of her books are women, low castes, horses and dogs (p. 199). Of the four Vedas, it is the Atharva Veda that is often termed as the ‘Veda of the Masses’. Unfortunately, Doniger practically ignores this Veda in her chapter, focusing almost wholly on the Rig Veda, which is itself often termed as the Veda of Sages who were associated with the rulers of Vedic peoples. Doniger also ignores the Yajurveda, whose Samhitas provide very valuable information on the daily life of the Vedic peoples. As a result, her sketch of the Vedic society is very deficient and clichéd. The only novelty in her chapter is the abundant use of witticisms and cute phrases. Otherwise, there is really no ‘alternative’ history in her chapter.

Early in her book, Doniger says (p. 4, “.....*I hope this book will inspire some readers to go back to the sources and decide for themselves whether or not they agree with me. The relevant materials can be found in the bibliography as well as in the notes for each chapter, which will also provide browsing material for those readers (I confess that I am one of them) who go straight to the back and look at the notes and bibliography first....to see where the author has been grazing...*”). When we check Doniger’s sources for this chapter, the results are very disappointing. For example, she relies excessively on her own idiosyncratic anthology of Rigvedic hymns mis-translated into English. But worse, she uses the works of Stephanie Jamison as her primary sources for the role of women in Vedic rituals and in the Vedic society in general. The problem with this is that Jamison always gives the most negative or the worst possible interpretation to Vedic texts conveying the impression that Hindu/Vedic males are/were horrible oppressors of women. Mahatma Gandhi would have called her writings as ‘*Gutter Inspector’s Report*’ (as he did to ‘*Mother India*’ by Katherine Mayo). As a result of relying excessively on these scholars pretending to bear the ‘White Woman’s Burden’, Doniger has painted a very negative picture of women in ancient India.

The second problem with her bibliography is her excessive reliance on the works of India’s Communist/Marxists historians such as Romila Thapar and D N Jha, who are often driven by a political agenda in what they write, and who cannot read the ancient Hindu scriptures in their original languages. Doniger appears to point the reader selectively in

the direction of authors who just regurgitate old colonial interpretations of the Vedic period. The same flaws therefore end up being transferred to her narrative. Not surprisingly, Doniger ignores all Indian Vedic scholars – traditional as well as modern Vedicists (in the true sense of the word), while writing her chapters.

Doniger's distance from the primary data and her reliance on faulty secondary and tertiary sources leads to some comical results. For example, in chapter 5, page 104, she remarks – "*The Vedic people left no cities, no temples, scant physical remains of any kind; they had to borrow the word for 'mortar'.*" Doniger relies on the coffee table book by John Keay ('*A History of India*', p. 24), who does not give the actual source of his claim. So why is this example comical? Because, the word 'mortar' is used in English in two completely different senses (among others): first, as in 'mortar and pestle'; and second, as in the 'mortar' that is used as a construction material. Doniger, and Keay use the word 'mortar' to denote a construction material in their books. But in reality, the linguistic controversy surrounding this word revolves around the 'mortar' ('*ulukhala*' in the Rigveda) that is used with the pestle! To conclude, Keay shows his ignorance of the original controversy, and Doniger merely repeats his error.<sup>126</sup>

The disrespect that Doniger shows towards Hindus in this chapter (as in several others) is astounding. She compares the Vedic worshipper to an unfaithful, philandering boyfriend and refers to Vedic hymns as 'poems'. And finally, the chapter has several errors of fact. There is practically nothing that the chapter adds to our knowledge about the period. In fact, it seems to be largely a collection of excerpts from non-state-of-the-art works on the Vedic period and merely perpetuates colonial paradigms about the Vedic peoples.

After these general comments, let us now look at the specifics.

**Page 103, para 1:** "*c. 1700 – 1500 Nomads in the Punjab region compose the Rig Veda. C. 1200 – 900 The Vedic people compose the Yajur Veda, Sama Veda, and Atharva Veda.*"

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<sup>126</sup> It is argued that the word '*ulukhala*' is a foreign loan-word into Old Indo-Aryan, although some Indo-Europeanists (e.g., Paul Thieme) contend that the word is a variant of 'uru + khara' that has a straightforward Indo-Aryan etymology. See a discussion on this in my review of the preceding chapter.

**Comment:** What were the Vedic peoples doing then from 1500 – 1200 BCE ?

**Page 104, para 3:** *“The Vedic people ...had to borrow the word for “mortar”.”*

**Comment:** Doniger relies on the coffee table book by John Keay (*A History of India*, p. 24), who does not give the actual source of his claim. See more above on why this statement of Doniger is laughable.

**Page 104-105:** *“The verses [of the Rigveda] were arranged.....with additional prose passages for ritual use as the Yajur Veda...”*

**Comment:** Inaccurate statement. The Yajurveda texts have hundreds of verses that are not found in the Rigveda, and not just additional prose passages.

**Page 105:** *“Unbelievers and infidels, as well as Pariabs and women, were forbidden to learn the Vedas, because they might defile or injure the power of the words, pollute it...”*

**Comment:** As the chapter deals with the Vedic period, it is unclear why Doniger does not mention that these restrictions were not present in that period, and came into effect much later. It appears that Doniger is re-living her own life in making this spurious claim that women were debarred from Vedic studies.<sup>127</sup>

The Vedic reality is much more diverse, variegated and nuanced, contrary to the monochromatic claim of Doniger. We may give a few counter-examples to this completely negative characterization by Doniger –The intimate connection of women with Vedic rituals is seen from the fact that several sacred mantras from the Vedas<sup>128</sup> are specifically meant for recitation by women, as is clarified by Shrautasutras<sup>129</sup>– manuals of Vedic rites. Since the wife is indeed the pivot of the house, she was

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<sup>127</sup> In her autobiography (p. 40), she confesses that her father taught her brother to read the Bible in Hebrew but did not teach her because, as he said, “*You’re a girl*”. See Wendy Doniger, “From the Great Neck to Swift Hall: Confessions of a Reluctant Historian of Religions”, pp. 36-57 in *The Craft of Religious Studies*, ed. by Jon R Stone, St. Martin Press, New York (1998).

<sup>128</sup> e.g., Madhyandina Yajurveda 5.17; 3.44-45 etc.

<sup>129</sup> e.g., Katyayana Shrautasuta 5.5.10 etc.

entitled to perform the sandhyaa, or the morning and evening rituals with the sacred altar and Vedic texts.<sup>130</sup>In the Ramayana, Queen Kausalya performs<sup>131</sup> the daily fire sacrifice (agnihotra) with Vedic mantras as do Tara and Sita<sup>132</sup>etc. In the Mahabharata also, ladies such as Savitri and Amba likewise perform Vedic rituals with the recitation of Vedic texts. Some Vedic texts actually cite women as authorities on minutiae of Vedic rituals.<sup>133</sup> Therefore, though women were debarred from reciting Vedic texts or from performing Vedic rituals in later times<sup>134</sup>, their right to do so in ancient times is quite well established from the extant ancient Hindu literature. In fact, a lost Vedic text named Saulabha Brahmana is attributed to Sulabha, a woman. This text could have belonged to an extinct school of Rigveda which she must have founded. The Mahabhashya of Patanjali seems to indicate that there were women scholars who studied the Katha Shakha of Yajurveda and the Bahvricha Shakha of Rigveda.

Although no sacred-thread ceremony has been performed for women in recent centuries, ancient texts affirm that women did undergo this ceremony in the past, or wore the sacred thread during various rituals. For instance, a text<sup>135</sup> says that the bride should wear the sacred thread during her wedding. The Harita Dharmasutra, perhaps belonging to Maitrayaniya school of Yajurveda, has been cited in some later texts (e.g., Hindu law manuals like Nirnayasinhu) to the effect that women are of two types – Brahmapadini (devoted to the Vedas and to the Supreme Being) and Sadhyavadhū (those who marry and settle down as housewives). Concerning the former, the Dharmasutra says<sup>136</sup> that they

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<sup>130</sup> Gobhila Grhyasutra 1.3.15; Khadira Grhyasutra 1.5.17-18 etc.

<sup>131</sup> Ramayana 2.20.14

<sup>132</sup> Ramayana 5.14.49

<sup>133</sup> e.g., Aitareya Brahmana 2.9 cites the opinion of Kumari Gandharva-grihita on the Agnihotra ritual.

<sup>134</sup> Manusmriti 2.67 says that the wedding rite is the only Vedic rite of women, and domestic work is like performance of *agnihotra* rite for women. Interestingly, as late as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the commentator Kullukabhatta noted several additional verses in manuscripts of Manusmriti found in his times. Right after 2.67, he noticed an additional verse (excluded in vulgate text) according to which wives were actually responsible for performing the daily *agnihotra*, clearly contradicting the preceding verse but consistent with numerous old texts such as Gobhila Grhyasutra 1.3.15; Ashvalayana Grhyasutra 1.9

<sup>135</sup> Gobhila Grhyasutra 2.1.9

<sup>136</sup> ‘*dividha striyah. Brahmapadinyah sadyavadvascha. tatra brahmapadiniinaamupanayanamagniindhanam svagrhe bhiksacharyeti.*’

undergo the thread ceremony, perform agnihotra, study the Vedas, and live by begging alms from their family members (just as male students, although boys have to leave home to live with their teachers). Later texts also cite the opinion of Yama<sup>137</sup> to the effect that in ancient times, women also underwent the thread ceremony, studied the Vedas and recited the Gayatri and other Vedic mantras. However, these later texts somehow try to explain these old traditions away because they were perceived as anachronistic in later times.

On the eligibility of the 'Pariahs' for Vedic learning, 'alternative' views can be stated again (obviously Doniger omits these 'alternative views') - The fact of Sudras performing Vedic sacrifices is actually recorded in several Srauta sutras. Manava Srautasutra 11.1.2 states that if the giver of the sacrificial fees (daksina) is a Sudra, then the priest should go to his house, touch water and then go over the sacrificial formula mentally. In the Apastambha Srautasutra 5.11-18, Sudras are listed as one of them from whose homes a sacrificer desirous of prosperity must procure fire. According to some teachers (Apastamba Srautasutra 1.19-23), some teachers allowed Sudras to perform Vedic sacrifices, while others (Apastamba 24.1) deprived him of this right. Bharadvaja Srautasutra 5.2.9 also records that according to some teachers, the Sudras also have the right to establish the sacrificial fires. Yajurveda (Madhyandina) 26.2 is sometimes taken as a proof that Shudras are also entitled to listen to the Vedas.

In short, in making stereotypical statements about the role of women in Hinduism, Doniger has done exactly the reverse of what she claims to be her purpose in writing the book – *"It tells a story that incorporates the narratives of and about alternative people – people who, from the standpoint of most high-caste Hindu males, are alternative in the sense of otherness, people of other religions or cultures, or castes, or species (animals), or genders (women). Part of my agenda in writing an alternative history is to show how much the groups that conventional wisdom says were oppressed and silenced and played no part in the development of the tradition – women, Pariahs (oppressed castes, sometimes called Untouchables)-did actually contribute to Hinduism."* (p. 1)

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<sup>137</sup> *Puraakalpeshu naariinaam maunjiibandhanishyatey. Adhyaapanam cha vedaanaam saavitri vaachanam tatbaa.*

**Page 107, para 3:** “*All the poems of the Rig Veda are ritual hymns in some sense. Since all were sung as part of the Vedic ceremony.*”

**Comment:** False statement. In fact, a considerable portion of the Rig Veda is NOT employed in ritual.<sup>138</sup>

**Page 111, para 5:** “*The Vedic people....resembled the cowboys of the nineteenth-century American West, riding over other people’s land and stealing their cattle.*”

**Comment:** The analogy with the Wild West shows the unscholarly and cavalier manner in which ethnocentric Indologists like Wendy Doniger interpret India’s past. The author tries to put the Vedic people’s feet across the saddle but gets her own foot in the mouth instead! There is no firm evidence that Rigvedic peoples did horse-riding, and the meaning of the few verses (out of the 10552 mantras of the text) where it is supposedly mentioned is disputed.<sup>139</sup>

The other alternative - that of the Vedic peoples riding horse driven chariots to herd cattle does not look very plausible either. The characterization of Vedic people as stealing others’ land and cattle as their favorite and predominant pastime is largely unsubstantiated. Since this work claims to be an *alternative history*, rather than *historical fiction*, the author’s lack of scholarly rigor in making such sweeping claims should be noted.

**Page 112, para 1:** “*They did have, however, a policy of riding over other people’s land and of keeping the cattle that they stole from those people. That the word gavisthi (“searching for cows”) came to mean “fighting” says it all.*”

**Comment:** Doniger’s understanding of the word ‘gavisthi’ reflects her antiquated acquaintance with the technical literature on this subject. For a contrary opinion, she may consult specialist literature.<sup>140</sup> Fighting is just a secondary meaning of this word, and there are dozens of words used in the Rigveda for war.

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<sup>138</sup> Jan Gonda, 1978, *Hymns of the Rgveda Not Employed in the Solemn Ritual*. (Amsterdam)

<sup>139</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. 1942. “Horse-Riding in the Rgveda and Atharvaveda.” *JAOI*, vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 139-140

<sup>140</sup> Sadashiv Ambadas Dange, 1967, ‘Go-Ishti and Mehana from the Rgveda’, in *Nagpur University Journal*, pp. 78-108



**Page 112, para 2:** “...but another [verse] says that a cow must be slaughtered on the occasion of marriage (10.85.13), and another lists among animals to be sacrificed a cow that has been bred but has not calved (10.91.14)...”

**Comment:** The correct meaning of Rigveda 10.85.13 is not that the “cows are slaughtered”, but that the “cows are driven along”.<sup>141</sup> Likewise, the words vashanna and ukshanna in 10.91.14 can be explained differently from what Doniger interprets.<sup>142</sup>

**Page 112, para 2:** “The usual meal of milk.....wheat, and barley would be supplemented by the .....[in the Rigvedic period]”

**Comment:** The mention of wheat is anachronistic. Wheat is not mentioned in the Rigveda and first appears in Yajurvedic texts such as the Maitrayani Samhita.

**Page 116, para 1:** “Perhaps the horse was not eaten because of the close relationship that the Vedic people, like most Indo-Europeans, had with their horses....”

**Comment:** This is a very simplistic statement. Many peoples in Central Asia and Mongolia who practice nomadism and have a close relationship with horses do eat horse meat. Likewise, in pre-Christian Europe, Germans and Scandinavians ate horse meat during Pagan rites despite the fact that they too were Indo-Europeans. Doniger has grossly exaggerated the role of the Ashvamedha rite in the Rigveda although it occurs in two *late* hymns of the text. It stands to reason that if the Vedic Aryans had inherited this rite from their Indo-European heritage, then it should have been prominent in early parts of the Rigveda, and not in the later parts when they were already getting ‘Indianized’. And the Ashwamedha was performed very rarely, so rarely that the later Brahmana texts actually name those few kinds who had performed this ceremony (and she has herself noted this fact in chapter 6 of the book).

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<sup>141</sup> “A Review of ‘Beef Eating in Ancient India’, published by Geeta Press, Gorakhpur (1971), pp. 185-195

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, pp. 168-179

**Page 116, para 3:** “*The Vedic people at first distinguished just two classes (varnas), their own (which they called Arya) and that of the people they conquered, whom they called Dasas (or Dasyus, or, sometimes, Panis).*”

**Comment:** Doniger seems to subscribe to the racist and white-supremacist Aryan invasion theory, which led to horrors like Nazism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is no evidence in the Vedas that the Dasas or Dasyus were original inhabitants of India who were conquered by invading Aryans. It is also debatable whether the native Indians conquered by the invading Aryans were the Panis. The narratives concerning Panis find parallels in Teutonic and Greek mythology and therefore, these narratives either stem from a common Indo-European root, or they presuppose an Indo-European immigration from India, or both.<sup>143</sup>

**Page 119, para 3-4:** “*One Vedic poem that may incorporate a critique of Brahmins is a tour de force that applies simultaneously, throughout, to frogs croaking at the start of the rainy season and to Brahmin priests who begin to chant at the beginning of the rains.*”

**Comment:** There is nothing of the sort of ‘critique’ in Rigveda 7.103 that Doniger imagines. Current scholarship sees a fairly serious rain-charm here.<sup>144</sup> In fact, no derision of Veda reciting Brahmins is implied in this hymn at all.<sup>145</sup>

**Page 123, para 2:** “*The gambler’s wife is one of a more general company of long-suffering wives, devoted but often deserted, who people ancient Hindu literature and the society that this literature reflects.*”

**Comment:** Doniger gives a falsely negative judgment on the role of women in ancient Hindu literature and in the ancient Hindu society. This claim is more a reflection of the ‘White Woman’s Burden’ syndrome that afflicts her, rather than any social reality.

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<sup>143</sup> Shrikant Talageri, 2000, *The Rigveda a Historical Analysis*, Aditya Prakashan (New Delhi), pp. 477-495

<sup>144</sup> See pg. 208 of Walter H. Maurer (1986). *Pinnacles of India’s Past – Selections from the Rgveda*. University of Pennsylvania Studies on South Asia, vol. 2. John Benjamin’s Publishing Company: Amsterdam/Philadelphia.

<sup>145</sup> See the extensive discussion on the purport of this hymn in H. D. Velankar’s *Rgveda Mandala VII*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Bombay (1963).

This negative characterization of the Vedic society represents the ancient Hindu scriptures and society less, and *Doniger's own life more*.<sup>146</sup>

**Page 123, para 2:** “*In the Rig Veda, a text dominated by men in a world dominated by men, women appear throughout the poems as objects.*”

**Comment:** This an obsessively negative statement contradicted by the Rig Veda itself. The close connection of women with the Vedas, the texts regarded as Divine Revelation (or ‘Divine Exhalation’) in Hindu Dharma may be judged from the fact that of the 407 Sages associated with the revelation of Rigveda, twenty-one<sup>147</sup> are women. Many of these mantras are quite significant, for instance the hymn on the glorification of the Divine Speech.<sup>148</sup> The very invocatory mantra of the Atharvaveda<sup>149</sup> addresses divinity as a ‘Devi’ – the Goddess, who while present in waters, fulfills all our desires and hopes. In the Atharvaveda, the entire 14<sup>th</sup> book dealing with marriage, domestic issues etc., is attributed to a woman sage. Portions<sup>150</sup> of other 19 books are also attributed to women sages<sup>151</sup>.

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<sup>146</sup> In her autobiographical account [Wendy Doniger, “From the Great Neck to Swift Hall: Confessions of a Reluctant Historian of Religions”, pp. 36-57 in *The Craft of Religious Studies*, ed. by Jon R Stone, St. Martin Press, New York (1998)], she describes (page 44) how her husband dumped her although she had earlier made sacrifices for him –

“*In 1975 I gave up tenure in London and followed my husband to Berkeley.....Berkeley, like most Sanskrit departments at that time, divided the world into two groups: white men, who taught courses about Ideas and were tenured, and women of color, sometimes married to the white men in the first group and informally referred to as ‘pillow dictionaries’, who taught Languages and were untenured. As a white woman with Ideas, I was....dirt...*

*I went to Chicago, accepting an invitation that Joseph Kitagawa, Dean of the Divinity School, had been extending to me, on and off,.....So I went, kicking and screaming, simply because I was broke and my marriage, to a man who had dug his toes into the sands of California and refused to leave, was broken and I needed a job.*”

<sup>147</sup> According to another count, the actual number is 28. But this inflated list includes feminine speakers such as ‘rivers’ and so on. See Brihaddevata 11.84 for this list.

<sup>148</sup> Rigveda 10.125, the inspiration of Vac, the daughter of Ambhrina

<sup>149</sup> ‘*Om shanno devirbhishtye aapo bhavantu....*’. The traditional recitation of Atharvaveda is commenced with this verse. The Paippalada version of Atharvaveda starts with this mantra. It occurs as mantra 1.6.1 in the Shaunaka version of Atharvaveda but even the recitation of this text is often commenced with the invocation to Devi.

<sup>150</sup> These portions are specifically termed as ‘*striikarmaan?*’ or acts pertaining to women.

Both male and female deities are extolled in the hymns of all revealed texts of Hindus and in the family prayers<sup>152</sup> of all the 10 lineages of Vedic Sages. Numerous schools of Vedic tradition customarily offer homage to women sages during their daily prayers<sup>153</sup>. The superlative epithets used uniformly to denote female deities like Ushas, Sarasvati etc., in the Vedas describe them as sweetly-smiling, the first or foremost of deities to whom worship is offered, the shining ones, splendid and beautiful, possessors of wisdom, teachers of mankind and as powers capable of fulfilling the desires of human beings. The Gayatri Mantra, the holiest prayer of Hindus in the Vedas, is often represented symbolically as a Devi in classical Hinduism. She is thus a female deity, who is also often termed as the ‘Mother of all Vedas’, and giver of boons<sup>154</sup>.

It is common to read in scriptures of mankind God is like the husband of all human beings and of all churches. In the Vedas however, we even read that God is like a dear wife whom ‘His’ worshipper loves like a doting husband<sup>155</sup>. The ‘Divine Word<sup>156</sup>’ itself is likened to a beautiful maiden who manifests her beauty to the husband<sup>157</sup>. As goddesses (*devīs*), they are worshipped as mothers of even the most powerful male deities (*devatas*). Devi Aditi is thus the mother of all prominent *devatas* such as Varuna, Mitra, Aryaman, Rudras, Indra, of kings and many other excellent sons. She is invoked as the mistress of the Cosmic Order, omnipotent, every youthful, protector, mother of the devout worshipper and a wise guide of all humans.<sup>158</sup> The Vedas hardly ever conceive of *devatas* without corresponding *devīs*. Almost as a rule, the Sage, the worshipper and the ritualist invoke the *devatas* to manifest along

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<sup>151</sup> Women Sages are termed as ‘*Rishika*’ while male Sages are termed as ‘*Rishi*’.

<sup>152</sup> These family hymns are called ‘*Apri Suktas*’, and all these hymns have invocations to women deities such as Ila, Bharati, Sarasvati etc.

<sup>153</sup> The ritual texts of the Vedas list women Sages to whom homage must be offered while studying the divine texts. See for instance Ashvalayana Grhyasutra 3.4.4; Shankhayana Grhyasutra 4.10 which enumerate women teachers such as Sulabha Maitreyi, Vadavaa Praathitheyi etc.

<sup>154</sup> Atharvaveda 19.71.1

<sup>155</sup> ‘*anavadyaa patijushteva naarii*’ – Rigveda 1.73.3

<sup>156</sup> ‘*Vak*’, the Sanskrit word denoting Divine Speech, is considered feminine according to grammatical rules.

<sup>157</sup> Rigveda 10.71.4

<sup>158</sup> Atharvaveda 7.6.2; Madhyandina Yajurveda 21.5

with *devis* and partake of the sacred oblations poured into the sacred fire altar.

To quote some Rigvedic verses on the glory of a bride –

*“Profound thought was the pillow of her couch,  
Vision was the unguent for her eyes.  
Her wealth was the earth and Heaven,  
When Surya (the sun-like resplendent bride) went to meet her husband.<sup>159</sup>  
Her mind was the bridal chariot,  
And sky was the canopy of that chariot.  
Orbs of light were the two steers that pulled the chariot  
When Surya proceeded to her husband’s home!”<sup>160</sup>*

**Page 123, para 2:** A man needed a wife to be present when he performed any Vedic sacrifice, though she had to stay behind a screen.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Jamison, *Sacrificed Wife*, p. 256

**Comment:** To state that women are or were required to sit behind a screen during Vedic ceremonies displays Doniger’s supreme ignorance of Vedic rituals! The reference cited by her (p. 256 of Jamison’s book) does not make any such claim either.

**Page 124, para 2:** *“More substantial is the early evidence in this poem of a form of rape that came to be regarded as a bad, but legitimate, form of marriage: having sex with a sleeping or drugged woman.”*

**Comment:** Doniger just loves rape throughout the book, and screams the word ‘rape’ at the drop of a pin, even if the pin is not from a lady’s dress. There is no hint in this hymn of rape. Rigveda 10.162.5 that Doniger refers to here talks of an evil spirit assuming the form of her husband, brother or assuming the form of her lover to come close to a pregnant woman to destroy her fetus. There is no hint in the mantra of sex with a sleeping or drugged woman. The woman in the mantra is already pregnant and the entire hymn contains imprecations against evil spirits who can cause her abortion.

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<sup>159</sup> Rigveda 10.85.7

<sup>160</sup> Rigveda 10.85.10

**Page 124, para 2:** “*It appears that a woman’s brother too is someone she might expect to find in her bed, though the Rig Veda severely condemns sibling incest...*”

**Comment:** Again, Doniger makes these remarks in the context of Rigveda 10.162 and really climaxes in her pervert thinking that the hymn suggests that the woman can find her own brother in her bed. As in her other books, Doniger’s sexually fertile imagination does not fail us here too, and she cannot resist the sensation of inserting titillating sentences like these here and there. Her perverse imagination apart, the Rigveda has no hint that a pregnant woman might find her brother sleeping with her. In fact, as Doniger states herself, Rigveda 10.10 severely rejects incest between brother and sister.

It is very apt that a Vedicist says of her –

“O’Flaherty seems to see only one function, the third one of fertility and sexuality, copulation, defloration, castration and the like: even bhakti ‘devotion’ is described in stark erotic terms including incest and homosexuality.... Surely, erotic terms could be metaphors for spiritual or mystical experiences as is evidence in so much literature?”<sup>161</sup>

**Page 126, para 2:** “*One long poem (10.85) celebrates the story of the marriage of the moon and the daughter of the sun....*”

**Comment:** The hymn talks of the marriage of Sūryā to Soma, and the latter is considered distinct from the moon in the Rigvedic context. The equation of Soma to the moon is largely a later development. This is common Indological understanding but Doniger seems unaware. In fact, this very hymn states that ‘chandrama’ (moon) was one of the two wheels of the bridal chariot. So how could her husband Soma be the same as chandrama (the moon)?

**Page 127, fn.:** Concerning the word ‘svayambhu’, Doniger states – “*The Rig Veda (10.83.4) applied this name not to creator but to Manu, “Anger”. By the time of the Mahabharata, however, it is an epithet of Manu and then of Brahma.*”

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<sup>161</sup> Kazanas, Nicholas. “Indo-European Deities and the Rgveda”, in *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, vol. 29, nos. 3-4 (Fall & Winter 2001), pp. 257-293. Fn. 14 on page 283

**Comment:** Quite a meaningless statement because at least as early as Yajurveda (Madhyandina) 40.8, the epithet is clearly applied to the Supreme Being. If this chapter is on the Vedas, then why does Doniger practically restrict herself to the Rigveda alone?

**Page 128, para 2:** Doniger calls the Vedic worshipper's successive praise of different Deities as 'serial monogamy' and then gives this parallel – *"You, Susan, are the only woman I've loved; you are the only one."* *"You, Helen, are the only woman I've ever loved; you are the only one."*

**Comment:** Comparing a Vedic worshiper to an unfaithful, untruthful and philandering boyfriend is a perfect example of how Doniger's personal biases and cultural conditioning render her deaf and blind to an ethos totally different from her own. Her flippant analogy, besides being incredibly disrespectful, fails to even remotely convey the true spirit and intent of a Vedic worshiper.

What Doniger forgets is that **in real life**, Susan and Helen are completely different women, and the debauched boyfriend will not reveal his love for Susan to Helen or vice versa. But the Vedic Deities are not separate from each other, and the worshipper's devotion (or lack thereof) to one Deity is not hidden from the other Deities either! The Vedic Deities are born of each other, they merge to constitute one Divinity, their origin is One, they represent different aspects of One truth and so on – all these are some inter-relationships of Deities stated in the Rigveda. Surely, Susan cannot be born of Helen or Helen of Susan!

To quote just a few Vedic references –

They call Him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is the Divine good winged bird (the sun with beautiful rays). The sages describe one and the same Agni in various ways and call it Agni, Yama and Matarisvan. Rigveda 1.164.46  
Agni itself is Indra, Vayu, Brahma, Vishnu and Brahmanaspati. Rigveda 2.1.3  
Varuna and Mitra are but functional manifestations of Agni. Rigveda 2.1.4  
Vishnu, Rudra and Marut are also functional manifestations of Agni. Rigveda 2.1.6  
That (Supreme Being) is Agni; that is the Surya; that is the Vayu; that is the Chandrama; that is Jyoti; that is Brahman; and that is Prajapati. (Madhyandina) Yajurveda 32.1

**Page 130, para 2:** “*Agni is the Brahmin, Varuna the Brahminical sovereign, Indra the warrior, and the Ashvins the Vaishyas. There are no Shudra gods in the Vedas.*”

**Comment:** It is anachronistic to talk of castes of Deities in the context of Rigveda. In any case, Doniger is wrong. In Shatapatha Brahmana 11.2.7.16; 6.4.4.13, the devatas are also divided into four castes. According to that text, Varuna is a Kshatriya (not Brahmin). And Pushan is a Shudra Deity, contrary to Doniger’s claim that there are no Shudra Deities in the Vedas. Jaiminiya Brahmana 1.68-69 associates Sudras with the Deity Vesmapati. Sometimes, the Vishvedevas are also associated with the Shudras. For more details, a paper by Arvind Sharma, a foremost scholar of Hinduism may be consulted.<sup>162</sup>

**Page 133, para 1:** About after-life in Rigveda, Doniger says – “*When it comes to the inevitable end of that span, the Rig Veda offers a varied but not necessarily contradictory images of a rather muted version of life on earth; shade (remember how hot India is), lots of good-looking women (this heaven is imagined by men), and good things to eat and drink.*”

**Comment:** It is a fiction of Doniger’s imagination that in the Rigveda, lots of good-looking women are promised to men in their after-life. Perhaps she confuses the Veda with the Koran.

**Page 133, fn:** Discussing Rigveda 10.16.1 which asks Agni to consume the body being cremated thoroughly, Doniger remarks – “*The great French Indologist Louis Renou translated the idea of being cooked perfectly as au point, just as one would say of a good steak.*”

**Comment:** Doniger obviously knows that beef is an anathema to modern Hindus, and perhaps for this reason, she has made a remark that would be highly offensive to Hindus today, especially when made in the context of their holy scriptures. So much for her cultural sensitivity and appreciation of diversity. One wonders if she would ever dare to bring in Pork chops while discussing the Koran or the Torah. Interestingly, Doniger has removed the reference to steak in her more recent book “*On Hinduism*”<sup>163</sup> that was first published in India.

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<sup>162</sup> Arvind Sharma, “Of Sudras, Sutas and Slokas: Why is the Mahabharata Pre-eminently in the Anustubh Metre?”, pp. 225-278 in *Indo-Iranian Journal*, vol 43 (2000)

<sup>163</sup> Aleph Books: New Delhi (2013)



When Doniger claims that *“Intoxication, though not addiction, is a central theme of the Veda, since the sacrificial offering of the hallucinogenic juice of the soma plant was an element of several important Vedic rituals.”* (p 122), we have come a full circle, back to Colonial Indology.

## 8. Review of the Chapter 6, ‘*Sacrifice in the Brahmanas*’ by Vishal Agarwal

**General Comments:** A vast number of Brahmanas are lost, but the existing literature is fairly copious.<sup>164</sup> Unfortunately, Doniger uses only a select few of the above texts,<sup>165</sup> and relies quite significantly on secondary works of non-specialists like Romila Thapar, Keay and Gavin Flood, who have themselves relied on piecemeal translations and other secondary or tertiary sources. This chapter of Doniger’s book is essentially a cut and paste of sections from her earlier books (*Hindu Myths*, *Textual Sources for the Study of Hinduism*, and *Jaiminiya Brahmana – Tales of Sex and Violence*.” The only difference is that whereas her earlier books do not deal with the history of Hindus except tangentially, she has tied together these cut and paste sections pretentiously with ‘historical’ interpretations that are largely again cut and paste from other secondary works of Keay, Thapar and Mitter.

Her own translations of the Brahmanas have also been criticized severely. To quote Michael Witzel, no friend of the Hindus:

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<sup>164</sup> The Brahmana texts available today under the four Vedas are:

- Rigveda: Aitareya, Shankhayana (along with the slightly differing Kaushitaki version)
- Shukla Yajurveda: Shatapatha (in two versions: Kanva and Madhyandina)
- Krishna Yajurveda: Taittiriya, and fragments of Katha Brahmana. Additionally, long Brahmana sections are embedded in the available Samhitas (Taittiriya, Maitrayaniya, Kathaka and Kapishtala). The Vadhula Anvakhya is considered an additional Brahmana of the Taittiriya Shakha by some scholars.
- Atharvaveda: Gopatha Brahmana
- Samaveda: The Jaiminiya tradition has the Jaiminiya Brahmana, Upanishad Brahmana and Arsheya Brahmana. The Kauthuma-Ranayaniya tradition have 8 Brahmanas – the Tandya, Shadvimsha, Arsheya, Samhitopanishad, Samavidhana, Vamsha, Mantra Brahmana, Devatadhyaya.

<sup>165</sup> For example, her leaving out of Chhandogya Mantra Brahmana belies her claim that her book is about women, because this Brahmana has a considerable grhya material related to women.

“(W.D. O’Flaherty, *Tales of Sex and Violence. Folklore, Sacrifice, and Danger in the Jaiminiya Brahmana*. U. of Chicago Press 1985)

There are many points I would take issue with in this book (starting from the title and the time limit she gives to JB, 900 BC, without any justification, etc. etc., -- for the moment, see H. Bodewitz, in his introd. to vol. II of his JB translation).

And of course, the translation, again is a \*re\*-translation, for all of O.’s selections had been translated by Hans Oertel and Willem Caland into English/German long before; see her own bibliography. O. merely added a fashionable(?) Freudian coating.

I select for commentary: "The rejuvenation of Cyavana" (JB 3.120-29), O. p. 64 sqq.;

The trouble again is that O. did not follow up the secondary literature well, not even with the help of the students she mentions.

\* if, -- she would have noticed that the 19th century "western scorn for the brahmanas" has long been overcome, see K. Hoffmann, *Aufsätze zur Indo-Iranistik*, vol. III, ed. S. Glauk et al., Wiesbaden 1992, p. 709, -- a 1959 piece, following up Oldenberg and St. Schayer -- and Hoffmann’s school at Erlangen, among which my lamented friend, A. Benke, MA thesis Erlangen 1976, and M. Witzel: *On Magical Thought in the Veda*. Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1979 (where the literature is given; incidentally, all provided by the editor to B.K. Smith for his article in *Indo-Iranian Journal*: "The unity of ritual: The place of the domestic sacrifice in Vedic ritualism", IJ 29, (1986) 79-96, and only partially used in his book "Reflections on resemblance, ritual, and religion." New York-Oxford 1989.-- which again lambasts our predecessors without making clear that their attitudes had long been overcome.)

\* And, -- if the sec. lit. had been used -- the translation would have turned out much better.

In JB 3.120 sqq. (p. 64 sqq.) there are several cases where this would have helped: p. 64 (JB 3.120): O.’s "the thrice returning departure" versus W. Rau, MSS 39, p. 159, 161 n. 1 tells us that this is part of the trekking procedure of the Vedic Indo-Aryans: Two days travel, one day rest (yoga-kSema). Thus: 3 times a period of double marching days (trih punahprayaNam). -- NB. see already his book: *Staat und Gesellschaft im alten Indien nach den Brahmana-Texten dargestellt*, Wiesbaden 1957, again largely unread west of the Atlantic...).

Further, the graama, which treks with wild west style wagons, is not a "clan" as O. translates repeatedly but a group of people under a graamanii "trek leader": including brahmins, ksatriyas, vaisyas and others -- for example the dumb carpenter of O. p.107, JB 2.272).

The old Cyavana (3.120, p. 65) is not "on his last legs" but a niSThaava, a "spitter" due to loss of front teeth, see again W. Rau, MSS 39, 160-161

I also leave aside her predilection for street language colloquialisms "balls of cowshit, balls of shit" (or: the balls of Indra) or: hanta

"hell!" (p. 65, 3.121), normal meaning: "let's do (something)" -- all cases where Vedic slang is not seen in the Sanskrit but the standard expressions, and I also leave aside the many gaps in the translations where words or whole sentences have been forgotten (e.g.: p. 64 As he was left behind :vaastau; p. 64 His sons have left him: nuunam; etc . etc. -- the last section, JB 3.125, only receives a short paraphrase, not a translation -- but O. does not tell us).

I rather move to more serious grammatical business: O. does not know the function of the "future" imperative in -taad (Delbrueck, Altindische Syntax, 1888 (!) p. 263 sqq. Thus in par. 123-124, where a series of commands is given, they should be translated by: do this, AND THEN do that -- the normal meaning of -taad in the Veda.

O. always calls the members of Zaaryaata's wagon train (graama) "Zaryaati", misunderstanding the 'first-year Sanskrit' Vrddhi formation in the text which has zaaryaatyaa- .

Difficult sentences, such as: saa yadiitiiyaayaditi (p. 65, 3.121 end) are simply left out without telling us so.

And p. 66 (JB 3.124) abibhede (MSS: abhibede/Talavakara Brahmana parallel: abhipede!!) is not (with Caland) "she could tell them apart" (from bhid???) but a typical JB mistake for \*abhipede "she touched him by the arm, baahau", see K. Hoffmann, MSS 23 (1968!), p., 41-43 = Aufsätze p. 504-5.

Simple question: if \*that\* much is wrong in just one story (and this is a small selection only!) -- what about the rest of this book and her other translations?

Face it: It might have been better to have used the old translations and to have added her Freudian interpretation to them...

In sum: The "translation" simply is UNRELIABLE."<sup>166</sup>

The chapter makes an interesting reading, but only from the perspective of literature. As a tool for understanding the history of Hindus, it is worthless. Or rather, as Hans Bakker said, it is like fast-food that has no substance although it pleases the tongue (or let us coin the phrase, 'Quickie Indology'). The comments pointed in this chapter review are merely illustrative.

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<sup>166</sup> Available online at

[http://list.indology.info/pipermail/indology\\_list.indology.info/1995-November/003511.html](http://list.indology.info/pipermail/indology_list.indology.info/1995-November/003511.html) <checked on 20 March 2014>.

Witzel wrote two other criticisms, one each for her translations of the Rigveda and Manusmṛiti. Amusingly, it appears that after this public criticism, Witzel has reconciled with Doniger, who wrote a superlative blurb on the back cover of Witzel's latest book "*The Origins of World Mythologies*" (OUP: 2013)

The Brahmanas have a wealth of information related to cosmogony,<sup>167</sup> culture,<sup>168</sup> legal and political institutions<sup>169</sup> and rituals<sup>170</sup> that has been studied systematically by scholars. Unfortunately, Doniger's bibliography shows that she has not used them.

Doniger cherry picks statements from these texts, distorting them and quoting them out of context. And indeed, for anything that she quotes, a contradictory statement might be quoted from the same texts. Contrary to Doniger's politically correct claim, the central theme of this chapter (as well as the others in the book) is certainly not animals, or women or low castes; the contributions made by them; or even the diversity of perspectives reflected in these texts. The reader can see only three over-arching principles: Tales of sex and violence, and of oppression.

The chapter is written purely under an Aryan Invasion paradigm. In this paradigm, the Brahmanas are all dated roughly within the period 900 – 600 BCE. Doniger cuts and paste the history of this period from the works of other generalists (who in turn have given a very speculative account in an empirical vacuum, and relying largely on Marxist or colonial paradigms).

The Brahmanas were succeeded by a very vast literature of the six Vedangas. These texts number literally in hundreds, and contain a mass of valuable information on the history, culture, society, politics, and religion etc. of the Vedic peoples. Scholars have demonstrated how even the

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<sup>167</sup> Konrad Klaus (1986), *Die Altindische Kosmologie – Nach den Brahmanas Dargestellt*. Indica et Tibetica Verlag (Bonn)

Umesh Chandra Pandey (1991-1992), *The Cosmogonic Legends of the Brahmanas*, Shivaniketanam (Gorakhpur, India)

<sup>168</sup> Sunanda Tilak (1990), *Cultural Gleanings from the Brahmana Literature*, Yaska Publishers and Distributors (New Delhi)

Jogiraj Basu (1969), *India in the Age of Brahmanas*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar (Calcutta)

<sup>169</sup> Hari Pada Chakraborti (1981), *Vedic India – Political and Legal Institutions in Vedic Literature*, Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar (Calcutta)

In this regard, the omission by Doniger of the numerous works of Wilhelm Rau, who has written extensively on the Brahmanas, is a real lacuna.

<sup>170</sup> G U Thite (1975), *Sacrifice in the Brahmana Texts*, University of Poona (Pune). [Doniger has referenced a 19<sup>th</sup> century work by Sylvan Levi instead].

seemingly technical works of ritual (Kalpasutras)<sup>171</sup> and grammar like those of Panini<sup>172</sup> have valuable information on the history of India. The Vedangas draw their inspiration and the basic material from the Vedas and the Brahmanas. Doniger practically ignores them in this and all other chapters of the book. With these remarks, let us review some specifics in this chapter.

**Page 135, para 1:** “1100 – 1000 Vedic texts mention the Doab (the area between the two rivers, the Ganges and the Yamuna.”

**Comment:** This is an inaccurate remark. The region and the rivers are mentioned from the oldest parts of the Rigveda. In fact, the Ganga is mentioned in the oldest layers of the Rigveda, and so is the Yamuna.<sup>173</sup>

**Page 136, para 2:** “...For the Brahmanas were composed during one of the most significant geographical and social shifts in the history of Hinduism, a period that has been called the second urbanization....”

**Comment:** Doniger works within the ‘Aryan Invasion happened around 1500 BCE’ paradigm and calculates all dates of scriptures from this premise. It ignores an earlier, archaeologically well attested migration of the Mature Harappan period populations into the Indo-Gangetic watershed during the late Harappan period, and thence further east in the later times. It stands to reason that if these Harappans spoke Dravidian or Munda languages, then why is it that the residents of the Ganga plains today speak IA languages? A more parsimonious explanation is that the IA speakers lapsed into a rural culture after the collapse of the Harappan culture, and it took them several centuries to develop cities again – this time in the Ganga plains. The continuity of the Harappan and the Vedic peoples who lived in the Ganga plains is suggested by evidence of many types (see reviews of chapters 3-4).

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<sup>171</sup> Ram Gopal, India in the Age of Vedic Kalpasutras,

<sup>172</sup> Vasudeva Sharan Agrawal (1952), *India as Known to Panini*, University of Lucknow (Allahabad)

<sup>173</sup> In this regard, see Shrikant Talageri (2000), *The Rigveda a Historical Analysis*, Aditya Prakashan (New Delhi) that discounts the general ‘Aryans went from the west to east’ dogma of some Indologists.

**Page 137, para 2:** “*The Brahmanas must have been composed a few centuries after the founding of these cities [Kashi, Hastinapur, Kaushambi], for considerable time must have passed since the composition of the Rig Veda....*”

**Comment:** Again, this claim is made under Aryan invasionist paradigms. If the Brahmanas were composed several centuries after the founding of these cities, then they should have been mentioned repeatedly in the Brahmanas.

Hastinapur is not mentioned in the Brahmanas at all.<sup>174</sup> Kaushambi is not mentioned directly, although a late book of the late Shatapatha Brahmana<sup>175</sup> mentions a person named Proti Kaushambeya, who may have been from Kaushambi or just a descendant of Kushamba, a person mentioned in Tandya Brahmana 8.6.8 and also later in the Mahabharata. Kashi is mentioned several times, but then, it is mentioned as early as the Atharvaveda (Paippalada Samhita) 5.22.14. Doniger’s evidence is therefore inconclusive in dating the Brahmanas and follows a circular logic.<sup>176</sup>

**Page 137, para 2:** “*During the first millennium BCE, the Vedic people settled down and built things to last....First they moved east from the Punjab to Magadha (Bihar) and the lower Ganges and later, in a backflow, west from the Ganges to Gujarat...*”

**Comment:** There is no evidence to prove that the Aryans moved in a backflow from the lower Ganga valley to Gujarat when they could have simply moved south along the Indus river valley and reached Gujarat via Kutch! In fact, that is what archaeology shows. Kutch has numerous early Harappan sites, but there are none in Saurashtra and Gujarat. Then, during the Mature Harappan period, we see numerous Harappan sites in Saurashtra. Historically too, people have moved frequently from Sindh into Gujarat and the languages of the two regions are more closely related than Gujarati with north Indian languages.

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<sup>174</sup> A town Asandivat is mentioned in the Aitareya and the Shatapatha Brahmanas, and is taken by some scholars to mean Hastinapura. However, the two towns are distinct, and Asandivat is a different town that is identified with modern Asandh close to the city of Karnal in Haryana. See: Devendra Handa, “Identification of Asandivat”, pages 278-281 in *Vishveshvaranand Indological Journal*, vol 3, part 2 (Sept 1965)

<sup>175</sup> Shatapatha Brahmana 12.2.2.13

<sup>176</sup> The *Vedic Index* can be checked regarding this information.

**Page 137, para 4:** “They [Vedic Aryans] moved partly in search of deposits of iron, which they developed from about 800 BCE (though a better quality was developed by about 600<sup>11</sup>); its use was predominant in the western Ganges plain in the first millennium BCE and spread from the Indo-Gangetic watershed to the confluence of the Ganges and Yamuna.<sup>12</sup> In the Rig Veda, the word *ayas* means “bronze”; later the Atharva Veda distinguishes red *ayas* (“bronze”) from the dark *ayas* (“iron”). First used for pins and other parts of horse harnesses, as well as for weapons, iron was not imported but was developed in India, primarily from rich lodes in what is now southern Bihar.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Thapar, *Early India*, 112

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 89-90

<sup>13</sup> Flood, *An Introduction*, 33; Keay, *India*, 41.

**Comment:** This is another example of how Doniger uses her sources carelessly. Thapar does not say on page 112 of her book at all that a better quality of iron was developed around 600 BCE. Nor does she say that the Vedic Aryans moved in search of the deposits of iron. All she says is that use of iron for objects other than weapons does not seem widespread before 800 BCE. Also, it is entirely questionable that the word ‘ayas’ in the Rigveda means bronze or that even dark *ayas* (shyaman) means iron.

The *Vedic Index* (Volume II, page 398), says that *syaamaayasa* (dark metal) in the Atharvaveda Samhita denotes iron ‘in all probability’, which clearly indicates that it was a conjecture made by the authors of the Index<sup>177</sup>. In a study on gold in Vedic texts, even Jan Gonda<sup>178</sup> treats the equation ‘*yaaamasa* = iron’ with reservation, and in fact, suggests that the word could mean bronze. There is considerable literature on this subject but Doniger has relied on outdated generalist works<sup>179</sup> and has presented

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<sup>177</sup> The Saunakiya Samhita mentions ‘dark’ to denote a dark metal at two places - 9.5.4; 11.3.7. In his translation, although Whitney glosses ‘dark metal’ as ‘doubtlessly iron’ for the latter occurrence, nothing compels us to accept this meaning. It could very well mean bronze (knife). He does not comment on the identity of the dark metal at 9.5.4. although the context again refers to a knife made out of the same. It may be noted that bronze and copper knives and blades have been found in the Harappan sites.

<sup>178</sup> Jan Gonda (1991), *The Functions and Significance of Gold in the Veda*, E. J. Brill (Leiden/New York)

<sup>179</sup> For a more contemporary overview, refer: Deo Prakash Sharma (2012), *Science and Metal Technology of Harappans*, Kaveri Books (New Delhi)



a very simplistic picture. She seems to presume that the use of iron spread from the Indo-Gangetic watershed eastwards, but the archaeological evidence is just the opposite.<sup>180</sup>

**Page 140, para 3:** *“The move down from the Punjab to the Ganges also sowed the seeds of a problem that was to have repercussions throughout the history of Hinduism: The Vedic people no longer had good grazing lands for their horses, and so it was no longer possible for every member of the tribe to keep a horse.”*

**Comment:** It is pure fantasy that every member of the Aryan tribe ever kept a horse! In fact, scholars from Edmund Leach to Romila Thapar have stated in their works that the horse was a prized and a relatively rare animal even in the Rigvedic period! Specifically referring to Doniger (by her married name O’Flaherty), Edmund Leach remarks-

“As part and parcel of the dogma that the Rgveda was introduced into India by the Aryan invaders, we have the further dogma that the life-style of the divine beings of the Rgveda was the life-style of the Aryan invaders themselves. In particular, the war chariots of Indra and his associates show that the Aryan invaders were lavishly equipped with war chariots, while the complex rituals of the Vedic horse sacrifice stem from the fact that the horse was ‘the supreme symbol of the victorious Indo-Europeans... whose domestication enabled the Indo-Aryans to conquer the Indo-European world’ (O’ Flaherty 1981:85). This too is a fantasy, though it has been around for a long time.”<sup>181</sup>

It is true that the two-wheeled chariot, in a crude form, is likely to have been invented in Central Asia. But the appearance of chariots as grave goods and the pictorial representation of chariots in other contexts suggest that it was a rare object, a ceremonial carriage rather than a piece of normal military equipment. The characters in the Rgveda ride in chariots because they are divine beings.”

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<sup>180</sup> Erdosy, George (1995), “The prelude to urbanization: ethnicity and the rise of late Vedic chiefdoms”, In F.R. Allchin (ed.), *The Archaeology of the Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States*, pp. 75–98. Cambridge University Press (Cambridge); pages 83-84

<sup>181</sup> Edmund Leach (1990); Aryan Invasions Over Four Millennia, in E. Ohnuki-Tierney (ed.), *Culture Through Time, Anthropological Approaches*, Stanford University Press; Stanford

Loose and historically amateurish statements like these abound in Doniger's book. The Hindus continued to rule the Punjab till Mahmud Ghaznavi overthrew the rule of the Shahis in late 10<sup>th</sup> century. In any case, Punjab was under the rule of the Delhi Sultans and the Moghuls but they still had to import good horses. The reason is that Punjab did not have any significant good grazing lands. And Hindus in the peninsular part of India imported them from Arabia on ships.

**Page 140-142:** Doniger then narrates the story of the Brahmana charioteer Vrisha and King Triyaruna (as told in the Jaiminiya Brahmana, book III). A dispute between the Ikshavaku king and the charioteer is resolved in the king's favor by the judges, who are his fellow Ikshavakus. Doniger extrapolates this single instance, and generalizes (on page 142, para 2): *"The point of this story of Vrisha seems to be that royal power trumps priestly power in the courts, since the jury is stacked; the only way that the priest can avoid punishment is by using priestly power to erase the entire crime."*

**Comment:** Once again, a very loose statement because the earliest Dharmasutras are all by Brahmanas, and the jury is not comprised merely of Kshatriyas! Ancient India had numerous institutions that enforced law even if the King were the upholder of the law.<sup>182</sup> Jaiminiya Brahmana 2.217 text says that only those of Bharadvaja Gotra can execute penalty in the court of law.<sup>183</sup>

**Page 142, para 1:** Quoting the Katha Upanishad 3.3-6, Doniger says, *"In the Upanishads, we will soon see, the intellect/charioteer reins in the senses/horses that pull the chariot of the mind."*

**Comment:** The Katha Upanishad does not talk about the 'chariot of the mind.' In fact, the *reins* are the mind, and the chariot represents the body (not the mind). Doniger gets even elementary facts about the Upanishads wrong.

**Page 145, para 3:** *"A dog too played a part in keeping evil out of the [Ashwamedha] sacrifice, and the negative role of the dog is evidence that the lower castes were still essential to the ritual.....Another factor in the fall of the dog's status may have been the progressive decline of the Vedic gods Indra, Yama, and Rudra, who were associated with dogs."*<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Debroy, *Sarama and her Children*

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<sup>182</sup> See Chakrabarti (1981), page 241 onwards.

<sup>183</sup> Tilak, p. 122

**Comment:** It is quite questionable if the dog can be equated to the lower castes as she has done throughout the book. Data from the Brahmanas indicates a different story. It is the sheep that is said to be like the Shudras (Jaiminiya Brahmana 1.69).

The logic that the dog declined in status because of the progressive decline in the status of Rudra, Indra and Yama is questionable. First, the *only* dog (or rather bitch) associated with Indra is Sarama. This Devata is more closely associated with his bay horses in the Rigveda, or with bulls etc. Second, Yama is a minor Deity in the Vedas. Only 3 of the 1028 hymns in the Rigveda are dedicated to Rudra, although the Shatarudriya (called by other names like the Rudraprashna) is exalted in the Yajurvedic and Atharvavedic traditions (and also in the Shankhayana Rigvedic traditions of Naagara Brahmins). In general, Rudra is an ‘outsider’. Doniger has relied on the hypothesis of Debroy in associating the decline of the dog to the decline of the Vedic deities and caste system. The question is – does this hypothesis even hold true? Debroy notes that Rudra was replaced by Shiva and the dog is still hallowed in that tradition (especially in the streams associated with Bhairava) and also by the worshippers of Dattatreya, but dismisses the latter as being inconsequential as if the worship of Yama was widespread in Vedic India.<sup>184</sup> However, whereas Debroy gives a more nuanced and a multifaceted argument, Doniger does not. Debroy gives one specific argument that makes more sense – Dogs are more useful to pastoralists than to settled agriculturalists. The increasing sedentarization of populations in ancient India is a better explanation as to why the status of the dog declined gradually.

**Page 150, para 2:** After some discussion on the question of eating beef in ancient India, Doniger then cites a passage from the Shatapatha Brahmana: “On the other hand, one Brahmana passage forbids the eating of either of either cow or bull... concluding that anyone who did eat them would be reborn as something so strange that people would say, “He committed a sin, *he expelled the embryo from his wife.*” *The text then adds, “However, Yajnavalkya said, ‘I do eat [the meat of both cow and bull], as long as it’s tasty.’”*<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup>*Shatapatha Brahmana 3.1.2.21*

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<sup>184</sup> And in modern times, the worshippers of Sai Baba recall the association of two dogs with the saint.

**Comment:** As Witzel (quoted above) noted, Doniger's knowledge Sanskrit does not exceed that of a first year Sanskrit student. The passage, when seen in the context refers to the yajamāna avoiding milk and milk products, to which Yajnavalkya says, "But I will eat it (milk products) if it is nourishing." The grammar and Koshas explain this passage in the same way, and so does Sayana.

The word amsala does not mean 'flesh of an animal', but rather 'nourishing and strength bestowing' (Ashtadhyayi 5.2.98). Likewise, Amarkosha 2.6.44 also explains it as nourishing fruit, milk products, sweets etc.<sup>185</sup>

**Page 151, para 2:** *"The ancient Indians thus defined animals according to the manner in which they killed them, either in a hunt (mrigas) or in a sacrifice (pashus)."*

**Comment:** Again, this generalization is untenable. First, the division of animals is not into those that are slaughtered in a sacrifice versus those that are hunted, but rather into those that are domesticated (grāmya) versus those that are in the wilderness (āranya). In fact, they are referred to as 'grāmya pashavah' and āraṇyāḥ pashavah'.<sup>186</sup> In other words, the word 'pashu' is used not just for domesticated animals but also for wild animals. And there is a third category of animals that are neither of these – like the frog (Taittiriya Samhita 5.4.4.4). Secondly, Doniger's tendency to use sex and violence as overarching hermeneutical devices has no basis because the 'grāmya vs. āraṇya' divide is used in many other Vedic spheres – e.g. the melodies of the Samaveda. Now sure, it is absurd to say that the Samavedic melodies are sacrificed or hunted! And in fact, the Brahmanas clearly declare that the wild animals are not to be slaughtered (Tandya Brahmana 6.8.14), and contrary to Doniger's focus on the 'addiction' to hunting, scholars have pointed out that the wild animals were released during Vedic sacrifices.<sup>187</sup> Hunting as a means to get food and sport is not very well articulated in the Brahmanas.

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<sup>185</sup> For more details, refer to pages 212-214 of "A Review of Beef Eating in Ancient India" (1970) published by Gita Press (Gorakhpur)

<sup>186</sup> Tilak, p. 63

<sup>187</sup> Charles Malamoud, "Village and Forest in the Ideology of Brahmanic India", pp. 74-91 in *Cooking the World – Ritual and Thought in Ancient India* (1996), translated by David White, Oxford University Press (New Delhi). Doniger has referenced this work elsewhere in her book.

**Page 153, para 2:** *“The sacrificial quality that goes from the man to the horse, bull, ram, and goat sets the pattern for the myth in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (1.4.3-4) in which the father god rapes his daughter, who flees from him the form of a cow, a mare, a donkey, a goat, and a ewe, only to be caught and raped by him in the form of a bull, stallion, male donkey, goat and ram.”*

**Comment:** The rapes are a figment of Doniger’s perverse imagination, and there are numerous places in the book where she tends to imagine rapes. Let us reproduce the exact translation:<sup>188</sup>

“He [Purusha], verily, had no delight. Therefore he who is alone has no delight. He desired a second. He became as large as a woman and a man in close embrace. He caused that self to fall into two parts. From that arose husband and wife. Therefore, as Yajnavalkya used to say, this (body) is one half of oneself, like one of the two halves of split pea. Therefore this space is filled by a wife. He became united with her. From that human beings are produced. She thought, “How can he unite with me after having produced me from himself?” Well, let me hide myself. She became a cow, the other became a bull and was united with her and from that cows were born. The one became a mare, the other a stallion. The one became a she-ass, the other a he-ass and was united with her; and from that one-hoofed animals was born. The one became a she-goat, the other a he-goat, the one became a ewe, the other became a ram and was united with her and from that goats and sheep were born. Thus indeed, he produced everything whatever exists in pairs, down to the ants.”

I do not see any hint for a rape that Doniger imagines, and secondly, the text speaks not just of these five animals but every creature down to the ant. The point is that creation exists in pairs. And at worst, as Purusha did not just create his daughter, but himself split into two (husband and wife), he can only be assumed to have raped himself, if Doniger insists on imagining a rape.

**Page 154, para 1:** *“An early Upanishad, shortly after the composition of the Brahmanas, spelled out the malevolent implications of the inclusion of humans as sacrificial victims: “Whoever among gods, sages, or men become enlightened became the very self of the gods, and the gods have no power to prevent him. But whosoever worships*

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<sup>188</sup> S. Radhakrishnan (1953), *The Principal Upanishads*, Harper and Brothers Publishers (New York), p. 164-165

*a divinity as other than himself is like a sacrificial animal (pasbu] for the gods, and each person is of use to the gods just as many animals would be of use to a man. Therefore it is not pleasing to those [gods] that men should become enlightened.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, human men and women are the gods’ sacrificial sheep.<sup>70</sup>*

<sup>69</sup> Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.10, Shatapatha Brahmana 14.4.2.21-22; Doniger O’ Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, 91

<sup>70</sup> Doniger O’ Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, 171-73

**Comment:** This is again a fantastic interpretation, contrary to the context of the Upanishad. What the passages in question imply is that Brahman is the source of all, including the gods. When a man finds this out and realizes that even the Devas are subordinate to and originate from Brahman, they stop making offerings to Brahman and instead devote themselves to Brahman alone. There is no hint of ‘humans sacrificing themselves to gods’, nor is there any description of ‘malevolent implication of the inclusion of humans as sacrificial victims.’ Doniger’s totally loose methodology (Freudian free association) enables her to make fantastic and untenable interpretations of everything, in total violation of the context.<sup>189</sup> One can read the preceding passage (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.4.9), the earlier part of this same passage, and also the succeeding passage (1.4.11) to understand this point, which is totally contrary to what Doniger is making out to be by seeing animals only as sacrificial victims.

**Page 156, para 1:** Doniger compares and contrasts the Pururavas-Urvashi story in Rigveda 10.95 with the version in Shatapatha Brahmana 11.5.1.1-17 and claims, “*The Vedic Urvashi complains that he made love to her too often....and against her will...But when the story is retold in the Shatapatha Brahmana, she begs Pururavas to make love to her just that often....The Vedic text implies that his desire is greater than hers, while the Brahmana implies that hers is at least as great, if not greater....*” Doniger uses this assumed contrast to argue that with the passage of time, Hindu scriptures stereotyped women as creatures of insatiable sexual appetite.

**Comment:** Doniger’s conclusion is incorrect, based on a faulty understanding of the grammar of the Brahmana text. Scholars have pointed out that in both the texts, she allowed Pururavas to have sex with

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<sup>189</sup> Refer, S. Radhakrishnan (1953), *The Principal Upanishads*, Harper and Brothers Publishers (New York), p. 168-169

her even when she did not desire it.<sup>190</sup> The mā in the Brahmana is used not as a prohibitive particle but as the pronoun ‘me’.<sup>191</sup>

**Page 161, para 1:** *“The need for a substitute for the consciousness-altering soma may have led to the development of other ways of creating unusual psychic states, such as yoga, breath control, fasting, and meditation.”*

**Comment:** This one sentence betrays Doniger’s view of Hindu spirituality – that is merely a psychic state. Yogis will never accept this view of Bhogis that the state they attain during meditation can ever be attained through the use of substances like Soma (that presumably Doniger thinks of as something similar to marijuana or heroin in its mode of effect). Even in Patanjali’s Yogasutra 4.1, where ‘aushadhi’ is said to lead to Samadhi, the result is said to be very different from the true Samadhi resulting from the eightfold path of Yoga. Doniger’s desiccated view of Hindu philosophies and spirituality leads her gross misinterpretations of chapters on the Upanishads (chapter 7) and Darshanas (chapter 18). Unfortunately, Doniger’s pseudo-history is also at variance with what other scholars of history say. The standard paradigm is that Yoga, meditation, pranayama (we wonder why Doniger separates these three aspects of one and the same practice – Yoga) arose from the Shramanic communities whereas the Vedic ceremonies were led by the Brahmanas. Furthermore, whereas these Indologists point to the northwestern origins of Soma, they argue that Yoga emerged from communities living further east, in the interior of India. Secondly, clay figurines depicting Yogic asanas have been unearthed in Harappan sites, and reputable Indologists like Iravatham Mahadevan have likened to the unicorn seals’ pedestal in front of the creature as a representation of the Soma filter. For more details, see the reviews of chapter 3-4. To conclude, Doniger’s comment is extremely naïve and takes a reductionist view of the spiritual philosophies and practices of Hinduism.

**Pages 162-163:** Doniger narrates a tale from the Jaiminiya Brahmana in which the gods put evil, sleep, carelessness, anger, hunger, love of dice and desire for women in men, so that they are not able to reach heaven. Then, she concludes, “The gods here do not merely accidentally burden humans with evil that they themselves, the gods, cannot manage; they do it purposely, to prevent humans from going to

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<sup>190</sup> Henk Bodewitz, “The Legend of Urvashi and Pururavas and their Dialogue,” in *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik*, volume 27 (2010), pp. 1-27

<sup>191</sup> Karl Hoffman (1967), *Der Injunktiv im Veda*, Heidelberg (Germany), p. 93

heaven.....Why does this change take place at this moment? The hardening of the lines between states, the beginning of competition for wealth and power, the scrambling for the supremacy of the rich Ganges bottomland may have introduced into the myths a more cynical approach to the problem of dealing with evil. And the growth of both power and the abuse of power among the two upper classes may explain why the gods at this time came to be visualized less like morally neutral (if capricious and often destructive) forces of nature – the fire, soma, rain, and the rivers of the Veda – or brutal and sensually addicted but fair-minded human chieftains and more like wealthy and powerful kings and Brahmins, selfish, jealous, and vicious.”

**Comment:** Oh, but there is a little problem, because the Jaiminiya Brahmana that Doniger assumes as a Ganga plains text is actually not from that area, but from the Chambal region!<sup>192</sup> And all that Doniger sees in the Brahmins and Kshatriyas are jealousy, viciousness and selfishness! It is as if they cannot lead virtuous lives. Her book is replete with these types of hate filled stereotypical statements against different sections of the Hindus. Contrary to Doniger’s assertion that Brahmanas and Kshatriyas are depicted as vicious, selfish and jealous, the texts themselves give a more positive picture. The Brahmanas for instance are required to be knowledgeable and studious, of pure conduct and descent, and cooperative with other priests.<sup>193</sup> Bad priests are criticized.<sup>194</sup> The importance of faith and knowledge is emphasized.<sup>195</sup> Kings not only had privileges, but duties as well.<sup>196</sup> They were supposed to act respectfully, and not snatch someone’s sister, wife (or other women), wealth, or speak lies.<sup>197</sup> In fact, there is considerable material on ethical and spiritual values for all in the Brahmanas.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>192</sup>Michael Witzel, Tracing the Vedic dialects in *Dialectes dans les littératures Indo-Aryennes* ed. P Caillat, Paris, 1989, 97–265

<sup>193</sup> Thite, pp. 217-218

<sup>194</sup> Thite, p. 220

<sup>195</sup> Thite 319-322

<sup>196</sup> Basu, p. 17 - 20

<sup>197</sup> Taittiriya Brahmana 1.7.2.14

<sup>198</sup> Tilak, pp. 156-173



## 9. Review of the Chapter 7, '*Renunciation in the Upanishads*' by Vishal Agarwal

**General Comments:** Most of our criticism below rests upon the differences between the world views and hermeneutic strategies adopted by Doniger on one hand and the present critic on the other. We feel that Doniger's worldview makes her miss the true import of what are essentially profound spiritual treatises and as a result, she often dwells on meaningless minutiae and trivia. We will give several examples of the differences in the results of our differing approaches, hers being Freudian, and ours being emic. The Upanishads teach that we should go beyond 'matter' and embrace the 'spirit'. Unfortunately Doniger's views represent those of Virochana, the archetype of a materialist, and not that of Indra who sought refuge in spirituality.

Several Upanishads, or portions of these texts are spontaneous expressions of the spiritual insights of Hindu sages. Therefore, their language tends to be imprecise, mystical and esoteric. Their linguistic features gives these scriptures a unique charm and beauty – a relatively freer mode of expression that contrasts favorably with the pedantry so often found in later philosophical texts (like those of Navya Nyaya). The Upanishads themselves claim that “the Gods like the mysterious and dislike that which is stated directly” (Aitareya Upanishad). Therefore, by taking the words of these esoteric texts literally, and using materialistic and Freudian lens to interpret them, Doniger has missed her aim in every way. In order to reconstruct the milieu in which these scriptures were compiled, Doniger relies excessively on the works of Marxist historians like Romila Thapar who use dialectical materialism as the preferred interpretative strategy. Obviously therefore, the limitations of Thapar's analyses get transferred to Doniger's chapter too. Quite often, Doniger gets bogged down by trivial details, and mistakes wood for the trees. These texts use many metaphors and literary tropes as a device to convey profound spiritual and philosophical concepts. But Doniger dwells incessantly on the darkness of these trivia and overlooks the illuminated heart of these texts.

The Upanishads are Hindu scriptures of spirituality par excellence. They deal with the nature of Brahman, the nature of this universe (Samsara), origin of the universe (Srishti), Brahman's relationship to the creation, nature of our soul (Atman, Jiva), relationship between the

soul and Brahman, the doctrines of karma and rebirth, the different meditations (Vedantic Vidyas) that can help the soul attain moksha, the nature of moksha and so on. These are profoundly spiritual topics that have an eternal relevance and a universal appeal. Doniger discusses some of these topics of the Upanishads, but has barely any discussion on what they have to say about Brahman, the soul, creation and the meditations. Doniger may say that her book is an 'alternative history' and therefore dwelling on the trivia is precisely her aim in writing it. But in doing so, she lands up distorting the message of these texts. What she presents is not 'alternative history', but rather a superimposition of her questionable and subjective interpretations on these texts. One of the reasons why she has glossed over these topics is because her survey of Upanishadic doctrines focuses only on a few of the major Upanishads. She has pretty much left out the Kena, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Maitrayani, Prashna Upanishads. The ones that she ignores often also have a lot of interesting historical information. E.g., the Prashna Upanishad, in which the six seekers have names that give some idea about their provenance and family origins – information that is important from a historical perspective. Even in the Upanishads that she has used, Doniger leaves out information that would throw some good light on the how her book's subjects (women, a perpetual 'dog and pony show', and low castes) were considered by the authors or compilers of the Upanishads.

And as usual, her chronology (the cornerstone of any good work on history) is way off the mark.

A few comments on this chapter are listed below by way of critique. Most of my own comments below are matters of subjective interpretation due to our differing interpretation strategies and worldviews. The reviewer also feel however that it is often better to use arguments from within the tradition (which has been fairly continuous when it comes to Upanishads) to explain the context and deeper import of spiritual treatises like the Upanishads, than using irrelevant modern hermeneutic techniques (like Freudian worldview and dialectical materialism), especially when they have a very limited world-view. In fact, even professional psychoanalysts have acknowledged that there is a big gap between psychoanalysis on one hand and the Indian mystical tradition on the other.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Sudhir Kakar, "Reflections on Psychoanalysis, Indian Culture and Mysticism", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 10(1982) 289-297

**Page 164, para 1:**“c. 600-500 *Aranyakas* are composed”

**Comment:** Absurdly late date, making the *Aranyakas* roughly contemporary with Buddha.

**Page 164, para 1:** “c. 500-400 *Early Upanishads* (*Brihadaranyaka...Chhaandogya....Kaushitaki...*)”

**Comment:** Absurdly late date not even supported by Patrick Olivelle’s late chronology.<sup>200</sup> It makes even the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* later than Buddha although sections of the *Upanishad* revolve around King Janaka of Videha who is mentioned as a pre-Buddha and an ancient figure in the Pali cannon. Videha is depicted as a kingdom in the texts, a situation prior to it become an oligarchy sometime before the Buddha.

**Page 164, para 1:** “400-1200 *Later Upanishads* (*Katha...Kaushitaki...Shvetashvatara, and Mundaka...*)

**Comment:** There appears to be a typo. ‘1200’ should have perhaps been ‘200’. Why is *Kaushitaki* listed twice – once as an old *Upanishad* and now as a later *Upanishad*? Olivelle also says that *Kaushitaki* is most likely pre-Buddhist.<sup>201</sup>

**Page 165, para 3:**“*The eastern Ganges at this time, the seventh through the fifth century BCE, was a place of kingdoms dominated by Magadha, whose capital was Rajagriha, and Koshala-Videha, whose capital was Kashi (Varanasi, Benares).*”

**Comment:** Wrong. Koshala, Videha and Kashi were separate political entities. Eventually, Koshala conquered Kashi. Kashi was not the capital of Koshala-Videha. According to most historians, in the *Upanishadic* times, Videha was a kingdom, but by the time of Buddha, it had become an oligarchy and was eventually absorbed in the *Vajji confederacy* and then in *Magadha*.<sup>202</sup> Therefore, Doniger’s summary of the political situation is quite wrong.

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<sup>200</sup> Patrick Olivelle (1996), *Upanisads*, Oxford University Press (New York), pp. xxxvi - xxxvii

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. xxxvii

<sup>202</sup> G P Singh (2003); *Republics, Kingdoms, Towns and Cities in Ancient India*; D K Printworld (New Delhi)

**Page 165, para 4:** “*Commerce was facilitated by the rise of prosperous kingdoms and social mobility by the rise of great protostates, or oligarchies (mahajanapadas or ganasanghas). One Brahmin source describes these clans as degenerate Kshatriyas and even Shudras, accusing them of having ceased to honor the Brahmins or to observe Vedic ritual, worshipping at sacred groves instead, and of paying short shrift to sacrifices, using their funds for trade....*”

**Comment:** Inaccurate statement. Doniger relies on page 148 of Romila Thapar’s ‘Early India’. Thapar however clarifies that only the leaders of ganasanghas (and not of mahajanapadas as Doniger claims) were considered as degenerate Kshatriyas or even Shudras. This is another example of how Doniger misuses even her secondary sources.

**Page 166, para 2:** “*The first three classes...became sharply delineated not only from the Shudra (the fourth class. Below them) but, now, from a fifth category, Pariahs.*”

**Comment:** Misleading statement, because the word Pariah typically presumes the stigma of untouchability. A scholar states –

“The Rgveda shows no knowledge of people who must not be touched. Neither do the later Vedic texts give any indication of untouchability, although tribal groups of Candalas and the Pulkasas are mentioned with malice and revulsion. In the second phase, extending up to AD 200, certain tribal groups like Candalas and the Pulkasas emerge clearly as untouchables. The third phase being a continuation of the second, throws up some more ethnic groups as untouchables, but the peak is attained in the fourth phase from AD 600 to 1200 AD, when a number of occupational groups such as the carmakaras and the rajakas are degraded to the untouchable status and several new ethnic groups are added to the list.”<sup>203</sup>

In short, even in the later Vedic texts (which includes the Upanishads), there is no indication of untouchability against Pariahs.

**Page 166, para 3:** “*Much of the new literature on religious and social law (the Shrauta Sutras and Grihya Sutras) may have been designed to incorporate*

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<sup>203</sup> Jaiswal, Suvira, *Caste: Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change*. Manohar Books: New Delhi (1998), Pp. 86-87

*newcomers of social groups into a ranking system or to accommodate local power relations.”*

**Comment:** Doniger makes this claim on the basis of Duncan Derret’s “*Dharmasastra and Juridical Literature*”. Even on the face of it, Doniger’s claim is absurd (because this is not what the Shrauta-Grihyasytras deal with) and a perusal of Derret’s work shows that he has made these claims with respect to the Dharmashastra literature, not with respect to the Kalpasutras (Shrauta and Grihya). These latter are just concerned with the performance of the Vedic ceremonies using 3 and 1 fires respective. The Shrauta Sutras are definitely not manuals of social law per se.

**Page 168, para 3:** “*You are that...(tat tvam asi) (CU 6.8.7)..*” On this, Doniger gives the endnote (p. 711 of her book) – “Joel Brereton and Patrick Olivelle have argued, fairly convincingly, that it should rather be translated, “*And that’s how you are.*” Olivelle, *Early Upanishads.*”

**Comment:** Brereton and Olivelle have not considered the possibility that this phrase, considered a Mahavakya (“Great Utterance”) in Advaita Vedanta tradition, perhaps already had a mystical formulaic character as early as the time of the Upanishads and Aranyakas. They discuss grammatical details but seem not to take into account that the words are quoted as a spiritual formula/phrase already in Shankhayana Aranyaka, chapter XIII.

**Page 169, para 3:** “...*Nachiketas remains in the house of Death for three nights without eating and then tells Death that in effect, on the three nights of fasting, he hate “your offspring, your sacrificial beasts (pashus), and your good deeds (sadbhukrityam)....This blackmail is what forces Death to tell Nachiketas his secrets.”*

**Comment:** Doniger’s claim that Nachiketas’ blackmail is what forced Yama to reveal the secret is problematic from many perspectives. The Katha Upanishad talks about this ‘blackmail’ in just one verse, and Patrick Olivelle puts this verse not in the mouth of Nachiketa, but in the mouth of a ‘third voice’. This story also occurs in the Taittiriya Brahmana 3.11.8.1-6 where it is used to explain the Nachiketa fire altar, whereas this Upanishad uses the same story, toning down the ‘blackmail’ and uses it merely as a literary device to make Yama answer the three questions of Yama. The two contexts (of the Brahmana and the Upanishad) are different and it is not appropriate to emphasize that Nachiketa’s threat of blackmail was what actually caused Death to reveal the Upanishad. The threat should be seen just as a literary device. Her translation of ‘pashus’

as 'sacrificial beasts' is also a stretch. It could just mean 'wealth' (to complete the triad of progeny and karma). Why and to whom would Yama sacrifice? And would not 'sadhu-kriyam' include yajnas and its results anyhow?

**Page 170 – 171:** Doniger proposes a cute theory as an explanation for the origin of the theory of reincarnation – *“The theory of reincarnation, a recycling not of tin cans but of souls, may reflect an anxiety of overcrowding, the claustrophobia of a culture fenced in, an kind of urban Angst....Is this fear of crowds related to the shock of the new experience of city life in the Ganges Valley? Were there already slums in Kashi (as there may already have been in Harappa)? Is a fear of this sort is what inspired the theory of reincarnation, who precisely was it who was afraid?”*

**Comment:** The logic used by Doniger militates against the conclusion drawn by her. If there was overcrowding on this earth, why would Indians want dead persons to take rebirth on earth again? They'd want them to go to other worlds and just stay there.

Reincarnation is a very wide-spread belief found in numerous cultures all over the world, including societies that live in sparsely populated and remote islands. Doniger's views are too speculative because there was plenty of place for cities to expand into the surrounding country-side and forests in this period. In fact, the Buddhist scriptures (Sutta Nipata for instance) makes the Buddha yearn for a good time when there will be continuous human inhabitations that are not interspersed by forested land.

**Page 170, fn.:** *“No one there seems to have thought of asking about the opposite problem, why the world doesn't run out of souls, which constantly leak in the cycle in both directions, some up to the world of Brahman and some down to the world of insects. Centuries later Jaina cosmogonies did address this problem.”*

**Comment:** The question was perhaps not considered because an infinite number of souls were assumed, and mathematically, 'infinity minus infinity' ( $\infty - \infty$ ) is an undefined entity! No matter how many souls leaked in either direction, there was no reason to fear that the world would run out of souls. The question was raised only with regard to the yonder world (heaven) because it perhaps had finite dimensions as conceived by the compilers of the Upanishads. [This is just a speculation, meant to explain an ancient riddle using modern mathematics).

**Page 171, para 2:** *“The “second urbanization,” the spread of paddy rice cultivation into the Ganges Valley, producing a surplus that could support cities, the emergence of societies along the Ganges, created an unprecedented proximity of people.....Population densities had significantly increased, the result of a combination of the incorporation of indigenous peoples, a soaring birthrate, and the creation of agricultural surpluses. ....The movements to renounce the fleshpots of the Ganges Valley may have been inspired in part by a longing to return to the good old days preserved in the [Vedic] texts, when life was both simpler and freer, more heroic. Such a longing is reflected in the name of the Aranyakas (“Jungle Books”), in the village settings of so much of the Upanishads, and in the forest imagery that abounds in the writings of the early sects, both inside and outside Hinduism.”*

**Comment:** An alternate explanation is that the Upanishads and Aranyakas predate the second urbanization. Indeed, the older Upanishads do not mention any cities, even with a sense of rejection. Hardly any of the major cities of the Mahajanapadas seem to find a mention in the Upanishads and the Aranyakas. Even if the Upanishads were meant for forest contemplation, they should have mentioned at least a few urban centers of their time, if these centers existed at all. In other words, Doniger’s speculations (found in works by other Indologists as well) have been made in an empirical vacuum.

**Page 174, para 2:** *“....engage in the ritual practices that generate internal heat (tapas)...”*

**Comment:** Throughout her book, Doniger mistranslates ‘tapas’ as ‘internal heat’ whether it is used in a ritual or a spiritual context. This translation is very misleading. The word has several different connotations in different contexts.<sup>204</sup> It could mean spiritual power, the light of meditation, spiritual energy and so on.

**Page 175, para 2:** *“The people who reach the moon in the Brihadaranyaka are eaten by the gods (as they are eaten by animals in the Other World in the Brahmanas), but the gods in the Chhaandogya merely eat the moon, a more direct way to account for its waning.”*

**Comment:** This is an example of Doniger understanding the mystical language of the Upanishads in a very literal way, missing their heart completely. The texts use a metaphorical and poetic language to

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<sup>204</sup> Walter O Kaelber (1989), *Tapta Marga*, SUNY (Albany, NY)

stress that performance of good karma alone is not adequate because its results are finite. Eventually, these souls that reach the ‘moon’ due to performance of good karma also have to take a rebirth. No heaven is permanent – this is the import of these passages.

**Page 176 – 177:** *“The Kaushitaki Upanishad describes the fork in the road a bit differently....The deciding factor here apparently has nothing to do with the sort of worship the dead person engaged in while alive, or whether he lived in the village or the wilderness; there is just one final postmortem exam....that determines everything....The important doctrine of the transfer of karma from one person to another is harnessed to the trivial human frailty of liking some relatives and disliking others....”*

**Comment:** This is also an example of Doniger interpreting the mystical language of the Upanishads very literally (as a Bible thumping literalist would). This passage is taken up for discussion in Brahmasutra 3.1.12 sqq. and it is clarified that evil doers go to the realm of Yama, not to the moon. When Kaushitaki Upanishad 1.1-4a says that “when people depart, they *all* go to the moon,” the word ‘all’ merely means those who perform their Vedic rites. Those who do not perform their Vedic rites and are evil doers go straight to the realm of Yama and are not considered in this passage of the Upanishad. Those who perform the Vedic rites are tested for their level of spiritual attainment. If they fail, they are reborn according to their accumulated karma and knowledge. When this is understood, Doniger’s contention that the ‘postmortem exam determines everything’ can be dismissed.

Those that show an indifference to pleasures of heaven are freed by the moon to move further up. In that ascending path, the karma that has not started to bear fruit yet, gets destroyed by spiritual wisdom, and gets transferred to that person’s friends and enemies. The text does not say that the agency of transfer of Karma lies with the doer (thereby knocking out Doniger’s claim about the ‘trivial human frailty of liking some relatives and disliking others’) or that he himself transfers his deeds according to whether he likes or dislikes people. Rather, the text says that “he shakes off his merits and demerits. His dear relatives obtain his merits, those who are not dear his demerits.”<sup>205</sup>

The reasons for this transfer of Karma are more profound than what Doniger would make it to be and may be interpreted in the

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<sup>205</sup> Henk Bodewitz (2002), *Kausitaki Upanisad*, Egbert Forsten (Groningen), p. 16



following way: Hindu tradition emphasizes that we must not hate a knower of Brahman and should respect him, and should serve him diligently because his very presence in our midst is a blessing. Those who do so and assist him in the path of spirituality, are the ‘dear relatives’ and those who revile a knower of Brahman are the ‘not dear relatives’ (or enemies, Brahmadveshi). It is for this reason, that they respectively receive the non-fructified good and bad karmas respectively of the knower of Brahman when he has himself gone beyond the effects of Karma.

So we see again that a materialistic and urethral (=Freudian) worldview makes Doniger miss the deeper intended significances of the Upanishads.

**Page 177-178:** Doniger claims, “*A remarkably open-minded attitude to women’s infidelity is evident in the mantra recommended to make a sexual rival impotent.*” Doniger then cites Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 6.4.12, and gives her own twist – “*In contrast to almost all of later Hinduism, which punished a woman extremely severely for adultery, this text punishes only her partner. Moreover, this punishment is intended (only) for a lover of his wife that the husband hates and therefore not necessarily for a lover that he does not hate, a most permissive qualification.*”

**Comment:** This is quite a pervert interpretation by Doniger (typical of her) and assumes a husband who can sometimes not hate the paramour of his wedded wife. Does Doniger personally know husbands who would not feel bad about their wives being seduced by other men? It appears more likely that the Upanishad does not consider the possibility of the wronged husband forgiving or loving the offending male in this passage.

**Page 182, para 1:** “*Of course the kings in these texts [the Upanishads] may never have existed; they may simply have been dreamed up by Brahmin authors, purely a literary convention, a fantasy.*”

**Comment:** This is skepticism bordering on cynicism. Janaka is mentioned even in Buddhist scriptures and there is sufficient reason to believe in its historicity. It is ironical that Doniger imagines rape, incest and the like in Hindu scriptures without any evidence, but dismisses people who are actually mentioned in those texts (and in parallel texts of other traditions) as a ‘fantasy’ (fictitious). She sees what is not present, and does not see what is present.

**Page 183, para 3:** Doniger makes the following comments on the episode of Raikva and Janashruti in Chhaandogya Upanishad 1.1-2: *“Janashruti is a rich man and a king. Raikva is, by contrast, evidently a homeless person or a street person. He is also a man who despises cows and gold (two things that Brahmins always like the best) and who likes women.”*

**Comment:** Once again, Doniger has indulged in crass interpretations, ignoring the deeper spiritual and ethical import of the Upanishad. Doniger’s quaint interpretations are possible only if we accept Patrick Olivelle’s revisionist translation of the Upanishad (which Doniger has reproduced in her book) on its face value.

First, Olivelle has (following another Indologist) needlessly emended the Upanishad text to read ‘abrahmana’ (non brahmana) instead of brahmana. All traditional commentaries make Janashruti tell his chamberlain that he should search for Raikva where one would find a **Brahmana**. The reader should note that in the Chhaandogya Upanishad, a true Brahmana is one who is spiritually knowledgeable and enlightened, and therefore that designation applies to Raikva because he is spiritually enlightened, even if he is not born in a Brahmana family. Once we realize the Doniger has relied for her analysis on the translation of an **emended** (and not the traditional) text, her demonization of Brahmanas as people who just love gold and cows is left with no basis.

Second, Doniger makes it appear that Raikva was enticed by the possibility of sex with the princess, and not with wealth and that this is what makes him reveal the mystical doctrine of the Gatherer to Janashruti. This misses the point of the Upanishad entirely. The section (Chhaandogya Up 4.1.1) starts by stating that Janashruti was a philanthropic king who built many rest-houses etc., and had come to believe that “all eat my food” – an indication of conceit and pride in his wealth. Subsequent sections show that Janashruti tries to purchase the wisdom that Raikva had, using enticements of wealth. But Raikva dismisses these offers contemptuously and instead addresses the king as a Shudra.

Finally, the King, as a mark of humility, offers his own daughter in marriage to Raikva. In the Indian culture, a daughter is offered in marriage to a family as a mark of submission and humility. When Raikva sees the princess, he lifts her face with his hand and remarks – “Shudra,

you have brought me all these. But with this face alone, you could have made me declare (the secretive doctrine) to you.”<sup>206</sup>

But wealth had no meaning for Raikva. Only when the King eschews his ego and even offers his pride as a mark of submission and humility does Raikva relent. The words, “with only this face...”, fit very well in this interpretation because Raikva is emphasizing (like in many other Upanishadic passages) that only humility and absence of conceit make one eligible for receiving spiritual wisdom. Likewise, the next story in the Upanishad (the story of Satyakama Jabala) emphasizes that truth and not one’s lineage make one eligible for spiritual knowledge.

The section on Raikva and Janashruti has another profound message that Doniger misses in her zeal to dwell on the irrelevant trivia. The message is that even a poor and an uncouth person can be a repository of wisdom and we should not judge these teachers merely by their external appearance. Instead, we should respect them for their inner beauty and wealth – their knowledge.<sup>207</sup> Further, true knowledge must not be sought with offers of wealth, but with a demonstration of humility and respect.

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<sup>206</sup> This is how the sentence In Chhandogya Upanishad 4.2.5 is translated traditionally and also by practically all modern scholars. But Doniger reproduces the revisionist and completely untenable translation by Olivelle – “With this face alone, you would have swindled me”. This revisionist translation implies that Raikva was greedy as well as a nymphomaniac (which suits Doniger’s penchant for seeing sex everywhere), whereas the traditional translation and the entire context of these sections (combined with how Indian tradition views the act of offering one’s daughter in marriage) actually indicates Raikva’s satisfaction that Janashruti has relinquished his conceit and pride of wealth and is therefore now fit to receive the instruction.

<sup>207</sup> The Upanishad text goes further – “There are villages in the region of Mahavrisha called the Raikvaparnas where the king dwelled with Raikya (for instruction)” (Chh Up 4.2.5). It is perhaps not out of place to point out that Mahavrisha is sometimes identified with the districts of Ganganagar and Bikaner in NW India and with adjacent regions of the Bahawalpur region of Pakistan where the bulls (vrishabha) are indeed large sized. In fact, a nomadic peoples called Raikas (note that Raikva is also said to be a man with a cart) still live in this region and the villages they frequent are still called ‘Raikon ke gaon’ (villages of Raikas). An interesting continuity of tradition indeed!

**Page 186, para 2:** *“But the Brihadaranyaka groups Shramanas with thieves, abortionists, Chandalas and Pulkasas (two Pariah groups), and ascetics (BU 4.3.22), and eventually the word “Shramana” came to mean anyone low or vile or, finally, naked.”*

**Comment:** This is quite a distortion of what the text actually says. Here is a translation of the relevant passage: “Here [in the state of being embraced by the Self of wisdom] a father is not a father, a mother is not a mother, the worlds are not the worlds, the Vedas are not the Vedas. Here a thief is not a thief, a murderer is not a murderer, a Chandala is not a Chandala, a Paulkasa is not a Paulkasa, a monk is not a monk, an ascetic not an ascetic. There is no following by good, no following by evil, for then he has passed beyond the sorrows of the heart.”<sup>208</sup>

It is clear that the text here talks about the state of spiritual enlightenment in which all worldly identities lose their meaning to the enlightened person. The mere fact that the monk and ascetic are placed in the same sentence as the Chandala etc, does not mean that the former are being reviled and equated to the Chandala, murderer and Paulkasas. In fact, the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, of all the major Upanishads, is perhaps the strongest in support of Samnyasa Dharma (Asceticism) and for these reasons, Doniger’s interpretation is quite clumsy, motivated by her penchant of dwelling on the jejune and the trivial. Likewise, in my review of chapter 6 too, I have shown how Doniger has grossly distorted the Brihadaranyaka and the Katha Upanishads.

**Page 189, para 3-5:** *“Dogs are satirically transformed from the lowest to the highest caste in an Upanishadic passage that may have been inspired by the Vedic poem likening priests....to frogs singing in the rainy season. ....The author of this text may be poking fun at Brahmins or pleading for more sympathy for dogs (and therefore for the lower castes), or both or none of the above.”*

**Comment:** It is quite preposterous to suggest, as Doniger does throughout the book, that dogs represent the lowest caste in Hindu scriptures.

There is also no need to see a satire here. To quote a contemporary scholar – *“There seems no reason to assume that satire is intended, though perhaps some shock value is intended in placing the saman in the mouths of*

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<sup>208</sup> Valerie Roebuck (2002), *The Upanisads*, Penguin Books India Ltd. (New Delhi), p. 81

*animals regarded as unclean. Perhaps the implication is that the chanter should desire the higher benefits of the sacrifice as earnestly as the dogs desire food and drink.*"<sup>209</sup>

And we may add that in the Hindu tradition, simple and deep faith (which is what the dogs demonstrate in this narrative) trumps inequalities based on birth, and plugs all the deficiencies in the ritual performed. Perhaps, this is the profound message that the text gives, not the trivial analysis that Doniger draws.

**Pages 189-190:** *"At the other end of the animal spectrum, the horse's continuing importance in the Upanishads is a constant reminder of the Kshatriya of the Kshatriya presence in these texts. A horse auspiciously opens the very first line of the very first Upanishad [Brihadaranyaka]..."*

**Comment:** The statement is misleading. The presence of horse in the Upanishads has nothing to do with the importance of Kshatriyas in these scriptures, nor has the mention of the cosmic horse at the beginning of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad anything to do with it either. Rather, a consideration of the sequence or arrangement of sections in Yajurveda (Vajasaneyi/Shukla Yajurveda Shakhas in particular) explains why the horse occurs at the beginning of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. The Shukla Yajurveda Samhita (and the parallel running Shatapatha Brahmana incorporating the Upanishad) describes the Vedic ceremonies in a particular order from the basic to the more evolved or derived. The Ashwamedha is the grandest Vedic ceremony and is therefore at the end of the ritualistic Brahmana portion. The Yajurveda texts then transition to the more mystical and esoteric portions starting with the cosmic interpretation of the Ashwamedha before beginning the Upanishad proper. In conclusion, there is nothing specifically 'Kshatriya' about all this.

**Page 191, para 1:** *"Significantly, the Good Animals, horses and cows, do not appear in the rebirth lists as likely options."*

**Comment:** These lists in the Upanishads usually also do not list Shudras. The reason is that the lists dwell upon the extremities in the hierarchy (or the continuous spectrum) of living things, with the Brahmanas and Kshatriyas on one end of the scale, and the Chandala and Pulkassa (amongst humans) clubbed with the lowest creatures on the other end of the scale. Those somewhat in the middle of this entire

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<sup>209</sup> Roebuck, p. 142, fn. 32

spectrum, like the Shudras, and horse and cow, are therefore seldom mentioned. The Upanishads do not give comprehensive lists of what genus one might be reborn into, and this task is done by the Dharmashastras. Manusmriti 12.55 says, for example, that a killer of a Brahmana is reborn as a cow etc. Perhaps a diligent search of Hindu scriptures will unearth something about being reborn as a horse too.

**Page 192 – 193:** *“Non violence, pacifism, compassion for animals, and vegetarianism are not the same thing at all. Indeed Manu equates, in terms of merit, performing a horse sacrifice and abjuring the eating of meat (5.53).”*

**Comment:** They cannot be the same thing because vegetarianism and compassion for animals are derived from Non-Violence (Ahimsa) just as pacifism is. Doniger completely twists the meaning of the verse that she cites from Manu. Contrary to what she asserts, Manu actually says that merely being a vegetarian is equivalent in merit to performing a 100 Ashvamedha sacrifices (‘perform Ashvamedha annually in all of the 100 years of one’s life’). The fact that vegetarianism is said to equal to the performance of a 100 of the most exalted Vedic ceremony, the Ashvamedha, is clear indication that vegetarianism is considered more exalted than performance of even the highest Vedic ceremonies.

Manu also has some other verses (which Doniger cites herself in another chapter) that clearly correlate vegetarianism to pacifism, compassion for animals and Ahimsa –

He who kills harmless and non-violent creatures for his own pleasure will never get true happiness, whether in this life, or after he dies. **Manu Smriti 5.45**

He who does not seek to kill, cause pain or tie up living creatures and desires the good of all attains everlasting joy. **Manu Smriti 5.46**

Whatever such a man who does not injure any creature thinks of, whatever he strives for and whatever he focuses on – all that he obtains without any effort. **Manu Smriti 5.47**

Meat cannot be obtained by causing injury to living creatures, and killing living creatures prevents one from reaching heaven. Therefore, one should completely abstain from eating meat. **Manu Smriti 5.48**

Reflecting upon the (unclean and painful) origin of meat, and how living creatures are tied and slaughtered (to produce meat), one should stop eating all kinds of meat. **Manu Smriti 5.49**

He who does not eat meat like a Pishācha in violation of the prescribed rules is loved by the world and is not troubled by diseases. **Manu Smriti 5.51**

He who authorizes the killing of an animal, he who butchers the animal into pieces, who slaughters the animal, who sells and purchases, cooks, serves and he who eats it – they are all murderers of the animal. **Manu Smṛiti 5.51**

There is no greater sinner than him who seeks to nourish his own flesh with the flesh of other creatures (and eats meat) outside of the purpose of Devas and one's departed ancestors. **Manu Smṛiti 5.52**

**Page 194, para 1:** “*A profound psychological understanding of addiction (sakti, particularly excessive attachment, ati-sakti<sup>+</sup>) to material objects....*”

<sup>+</sup> The title of Gandhi's essay on the Gita says it is about *asakti-yoga*, usually translated as “selfless action” but more precisely the yoga of nonaddiction.”

**Comment:** Wrong. The non-use of diacritics by Doniger leads to confusion in this instance. The word āsakti itself means ‘deep attachment’ and is in fact the yoga of deep devotion to God advocated by some Vaishnava schools. Gandhiji's work is titled not asakti-yoga but as Anāsakti Yoga (the Yoga of selfless action, or non-attachment to the results of one's Karma). Doniger's etymologizing is plainly spurious because she has got the title of the Gandhiji's work incorrect and does not understand the reason behind it either.

## 10. Review of the Chapter 8, ‘*The Three (or is it Four) Aims of Life in the Hindu Imaginary*’ by Vishal Agarwal

**General comments on Chapter 8:** Doniger does well to devote a chapter to this central Hindu doctrine of Purusharthas which is crucial to understand the basic structure of Hindu ethics, philosophy and theology. She sets this chapter apart from the rest of the book by saying – “*It is an interlude, its subject neither any particular historical period nor any of the main actors in this book (women, low castes, dogs, horses), but certain basic ideas that undergrid the practice of Hinduism as well as its historical development.*” (page 199). As a result, the chapter is relatively free of Doniger’s favorite topics - sleaze, sex, booze, rape, drugs and violence.

Unfortunately, she gets distracted far too often in petty discussions about whether 3 or 4 is the cardinal number in Hindu traditions and so on. As a result of these distractions, she leaves out topics that should be discussed in this chapter – the glorification of the human form (vis-à-vis animals such as dogs and horses!) in Hindu scriptures and their exhortations that we should not let this human birth go waste. Or the three-fold classification of sorrows. Or even what Artha, Kama, Dharma and Moksha are really all about. Wendy largely talks *around* these concepts instead of talking *about* them. The chapter might make titillating reading for a casual reader, but it will not enlighten him much about what these concepts really mean.

And then of course, the chapter abounds in errors and wrong interpretations resulting from cherry picking of data to fit pre-conceived theories. Doniger also creates unnecessary controversy (an attention grabbing mechanism?) where none exists. We discuss some of them below.

**Page 200, para 3:** “*The expedient of simply adding both the ether and hell to the basic pair of sky and earth is not taken, perhaps because the idea of three worlds was already so firmly embedded in Hindu cosmology. The number of worlds remained stable forever – that is, they were never squared, as were other paradigmatic triads....Indeed their resistance to quadripartition is one of the props of the argument that triads, rather than quarters, are the basis of Hindu thinking.*”

**Comment:** Incorrect statement. Beyond the three worlds, Hindu scriptures frequently speak of 7 realms (sapta-lokas), 14 realms



(chaturdhasha-bhuvan) etc. See for example Vyasa's commentary on Yogasutra 3.26

**Page 201, para 3:** “Originally they were a triad, dharma, artha, and kāma, known collectively as the Trio (trivarga).”

**Comment:** Doniger's claim that Moksha was added later to Trivarga is based on a paper by Troy Organ,<sup>210</sup> who does not give any proof for his claim either. The fact is that the oldest classical formulations of the doctrine of Purushartha already include Moksha as the fourth. Recent works clearly state that this fourth Purushartha is already presumed in the Vedic literature along with the first three.<sup>211</sup>

**Page 204, para 3:** “The Artha-shastra and Kama-sutra rank dharma first and karma last, but Manu, oddly enough, hedges: “Dharma and artha are said to be better, or kāma and artha, or dharma alone, or artha alone, here on earth. But the fixed rule is that the Trio is the best (2.224)””

**Comment:** Baseless speculation. The quoted verse of Manu forms a part of the section addressed to graduating students while they are transitioning from the stage of Brahmacharya to the stage of householder. The purpose of this passage is to instruct these students that they should live a balanced life and should pursue all the 3 goals in the triad of Trivarga because all the three are important. The intent is not to put these three goals in a hierarchical relationship, but to suggest that all (and not just 1 or just 2 of these 3) ought to be pursued. Elsewhere otherwise, Manu clearly states or implies that Dharma is superior to Artha and Kama. For instance: “Dharma is proclaimed for them who are not attached to Artha and Kama” (Manu 2.13a); “They who transgress Dharma and whose wealth is obtained through falsehood...they will never get happiness” (Manu 4.170) etc. In the entire text, the primacy of Dharma over Artha and Kama is clearly assumed, which is why Manu clearly states the limits of Dharma within which Artha and Kama ought to be pursued in literally 100s of verses in the text.

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<sup>210</sup> Troy Organ, ‘Three into Four in Hinduism’, *Ohio Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol 1 (1973), pp. 7-13

<sup>211</sup> Samiran Chandra Chakrabarti, 2000, ‘The Value System as Reflected in the Vedas – The Concept of Purusharthas’, Maharshi Sandipani Rashtriya Ved Vidya Pratishthan (Ujjain)

**Page 205 – 206:** *“The texts on each of the aims of life do not, by and large, deal with moksha when they deal with the other three aims, either because they did not take it seriously or, more because they felt it operated beyond the range of their concerns.”*

**Comment:** A false generalization. The Arthashastra hardly deals with Kama and Dharma. The Kama-sutra hardly deals with Dharma and Artha. But Dharma-shastras devote considerable sections to Moksha. For instance, the last of the 12 chapters of Manusmriti is on Moksha. The Adhyatma Patala of Apastamba Dharmasutra and dozens of verses of the Yajnavalkya Smriti deal with Moksha. The texts proper for studying about Moksha are the Moksha-Shastras (i.e., Darshanas) and this is where we must search for the fourth Purushartha. Therefore, Doniger’s statement is like complaining that there are no penguins to be found in the Sahara and no camels in Antarctica.

**Page 206, para 2:** *“Some authors also attempted various unsatisfactory, overlapping correlations between the four aims and other quartets/triads...It works better with the colors and qualities; white lucidity for Brahmins, red energy for Kshatriyas, and black torpor for the lower classes. But the matchmaking is generally a doomed failure attempt to put a square peg in a round hole.”*

**Comment:** Doniger’s attempt to project ‘doomed failures’ where none exist is due to her selective use of data in Hindu scriptures. Hindu texts actually assign distinct 4 colors to the four social classes –

*Sage Bhrigu said:* (Prajāpati Brahmā) made white as the color of Brahmanas, red as the color of Kshatriyas, yellow as the color of the Vaishyas and black as the color of the Shūdras. **Mahabharata 12.181.5**

**Page 206, para 3:** *“Similarly. Where the Hindus had formulated a group of three passions – lust (kāma), anger (krodha), and greed (lobha, or in some formulations, fear....- now a fourth metaphysical, epistemological emotion was added: delusion (moha).”*

**Comment:** Again, a distortion by Doniger, a failed attempt to put a hexagonal peg into a round or a square hole. The Dharmashastras rather talk about ‘shadripu’ (six enemies) viz., lust, anger, greed, delusion, jealousy and ego.

**Page 206-207:** “...to the Vedic modes of experience (wakening, dreaming, and dreamless sleep) was added a fourth stage, just called the fourth (turiya).....”

**Comment:** Again, an unsuccessful attempt to postdate inclusion of Moksha based on a half-baked understanding of Troy Organ’s paper (who quotes the Mandukya Upanishad). The fact of the matter is that all the four states are mentioned already in earlier Upanishads such as the Brihadaranyaka. It is unclear what is specifically Vedic about the first three modes of experience and what is non-Vedic about the fourth.

**Page 208, para 1-2:** Doniger first quotes Kama-sutra 1.2.6, “...Or, because the life span is uncertain, a man pursues these aims as the opportunity arises, but he should remain celibate until he has acquired knowledge...” The author then comments – “....The suggestion that you can indulge in kāma at any stage of life (except childhood) reflects (or perhaps even satirizes?) widespread arguments whether you can engage in renunciation (samnyasa) at any stage.”

**Comment:** Doniger’s speculation reminds one of scoops and scandals discussed in gossip tabloids. Adoption of renunciation is a formal occasion, a Samskara that is bound by more formal rules on eligibility. On the other hand, indulgence in kāma is a private aspect of one’s life with the restriction that a student must not indulge in kāma (whereas a young or an older person can). To associate kāma with samnyasa in the Freudian free association manner based on superficial similarities is not very intelligent.

**Page 209 – 210:**“....though different texts had different ideas about what those precepts [general Dharma] were. Even a single text, Manu’s dharma text, lists them, differently in different places. In one verse, “Nonviolence, truth, not stealing, purification, and the suppression of sensory organs are the dharma of the four classes, in a nutshell (10.63).” Non violence also comes first in another, related verse in Manu: “Non violence, the suppression of sensory powers, the recitation of the Veda, inner heat, knowledge, and serving the guru bring about the supreme good (12.83-93; 10.63).” But Manu includes only one of these (suppression of the sensory powers, not nonviolence) in the ten commandments for the top three classes in all four stages of life: “Truth, not stealing, purification, suppression of the sensory powers, wisdom, learning, patience, forgiveness, self-control, and lack of anger (6.91-4).” Significantly, he does not include generosity, the primary Vedic virtue, in any of these lists. The general thought behind all the lists is a vague social ethic.”

**Comment:** Again, Doniger creates unnecessary controversy without understanding the fact that these verses belong to different contexts within the text.

Verses 12.83-93 deal with means of Moksha, and therefore this list will be different from the other lists.

Verses 6.91-4 come after a discussion on the Samnyasa (4<sup>th</sup> Ashrama) and deal with the general duties for all the *four Ashramas* (the qualification 'dvija' is stated because Shudras do not necessarily go through the stage of studentship). Verse 10.63 on the other hand deals comes when the duties of all the four Varnas have been explained in their entirety and therefore it deals with the general duties of all the *four Varnas*.

The Varnas and Ashramas form an intermeshing matrix but are not entirely overlapping categories. Therefore, general duties, when prescribed for all the four Ashramas, are different for general duties prescribed for all the four Varnas (social classes). It may be noted though that within the first and the second half of verse 10.63, some manuscripts notice an additional verse – "Performance of shraadhha ceremonies, serving atithis, charity, straight-forwardness, progeny through one's wife and absence of jealousy [are also the dharma of the four classes]." If this extra verse is genuine and got dropped later, Wendy's speculations lose much of their force.

But even otherwise, these verses should be read in conjunction with the specific duties of different Varnas and Ashramas to understand why certain virtues are omitted. Therefore, generosity cannot be a duty for the fourth stage (Samnyasa ashrama), because the ascetic himself does not possess anything. Manus has already enumerated charity/generosity as a duty for the first three classes (Manu 1.88-91) but not for the Shudra. For these reasons, generosity is not listed in 6.91-94 and 10.63. As for the vagueness of the social ethic alleged by Doniger, the truth is that it is inherently impossible to enumerate all the precepts that one should follow.

To conclude, Doniger wastes too much ink on drawing silly parallels and using data selectively to prove useless theories that do not illuminate the doctrine of Purushartha which is the subject of this chapter. Here generalizations seem to be dependent more on sensational claims and cute phrases rather than on facts – a problem that plagues her entire book.

## 11. Review of the Chapter 9, ‘*Women and Ogresses in the Ramayana 400 BCE to 200 BCE*’ by Aditi Banerjee and Vishal Agarwal

### General Comments on the Chapter: A Gossip-Tabloid Version of the Ramayana

“*Jennifer Aniston seen without her wedding ring!*” or “*Michelle Obama breaks down while confessing to her adultery in front of the cameras*” – It is very common to see these sleazy, sensational and gossipy headlines screaming out from garishly printed tabloids when one is waiting in the cashier’s line at a grocery store. The tabloids also ‘prove’ their sensational news by incorporating some doctored ‘photographs’ in their narrative. Wendy Doniger’s book is no less graphic, sensationalized and sleazy. But whereas, all sensible minded people know these tabloids to be just what they are – i.e. titillating and cheap gossip, in the field of South Asian Studies (called ‘Indology’ by colonialists), these types of writings are very mainstream. Indeed, several years ago, Rajiv Malhotra wrote about the “Wendy’s Child Syndrome”<sup>212</sup> in an online portal, and a book highlighting this ‘scholarly’ malaise too came out in the year 2007.<sup>213</sup>

Doniger’s “*The Hindus: An Alternative History*” (2009) is not even a history. It is rather a collection of her own fantasies about alternative sex practices that she superimposes on the Hindu scriptures using the fig leaf of Freudian psychology in which, per her own admission, she has not been trained professionally. Her so called methodology enables her to use ‘free association’ to link completely unrelated facts using the most superficial resemblances, and bandy around words like ‘displacement,’ and ‘beheading’. To bullet proof her book against any criticism, she has claimed at the very onset that her book gives voice to the suppressed

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<sup>212</sup> See Rajiv Malhotra’s “*Wendy’s Child Syndrome*,” available online at <http://rajivmalhotra.com/library/articles/risa-lila-1-wendys-child-syndrome/><checked on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2014>. See also several other articles in the series ‘Risa-Lila’ easily found through a google search.

<sup>213</sup> For an expose of the ideological motivations behind these books, refer to Aditi Banerjee, Krishnan Ramaswamy and Antonio de Nicolas (2007), *Invading the Sacred – An Analysis of Hinduism Studies in America*, Rupa & Co. (New Delhi). Now available online as a PDF at [http://voiceofdharma.org/books/its/invading\\_the\\_sacred.pdf](http://voiceofdharma.org/books/its/invading_the_sacred.pdf)<checked on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2014>

sections of the Hindu society (women, lower castes and tribals). The ruse seems to have worked, because the traditionally Hindu hating Marxist professors teaching at some American<sup>214</sup> (and Indian) universities have used the book as a textbook in their Hinduism classes, ignoring the hundreds of errors, fantasies masquerading as facts (not even as interpretations) and undisguised racism and hatred for the Hindus. The book actually degrades its 'objects' of study by projecting Hindu women as over-sexed, debauched and violent creatures, by describing the tribals and the lower castes as silent and stupid victims of the tyranny of 'upper-caste' Hindu males.

Doniger also claims that the 'upper-caste Hindu males' have imbibed Victorian prudery from British colonialism, and therefore, they are wrongly offended when she points out the sex that is present in the Hindu scriptures. However, Doniger's argument is largely an attempt to deflect criticism of the shoddiness of her own work. **Hindus have never sanitized our scriptures to strip them of their sexual content. The problem is that Doniger imagines things in them that are not there.**

In many ways, the chapter on Ramayana wins heads down in how Wendy lets her shoddy scholarship run riot. To 'glorify' Sita, she imagines all sorts of character flaws in Rama. But she does not spare Sita either, whom she projects as 'sexual' [e.g. see item 31 below]. Her kitsch psycho-analysis is more a window into Doniger's mind than it is reflective of the character of the characters in the Ramayana. The chapter shows Wendy's penchant for below the belt gossip. Doniger does not mention the numerous glorious women characters in the Ramayana, ostensibly because she could not kink narratives about them into perverse interpretations – like Shabari, Svayamprabha (who transported the Vanaras to the sea shore from where Hanuman leapt towards Lanka), or even Mandodari – the virtuous wife of Ravana.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> See <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/hindus-will-suffer-most-from-the-withdrawal-of-donigers-book/20140226.htm> <checked on 7 March 2014>. Note that Gyan Prakash was a student leader of the Leftist student party at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), considered the ideological Mecca of Indian Communism. The institution has repeatedly churned out Maoist terrorists, including Dr Prachanda, who headed the Maoist insurgency in Nepal for many years.

<sup>215</sup> To understand the role of women in the Ramayana from an academically sound perspective, the following works may be consulted:

Words like ‘seduction,’ ‘addiction,’ ‘sexual,’ and ‘violence’ screech out from the chapter, para after para, making it look like a gossip tabloid retelling of the Ramayana. Much like the doctored photos in these tabloids, Doniger’s book abounds with spurious references, wrong translations and fantasies paraded as facts.

Additionally, the chapter suffers from the following methodological errors:

1. It does not discuss the internal stratification of the text of Valmiki’s Ramayana. Numerous scholars have pointed out that significant portions of Book I and the entire book VII of the Ramayana are later additions, and not from the pen of Valmiki.<sup>216</sup> And yet, Doniger treats all the seven books as one unit, and draws more than half of the narrative of her chapter from these two books of the Ramayana alone.
2. It practically ignores the retellings of Ramayana in many Indian and non-Indian languages. Wherever they are used sparingly, it is for the purpose of promoting a strained interpretation or some other pernicious agenda. In a later chapter, she refers to the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas in some detail, but even those references are riddled with errors.<sup>217</sup> At one instance, she uses an episode in the Ramacharitmanas that is not in the Ramayana, without telling the reader so, and then falsely psycho-analyzes the relationship between Rama and Lakshmana. This is a very shoddy methodology.
3. The text is situated by Doniger in the historical period of 200 BCE to 200 CE rather artificially. She uses an imaginary

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A V Subramanian, “Some Women Characters in the Ramayana”, pp. 173 – 195 in Bhuvan Chandel and Shubhada Joshi (eds.), *Women in Ancient and Medieval India*, Center for Studies in Civilizations: New Delhi (2009)

B R Modak, “Position and Status of Women in the Ramayana”, in I K Tripathi (Ed.), *Position and Status of Women in Ancient India*, vol I, Department of Ancient Indian History Culture and Archaeology: Varanasi (1988), pp. 72-77

G V Bapat, “Position and Status of Women in India as Reflected from the Ramayana”, pp.78- 108 in *ibid*.

<sup>216</sup> See Father Camille Bulcke and Dinesheshwar Prasad (2010), *Ramakatha and Other Essays*, Vani Prakashan: Delhi or even the numerous articles and books of John Brockington that Doniger should have been familiar with.

<sup>217</sup> See my review of Chapter 20 for these errors.

historical context to explain the narrative of the Ramayana, but fails miserably because first, her historical facts themselves are wrong and second, because she cherry picks passages from the scripture and fails to correlate it cogently to any worthwhile historical data.

4. Doniger has used the critically constituted text of the Ramayana that was published from Baroda. In this text, the purported interpolated passages are relegated to footnotes or to appendices. It is interesting to see how Doniger uses these interpolated passages selectively only when they serve her narrow purposes. There is no consistent methodology behind Doniger's selection or rejection of these additional or interpolated verses in the Ramayana.
5. Many a times, Doniger injects episodes into Valmiki's Ramayana when they do not even exist in the text! Or she misreads them and mangles them beyond recognition. We are unsure if these are instances of blatant lying, or of pathetically shoddy scholarship by Wendy Doniger.
6. She indulges in cherry-picking verses out of their context, and leaving out dozens of verses to weave a fantasy and pursue her hyper-sexual theories in the most shoddy manner.
7. Understanding the cultural context is a pre-requisite to interpretation of the ancient texts. Doniger does not even make an attempt to understand the Hindu culture, and perceives these scriptures through her idiosyncratic and ethnocentric lens.

Aditi Banerjee had written an excellent criticism<sup>218</sup> of Doniger's fake interpretations of the Ramayana and we have used the same wherever applicable in this review. For English translations quoted here, we have referred to Robert Goldman et al's translations<sup>219</sup> of the first six books. For the seventh book, we have consulted the critical Baroda edition of the Ramayana and have translated the verses myself. The list of errors discussed is partial – the chapter is very poorly written like many others in the book. Nevertheless, we discuss this chapter in some detail, to

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<sup>218</sup> Aditi Banerjee, "*Oh, but you do get it wrong*" available online at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262511> <checked on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014>.

<sup>219</sup> Robert P. Goldman et al (2007 - ), *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd (New Delhi) in 6 volumes covering Balakanda through Yuddha Kanda.



demonstrate the extreme contempt that Doniger holds for the Hindus and their heritage. With that, let us comment on some of them.

**Page 213, para 2:** Doniger summarizes Ramayana's own narrative on how the text was composed. One day, while bathing in a river, Valmiki saw a pair of cranes mating. Suddenly, a hunter shot at them with an arrow and killed the male partner. Valmiki saw and heard the piteous cries of the female bird and burst out in a shloka verse spontaneously, criticizing the Nishāda (the hunter) for having killed the bird, and interrupted the couple's joy. Doniger interprets this event as representative of the central themes of the Ramayana. So what are these central themes of the Hindu scripture according to her? Doniger says: "*This vignette that the Ramayana tells about itself weaves together the themes of dangerous sexuality, the violation of Dharma, compassion towards animals, attitudes toward tribal peoples, and the transmutation of animal passions into human culture – all central to the concerns of this chapter.*"

**Comment:** As we will show in this chapter review, much of what Doniger describes as the central themes of her chapter or of the Ramayana, especially 'dangerous sexuality', 'attitudes towards tribal peoples, and 'transmutation of animal passions into human culture,' are rather are fiction of her own perverse imagination run riot. In her zeal to defame Rama, Lakshmana and even Sita, she has invented passages where they do not exist, has projected her own fantasies as interpretations, and has thoroughly abused the rather discredited field of Freudian psychoanalysis. Overall, this chapter, like the rest of the book shows very shoddy scholarship. The chapter is very long, and ironically after devoting 40 pages to her **faulty** interpretation of the Ramayana, Doniger concludes later in the book (on page 662) that "*it is a work of fiction.*" Doniger accuses the Hindus of having become prudish in sexual matters post Victorian era. First, this is not entirely true. Second, what we Hindus object to is Doniger injecting her own sexual fantasies on Hindu scriptures with gay abandon. Hindus have never sanitized our scriptures to strip them of their sexual content. The problem is that Doniger imagines things in them that are not there.

**Page 214, para 2:** Doniger contrasts the compassionate concern that the Shaivite and the Vaishnavite traditions have for animals with the animal sacrifices in the Vedas and says, "*The attitude to animal sacrifice was also much affected by the rise of the two great male Hindu gods Shiva and Vishnu in sectarian movements that had no use for Vedic ritual.*"

**Comments:** Doniger is wrong in stating that Vaishnavism and Shaivism have nothing to do with Vedic ritual. Even today, much of Vedic rituals are carried out by those who are otherwise Vaishnavites and Shaivites. And the same has been true for several centuries now simply for the reason that the scriptures of these two traditions often exhort their followers to continue performing these rites, which are said to be pleasing to both Shiva and Vishnu. True, that the Agamas also advocate their own Puja and Temple ceremonies, but they certainly do not do away with Vedic Yajnas. Another mistake that Doniger has done in this sentence is to allege that Vedic rituals always involve animal sacrifice. Even a person who is faintly acquainted with this subject will know that only a small fraction of Vedic ceremonies involve animal sacrifices. In fact, other than during the Ashwamedha Yajna, there is hardly any evidence in the entire Rigveda of animal sacrifices.<sup>220</sup> Even in the other Vedas and their associated scriptures, only a fraction of the Yajnas involve animal sacrifice. And even within the Vedic tradition, there is a hoary tradition of replacing actual animals with wheat flour substitutes as Doniger has noted herself elsewhere in the book.

**Page 214, para 3:** “*Rajagriha (in Magadha, the present-day Bihar) and Kashi (Varanasi, in Koshala), which had come to prominence in the time of the Upanishads, remained great centers of power but were now rivalled by Kaushambi in Vatsa.*”

**Comment:** Doniger has got her history all mixed up. Rajagriha is not mentioned in the Upanishads or even in the Ramayana. And Magadha does not equate to present-day Bihar, which lies on both sides of the Ganga and encompasses several ancient Indian kingdoms (Anga, Magadha, Videha etc.). Magadha was predominantly on the south side of Ganges. In the Ramayana, the **region** of Magadha is mentioned but no other details are given. In fact, verse 1.31.5 mentions Girivraja and not Pataliputra or Rajagriha, which were **later** capitals of Magadha. This omission in the Ramayana is quite glaring because in this section, Sage Vishvamitra **lists all the prominent towns in that region with the names of Kings who founded them.** If Rajagriha and Pataliputra had existed, the Sage would have surely mentioned them. As for Kashi, this kingdom or region is mentioned even in Atharvaveda (Shaunaka) 6.137.1. Kashi and Koshala were separate kingdoms in the Ramayana and it was

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<sup>220</sup> See, K R Potdar (1953), *Sacrifice in the Rgveda – Its Nature, Influence, Origin and Growth*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Bombay

only later that Kashi was conquered by Koshala. Doniger makes the same error on page 165 of her book.

**Page 215, para 2:** “....in 321 bce Pataliputra (the modern Patna), then said to be the world’s largest city, with a population of 150,000 to 300,000, became the capital of the first Indian Empire, the Mauryan Empire.”

**Comment:** It is debatable if the Mauryan Empire was really the first Indian empire. Pataliputra was also earlier the capital of the Nanda Empire. A look at the map of the kingdom of Mahapadma Nanda indicates that it too merited the designation of ‘Empire.’<sup>221</sup>

**Page 215, para 5:** “A story goes that a Brahmin named Chanakya (“chickpea”)....”

**Comment:** The explanation of the name Chanakya as ‘chickpea’ is inadmissible. It simply means ‘son of Chanaka.’ According to scholars, chickpea was introduced into India earliest during the invasions of Darius or *most likely* when the Greeks occupied the Punjab around 190 BC.<sup>222</sup> Especially if the latter were true, it is wrong to assume that Chanakya, who was born decades earlier, would be named after a foreign plant.

**Page 216, para 4:** “A passage in a much later text implies that the Shungas were of low birth,<sup>16</sup>...”

<sup>16</sup>Bana, Harshacharita

**Comment:** Doniger does not say exactly where Harshacharita implies that Shungas were of low birth. Like many other references and endnotes in her book, this one too is vague and reflects a lack of careful editing or sheer carelessness. No historian takes this reference in Harshacharita (Ucchavaasa 6 or section 6 of the work) literally because Banabhatta is merely criticizing Pushyamitra for having murdered his

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<sup>221</sup> This might be checked even online at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magadha#Nanda\\_dynasty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magadha#Nanda_dynasty) <checked on 07 March 2014> or in Joseph Schwartzberg’s *Historical Atlas of South Asia*, page 18 (Plate III.B.4). The atlas is available online at <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/schwartzberg/> <checked on 07 March 2014>

<sup>222</sup> GODE, P. K. “Studies in the History of Indian Plants – Some Notes on the History of Canaka (Cicer Arientinum) – Between 500 BC and AD 1820” , ABORI. Vol. XXVII, pp. 56-82

Mauryan King overlord treacherously. All other literary evidence points to the fact that the Sungas were not 'of low birth'.

**Page 216, para 5:** *"He [Pushyamitra] is alleged to have performed a human sacrifice in the city of Kaushambi."*<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Flood, *Introduction*, 51

**Comment:** Flood's association of Pushyamitra with human sacrifice is based on an old excavation report of the site by G R Sharma. Subsequent excavations and re-examination of data have resulted in different interpretations. The Syenachiti Altar (associated with the Purushamedha) is dated to mid 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. CE and is therefore better attributed to a Sunga king after Pushyamitra.<sup>223</sup> All available literary references point to Pushyamitra performing only the Vajapeya, Rajasuya, Agnishtoma and Ashwamedha (two of them). Doniger has therefore relied on a secondary source which is itself now outdated.

**Page 218, para 3:** *"The Ramayana and the Mahabharata mark the transition from the corpus of texts known as shruti, the unalterable Vedic canon, to those known as smriti, the human tradition. They are religious texts, which end with the "fruits of hearing" them ("Any woman who hears this will bear strong sons," etc.)...."*

**Comment:** Doniger makes it appear that Smritis have fruits of hearing, the (phalashrutis) whereas the Shrutis do not have them. This is not completely true. The 19<sup>th</sup> book of Atharvaveda (Shaunakiya) ends with the verse 'stutaa mayaa varadaa vedamaataa....' which is clearly a phalashruti. The Shankahayana Aranyaka chapter XIV is a Phalashruti (followed by a Vamsha). Many of the Upanishads end with a Phalashruti (e.g. the Kaivalya Upanishad and many other stand-alone Upanishads that are not a part of Vedic Shakhas but are considered shruti). In fact, Doniger herself mentions in Chapter 6 that phalashrutis are there in the Brahmanas ('yo evam veda'). And not all Smritis end with a Phalashruti. For example, the Kalpasutras that are appended to the Shruti but are regarded as Smriti do not have any "fruits of hearing" verses.

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<sup>223</sup> Deo Prakash Sharma (2006), *Archaeology of Lower Ganga Yamuna Doab (1200 BCE to 1200 AD)*, Bharatiya Kala Prakashan: New Delhi. Volume I of the book has extensive discussion on the Syenachiti.

**Page 221, para 1:** “...Ravana stole Sita and kept her captive on the island of Lanka for many years.” Doniger mentions this in her summary of the Valmiki’s Ramayana (pp. 220-221)

**Comment:** Ravana held Sita captive for a little under one (1) year, not many years. In the 10<sup>th</sup> month, he came to threaten her that he will kill her if she does not agree to marry him within 2 months. Hanuman heard this conversation concealed from view (in the Sundarakanda). But before the two months were over, Rama invaded Lanka and freed her.

**Page 221, para 3:** “*The Ramayana, composed at a time when kingdoms like Videha were becoming powerful in a post-Mauryan era, legitimates monarchy through the version of the golden age of Ram-Raj, Rama’s rule.*”

**Comment:** Again, a laughable claim, not supported by the facts of history. Videha was not a monarchy in the post-Mauryan era, let alone being a kingdom that was ‘becoming powerful.’ In the Upanishadic times, Videha was a kingdom, but by the time of Buddha, it had become an oligarchy<sup>224</sup> and was eventually absorbed in the Vajji confederacy and then in Magadha.<sup>225</sup> Therefore, Doniger’s summary of the political situation is quite wrong and grossly anachronistic.

**Page 222, para 2:** “*Hindus in later periods often took the devotion to Rama expressed by Hanuman and Lakshmana as a paradigm for human devotion (bhakti) to a god. Yet in the Ramayana, these relationships lack the passionate, often violent qualities that characterize the fully developed bhakti of the Tamil texts and the Puranas from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century CE.*”

**Comment:** Again, a grossly inaccurate generalization. ‘Violent qualities’ characterize the devotion of Nayanars, but to extrapolate that to all the Shaivites or others (Vaishnavites) of the Tamil speaking regions of that era is quite a stretch. And it appears that Doniger disqualifies the devotion of Lakshmana and Hanuman as being ‘fully developed bhakti’ because they lacked the ‘passionate and often violent qualities’ as if these are both an absolute must for a bhakta to be a complete bhakta. The later

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<sup>224</sup> The book below however argues that Videha remained a kingdom, but it still maintains (contrary to Doniger’s claim) that in the post-Mauryan period, Videha was overcome by the western Licchivis of Vaishali.

Yogendra Mishra (1981), *History of Videha*, Janaki Prakashan (Patna)

<sup>225</sup> G P Singh (2003); *Republics, Kingdoms, Towns and Cities in Ancient India*, D K Printworld (New Delhi)

Bhakti scriptures in fact classify the practice of Bhakti into 9 or more types (and every Bhakta does not exhibit all these 9 forms of Bhakti), and that of Hanuman is said to be ‘daasya-bhakti’.

**Page 222, para 4:** “...they [both Rama and Krishna] are not only part-time gods but partial or fractional parts of Vishnu, who remains there, fully intact, always a god, while his avatars function on earth, always human.”

**Comment:** Doniger reflects an inaccurate understanding of Vaishnavism. Most Vaishnavites make a crucial distinction between Rama and Krishna. It is Rama who is an ‘amsha avatara’ (partial incarnation) whereas Krishna is termed as a ‘Poorna Avatara’ (complete avatara) of Vishnu. This is captured in the well-known adage, “*Krishnastu bhagavan swayam.*” Nevertheless, Vishnu still did not cease to exist in Vaikuntha when he incarnated as Rama and Krishna. His entire powers were manifested in Krishna and that is why Krishna is not a ‘partial’, or a ‘fractional’ part of Vishnu. Like most of her works, this book of Doniger too indicates that she has not completely understood the subjects that she writes on.

**Page 223, para 2:** “Not only did some of these strands [of the Hindu epics] come from Buddhism and Jainism, but the avatar was an answer to one of the challenges that these religions now posed for Hinduism.”

**Comment:** Again, this is mere speculation. The critical editions of neither the Ramayana nor the Mahabharata have any reference to the Buddha, Buddhists or their doctrines.<sup>226</sup> There is no hard evidence to link the doctrine of Avatara to the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. The roots of this doctrine probably lie in the pre-Jain/Buddhist Vedic texts.<sup>227</sup>

**Page 223, para 3:** “For by this time the Buddha and the Jina had successfully established the paradigm of a religious movement centered upon a human being. But Rama and Krishna beat the Buddhists and the Jainas at their own game of valorizing the human form as a locus of superhuman wisdom and power, for Rama and Krishna are humans with a directly line to divinity.....”

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<sup>226</sup> In this regard, see: Asim Kumar Chatterjee (2007), *A Historical Introduction to the Critical Edition of the Ramayana*, R N Bhattacharya (Kolkata), p. 2-3

<sup>227</sup> For example, see the Vedic references of the Vamana incarnation in the following paper: Ganga Sagar Rai, “Vamana Legend in the Vedas, Epics and Puranas”, pp. 102 – 140 in *Purana*, vol. 12, No. 1 (1970)

**Comment:** Again, a meaningless interpretation because the Mahabharata or the Ramayana do not refer to or mention the Buddha/Jina or their followers or practices. In fact, in the early Puranas, Buddha is accepted as an Avatara of Vishnu just like Rama and Krishna. This fact comes in the way of Doniger's theory. If anything, it was the triad of Rama, Krishna and Buddha that beat Jina at his game.

The early Puranas are dated to the end of the period during which the Mahabharata was given its final form. Therefore, if these epics were upstaging Buddhists and Jains, then why did the Puranas treat the Buddha as an Avatara given that Buddhists were still a threat?<sup>228</sup> To conclude, Doniger's speculation looks good only in theory (like Marxism or Freudian Psychoanalysis) but real facts do not support it.

**Page 223, para 4:** *"Being human, Rama is vulnerable. Despite his divine reserves, he is tripped up again and again by women – his stepmother Kaikeyi, Ravana's sister the ogress Shurpanakha, and ultimately, his wife, Sita."*

**Comment:** It is unclear how Rama was tripped by Devi Sita. Doniger does not give any compelling reason, and equates Sita (the virtuous woman) with the evil women Shurpanakha and Kaikeyi in the most casual way.

**Page 224, para 1:** *"For bringing about the sufferings that will overwhelm Kausalya, Sita curses not Kaikeyi but the hunchback [Mantharā]..."*

**Comment:** Doniger clearly manages to mangle the text of the Ramayana. Nowhere does Sita curse Mantharā and this is purely her own invention. In another publication,<sup>229</sup> Doniger clarifies that Sita cursed Mantharā when Ravana comes to kill her. This happens in the Sundara Kanda, in Ashoka Vatika and where he threatens to kill her, while Hanuman is watching them, hidden from their sight. However, when the relevant portion of the Sundara Kanda's critical edition was examined, I did not see any verse there as well wherein Sita cursed the hunchbacked maid. Even in the Yuddhakanda, when Ravana creates an illusion of Rama's severed head and shows it to Sita, she is overcome with grief but does not curse Mantharā. She only reviles Kaikeyi for ruining the family

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<sup>228</sup> For the description of Buddha in the Puranas, refer: Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, "Buddha as depicted in the Puranas", pp. 384 – 404 in *Purana* vol. 24, No. 2 (July 1982)

<sup>229</sup> Page 525 in "*On Hinduism*", OUP (2014).

and bringing great sorrow upon Kaushalya. It was also Kaikeyi's own biological son Bharata who curses his mother when he learns of her political machinations (Ramayana 2.67-68). In fact, Bharata says later that the only reason he did not kill her own mother or that Shatrughna should not kill Mantharā for her crime was because Rama would then forsake Bharata for killing their mother and Shatrughna for killing Mantharā [Ramayana 2.72.21-22].

**Page 224, para 4:** Quoting Sita's anguish at Rama asking her to prove her innocence after the war, Doniger paraphrases, "*You distrust the whole sex because of the way some women behave. If anyone touched my body, it was by force.*"

**Comment:** Quite typically, Doniger cherry picks just 2 verses [Ramayana 6.104.7-8] out of the entire beautiful address of Sita to Rama and chooses words carefully so as to give a vulgar caricature of the episode. Sita's address covers verses 5-16 of that chapter, and it shows the deep love that she had for Rama. Then, she asks Lakshmana herself to set a pyre to undergo the fire ordeal so that she can die rather than live bereft of the love and trust of her husband.

Let us give Goldman's translation of the verse cited by Doniger:

"You harbor suspicion against all women because of the conduct of the vulgar ones. If you really knew me, you would abandon your suspicion. If I came into contact with another's body against my will, lord, I had no choice in this matter. It is fate that was to blame here." [Ramayana 6.104.7-8]

It is interesting here that Doniger chooses to insert the word 'sex' in lieu of 'all women', or 'gender'. Her choice follows a certain penchant for preferring words like 'seduction', 'addiction', 'rape', 'violent sex', 'violence' etc. just like gossip-tabloids written by juveniles for juveniles. In fact, it is not out of context to quote a few more verses hereafter that show the beauty of Sita's character:

"My heart, which I do control, was always devoted to you. But I could not control my body, which was in the power of another. What could I have done? If, my love, you do not truly know me despite our long-nurtured love and intimacy, then surely I am lost forever." [Ramayana 6.104.9-10]



How beautifully, Sita here establishes mutual trust and love as the basis of a long lasting and successful marriage. But perhaps, Doniger does not understand these human emotions because her own marriage broke down and she abandoned her spouse (or he did it to her).<sup>230</sup> And that is why, she sees all human relationships only through one orifice – that of sex.

What follows later in the Ramayana is also a lesson for all of us. It is not that all women who are kidnapped must undergo Agni Pariksha. Rather, Agni Devata, in the presence of all the Devatas, appeals to Rama to accept Sita because she never turned her mind and heart away from Rama, even though she was forcibly carried off by Ravana. [Ramayana 6.106.4-9].

Far from degrading women, these words actually teach us that women who are violated physically against their will are pure because their minds have not strayed. But Doniger is perhaps one of those who believe that women should enjoy their rape if they are subjected to it forcibly!

**Page 225, paras 1-2:** After Sita emerges unscathed from Agni Pareeksha, Rama expresses his relief. Doniger quotes Rama as saying that he was worried that if he would have accepted Sita without the fire ordeal, people would have said, “*That Rama, Dasharatha’s son, is certainly lustful and childish.*” Then, Doniger remarks, “*Dasratha’s son is certainly lustful*” is a key phrase. Rama knows all too well what people said about Dasratha; when Lakshmana learns that Rama has been exiled, he says, “*The king is perverse, old, and addicted to sex, driven by lust (Ramayana 2.18.3).*”

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<sup>230</sup> In her autobiographical account [Wendy Doniger, “From the Great Neck to Swift Hall: Confessions of a Reluctant Historian of Religions”, pp. 36-57 in *The Craft of Religious Studies*, ed. by Jon R Stone, St. Martin Press, New York (1998)], she describes (page 44) how her husband dumped her although she had earlier made sacrifices for him –

*“In 1975 I gave up tenure in London and followed my husband to Berkeley.....Berkeley, like most Sanskrit departments at that time, divided the world into two groups: white men, who taught courses about Ideas and were tenured, and women of color, sometimes married to the white men in the first group and informally referred to as ‘pillow dictionaries’, who taught Languages and were untenured. As a white woman with Ideas, I was....dirt...*

*I went to Chicago, accepting an invitation that Joseph Kitagawa, Dean of the Divinity School, had been extending to me, on and off,.....So I went, kicking and screaming, simply because I was broke and my marriage, to a man who had dug his toes into the sands of California and refused to leave, was broken and I needed a job.”*

**Comment:** Rama refers to himself as ‘Dasharatha’s son’ hundreds of times in the Ramayana out of regard and love for his father. But Doniger would like us to believe that Rama uses this phrase with a sense of shame by cherry-picking and distorting 2 verses out the more than 20000 shlokas in the Ramayana!

Doniger’s perverse interpretations have been refuted by Aditi Banerjee in the following words:

[QUOTE] According to Doniger, the concept of a “sex-addict” is introduced into the *Valmiki Ramayana* by Lakshmana calling Dasaratha *kama-sakta*, which she defines as “hopelessly attached to lust.”

It is not clear where Doniger picks up the term ‘*kama-sakta*’—the term does not appear upon a search of the text of the *Valmiki Ramayana* as given in the Titus online database, which is based on the following version of the text: G.H. Bhatt e.a., *The Valmiki Ramayana*, (Baroda 1960-1975), prepared by Muneo Tokunaga, March 12, 1993 (adaptations by John D. Smith, Cambridge, 1995.)

Further, neither the term nor its variants appear in the most logical place where Lakshmana would have used the words to describe Dasaratha, the passage in Book 2 (*Ayodhya Kanda*) when Lakshmana disparages the character of Dasaratha for banishing Rama. The relevant phrases that Lakshmana uses here are the following: *nripah vipariitasheba* (king with perverted mind), *pradbarsbhitaH visbhayaiH* (who is outraged by sensual enjoyments) and *samanimadhaH* (who is possessed of passion). [5] None of these terms translates even remotely as “sex addict / addiction”. Addiction is something more than just being overcome by lust: addiction is a “compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance...characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal.” [6]

However, for the sake of argument, I will give the benefit of the doubt to Doniger and assume that the term *kama-sakta* has been used by Lakshmana to describe Dasaratha in the *Valmiki-Ramayana*. That in and of itself does not imply that Dasaratha was “hopelessly addicted to lust.” *Kama-sakta* simply means an attachment (*sakta*) to desire (*kama*). *Kama* does not itself necessarily refer to sexual desire, or even erotic or romantic desire. Dasaratha’s reluctance to allow Rama to serve as guard over Vishwamitra’s *yajna*, for example, or Lakshmana’s unwillingness to be parted from Rama, could equally be characterized as *kama-sakta*. To assume it to mean “attachment to lust” is another in a pattern of Doniger’s ex-cathedra translations in variance with traditional Sanskrit *nirukta* (etymology) for which she has been repudiated before.

It has been brought to my attention that, subsequent to the original interview, as published in print and on this website, Doniger’s

statements were corrected to carry the following version of Doniger's quote on October 20: "Lakshman is the one who actually says it. He says the king is hopelessly attached to sensual objects. But Rama himself says (at 2.47.8) that the king is kama-atma, entirely consumed by kama." The deletion of the term *kama-sakta* and the addition of the new reference is not explained, other than as a "typo".

To offer Doniger leeway that she almost never offers her critics, I will accept the "corrected" statement—but her argument still fails. The relevant reference—found in *Sarga* 53 of the Gita Press, Gorakhpur version and in *Sarga* 47 of the Titus database version (mentioned above)—is part of a scene where Rama reminisces about his father to Lakshmana during the first night of his banishment from Ayodhya. Here is the exact reference:

*anaathaH caiva vRiddhaH ca mayaa caiva vinaakRitaH |*  
*kim kariSyati kaama aatmaa kaikeyyaa vasham aagataH ||*  
 vRiddhascha (aged); anaathascha ((and therefore)  
 helpless); mayaarinaacha (deprived of my presence);  
 kim karishhyati (what will he do); kRitaH (dominated as  
 he is); kaamaatmaa (by his passion (for Kaikeyi));  
 aagataH (and who has fallen); kaikeyivasham (into  
 clutches of Kaikeyi).

"Aged and (therefore) helpless, deprived of my  
 presence, what will he do, dominated as he is by his  
 passion for Kaikeyi and who has fallen into the  
 clutches of Kaikeyi."

As with the phrases described above (uttered by Lakshmana in anger), *Kama-atma* does not necessarily mean "entirely consumed by kama." For example, the illustrious commentary on the *Ramayana* by Sivasahaya, *Raamayana Siromani*, gives the following example of using the term *kama-atma* in a non-sexual context: *kaama - abhishEka vishayiNi ichchhaa* (desiring the matter of crowning) *aathmaa - aathmani manasyEva yasya sab* (one who had this in mind)—i.e., "the king who desired in his mind the crowning [of Rama]." [7]

Falling prey to love (Rama's description) or being overcome by lust (Lakshmana's description) does not make one a sex addict; if it did, then any of us could be accused of the same! Sex was explicitly discussed and celebrated in ancient Indian / Hindu texts, as an accepted integral part of life—discussions of being overcome by desire, therefore, do not automatically translate into one being characterized or condemned as a sex-addict. These epithets were uttered in anger and anguish by Dasaratha's sons at the time of their separation from their family and kingdom—the epithets are indicative of their pain and anger and are not meant to be psychoanalytical judgments of Dasaratha's character, particularly in a socio-cultural context where intense sexual enjoyment was not viewed as a vice—c.f., the accounts of Karadama *rishi* and Devahuti in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Yayati and Sarmishta in the *Mahabharata*, and Kacha and Devyani in the *Mahabharata*, where long periods of

intense sexual union were described without any condemnation or sense of shame.

[5] *Srimad Valmiki-Ramayana* Book 2, Canto 21, Verse 3.

[6] See the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/addiction>.

[7] See Sivasahaya, *Ramayana Siromani*, Parimal Publications, New Delhi, Volume 2, p. 722.

[UNQUOTE]

**Page 225, para 2:** Thereafter, Doniger alleges that Rama's description of his father was no more charitable. Narrating a conversation that Rama had with Lakshmana after they had left Ayodhya, Doniger says, "*Rama says as much himself. The king has lost his mind. I think sex (kama) is much more potent than either artha or dharma. For what man, even an idiot like father, would give up a good son like me for the sake of a pretty woman? (Ramayana 2.47.8-10).*"

**Comment:** Doniger once again paraphrases the Ramayana verses to create a sensational gossip by claiming that Rama called his father an idiot who had lost his mind. Let us quote the exact translation of the verses, wherein Rama says that even a fool (let alone his father) would not give up a good son:

Rama said to Lakshmana: "And being old and defenseless and parted from me what will he [Dasharatha] do? Such is his desire for Kaikeyi that he is completely in her power. Reflecting on this calamity and how the king so utterly changed his mind, I have come to the conclusion that the urgings of desire far outweigh both statecraft and righteousness. For what man, even a fool, would forsake his own son – a son who ever bowed to his will – on account of a woman, as father forsook me, Lakshmana?" [Ramayana 2.47.8-10].

Rama then continues the dialogue and its purpose becomes clear when he asks Lakshmana to return to Ayodhya. In other words, Rama's intention of speaking these words was his love and concern for his brother as well as his mother Kaushalya that he wanted to convince Lakshmana to return to Ayodhya [Ramayana 2.47.17-25].

**Page 225, para 2:** Commenting on Rama's motivation behind banishing Sita after a citizen of Ayodhya casts aspersion on her character, Doniger remarks, "*Rama thinks that sex is putting him in political danger (keeping his allegedly unchaste wife will make the people revolt), but in fact he has it backward: Politics is driving Rama to make a sexual and religious mistake; public concerns make him banish the wife he loves.*"

**Comment:** It is Doniger's own fantasy (and a circular argument) that Rama is scared of being termed as a sex addict by people. In fact, Rama's reason for banishing Sita was solely his pursuit of Rājadharmā – the duty of a King who puts the trust of his subjects over and above the love for his own family.

But Doniger first weaves a yarn about how Rama believes that his father is hypersexual, and then imagines that Rama too is scared of becoming hypersexual. The entire chapter is replete with these types of sleazy, sensational, gossip tabloid level interpretations.

Interestingly, while Doniger accuses Rama of being scared of his own sexuality (again, her own imagination), everyone around him actually thinks that Rama will never commit adultery. Sita says herself that he will never lust after anyone's wife [Ramayana 3.8.4] and so does even Kaikeyi [Ramayana 2.66.40]. Of course, Doniger does not mention all these facts. And this kind of questionable and sleazy gossip is considered scholarship in Hinduism/South Asian/Indological scholarship these days.

**Page 225, para 2:** *“Significantly, the moment when Rama kicks Sita out for a second time comes directly after a long passage when Rama makes love to Sita passionately, drinking wine with her, for many days on end; the banishment comes as a direct reaction against sensual indulgence (Ramayana 7.41).”*

**Comment:** First, note that this event is from Kanda VII of Ramayana that is regarded as an interpolation by scholars.

Doniger seems to imply that Rama's banishment of Sita was due to his fear that like his father, he too was becoming a slave of passion. To argue her point, she says that Rama banished Sita directly after he made love to her.

What is truth of the matter? First, even if two events occur in succession to each other does not imply a cause and effect relationship, as Doniger expresses in her shoddy and gossipy scholarship. I will reproduce Aditi Banerjee's criticism here:

[QUOTE]: Note the internal contradiction in Doniger's position—her characterization of Rama hinges on a passage found in Book 7 (*Uttara Kanda*), and she has elsewhere in the interview dismissed that same Book 7 as a later interpolation!

In any event, the passage describing Rama and Sita's "indulgence" is from *Sarga* 42 of Book 7 (*Uttara Kanda*), where Rama and Sita are enjoying their reunion after Sita's abduction. As described therein, during this period of two winters (*i.e.*, two years, although in some versions, an additional half-*shloka* is included providing that this interlude lasted 10,000 years), Rama and Sita would spend the second half of every day together in Rama's Ashoka-grove, enjoying heavenly music and dance and partaking of gourmet food and intoxicating drinks. Rama and Sita are compared to other divine couples:

Taking in his hand the pure nectar of flowers as intoxicating as the Maireyaka wine, Sri Rama ... made Sri Sita drink it, just as Indra does Sachi ... Seated in the company of the celebrated Sita, [Rama] shone with splendour like Vasishta seated along with Arundhati. Sri Rama, steeped in joy like gods, afforded delight thus day after day to ... Sita, who resembled a divine damsel. [8]

Doniger conveniently leaves out the fact that it is in this chapter that Rama discovers that Sita is pregnant. Delighted at this revelation, Rama asks her to tell him which desire of hers he should fulfil. This is Sita's response: "O Raghava! I wish to visit the holy penance-groves and to stay, O Lord!, at the feet of sages ... living on the banks of the Ganga ... This is my greatest wish that I should stay even for one night in the penance-grove of those who live only on fruits and (edible) roots." [9] Rama readily acquiesces to this wish, promising that she will be taken for a visit there the very next day.

Doniger claims that "in the very next chapter [Rama] says [to Sita] I've got to throw you out." This is another totally false statement by Doniger. It is in *Sarga* 45 (after two intervening *sargas* / chapters, wherein Rama learns of the negative gossip surrounding Sita and thus decides to banish her) that Rama orders Lakshmana to take Sita to the forest and leave her there. This is just one more instance of Doniger's casual disregard of the facts, unbecoming of a distinguished professor with a named chair at the University of Chicago.

Of course, it is the two *sargas* / chapters that Doniger skips over in her "alternative" narrative that provide the reason for Rama banishing Sita: Rama is informed that he is being rebuked by the people of Ayodhya as follows: "Why does not Sri Rama censure [Sita], who formerly had been forcibly carried away by Ravana? ... Such conduct of our wives shall have to be suffered by us also, since whatever a king does, the subjects follow." [10] The pernicious rumours are about Sita's chastity / purity, not about Rama's excessive lust.

When this gossip is confirmed by others, Rama summons his brothers to him, and informs them of his decision to leave Sita, providing the following explanation for his decision: "As long as the word of infamy circulates, so long one does fall in the lower regions (hell). Infamy is censured even by the gods and fame gains credence

in the world." [11] It is the fear of losing his good name (as the result of the infamy surrounding Sita's chastity by the gossip-mongers of Ayodhya) that impels Rama, not fear of being chastised as a sex-addict.

Nowhere is it mentioned that Rama feared he might fall victim to the "vice" of sex and that he therefore abandoned Sita – this again appears to be an example of the kind offanciful creation for which Doniger and many of her students, now academicians at leading American universities, have become well-known. *There is no connotation of illicit or excessive indulgence in the description of Rama and Sita's blissful interlude together in Sarga 42—to the contrary, Rama and Sita are depicted as a divine couple with the dignity and radiance of Indra and Sachi, Vasishta and Arundhati.* Rama is full of tenderness for Sita upon discovering her pregnancy. It clearly breaks his heart to send Sita away—after giving Lakshmana the command, "[Rama] the noble one with His eyes closed, taking leave of His brothers, entered His own apartment, with his heart agitated by sorrow, deeply sighed as an elephant." [12]

In Doniger's own words, she is **"taking pieces of the Ramayana and putting them together"** to come up with this far-fetched explanation. But, one cannot play connect-the-dots with various scenes from a vast text such as the *Valmiki Ramayana*, stripping out the proper sequence and removing the contextual background of the critical passages, and then call it a valid textual interpretation.

Even if Doniger is reading into the text certain psychological motivations she wants to attribute to the characters, her characterization appears to be illogical—if Rama sent Sita away simply because he didn't want to become / be characterized as a sex addict, why did he not make arrangements to claim his future heir(s), whom he knew Sita carried in her womb?

[8] See *Srimad Valmiki-Ramayana (With Sanskrit Text and English Translation)*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur (Sixth Edition 2001), Book 7, Canto 42, Verse 19 and 24, (Volume 2, p. 819).

[9] *Ibid*, Verses 33-34, (Volume 2, p. 820).

[10] *Id.*, Canto 43, (Volume 2, p. 821).

[11] *Id.*, Canto 45, Verse 13 (Volume 2, p. 825).

[12] *Id.* Canto 45, Verse 24-25 (Volume 2, p. 825). [UNQUOTE]

**Page 227, para 1:** Describing the scene when Luv and Kusha come to Ayodhya, and their appearance is identical to that of their father Rama, Doniger says, "Yet Rama pointedly recognizes them\* as "Sita's sons" but not necessarily his own (Ramayana 7.86.2). This is an essential episode, for male identity and female fidelity are the defining desiderata for each human gender in these texts; no one is interested in female identity or male fidelity....."

\*Did Rama know that Sita was pregnant when he banished her? He seems to allude to her pregnancy in one verse (7.41.22), but as there is no further reference

to what would surely have been a very important event, and since some manuscripts omit this verse, it seems unlikely that Rama did know.

**Comment:** Doniger distorts the verse of the text to force-fit her own interpretation. The verse 7.86.2 reads: “When the recital (of Rama’s story) was going on and Rama learned that Kusha and Lava were Sita’s sons, he made an address in that regard in the midst of the assembly.” So it is not Rama who ‘recognizes them’ as Sita’s sons, rather he is told that they are Sita’s sons.

And Doniger distorts the evidence of the apparatus of the critical edition (to prove that he might have been unaware of Sita’s pregnancy when he sent her to the forest) which shows that out of the dozens of manuscripts used, only 1 omits verse 7.41.22 and another uses the word ‘apoorva’ in lieu of ‘apatya (child).’ Considering that a third of verses of each recension of the Ramayana are unique, this verse has rightly been included in the critically constituted text by the editors because of the overwhelming manuscript evidence in its favor. If we start using Doniger’s ideologically motivated loose methodology, then anything can be proved from critically constituted texts.

Moreover, as Aditi Banerjee describes above, Sita’s request to visit the hermitages of ascetics is very consistent with the couple’s knowledge that they will become parents soon. In the Hindu culture, these acts of Dharma are believed to have a beneficial effect on the fetus. Doniger exhibits her ethnocentrism in not understanding that it is very common in the Indian culture to refer to children by their mother’s name even when their father is well known because a mother is considered more exalted in the Hindu tradition relative to the father.

There was no restriction in the ancient Hindu society that sons must always be named after their father. Numerous heroes of Hindu tradition are frequently addressed as sons of their mother. For instance, Arjuna, the greatest warrior of the Hindu Epic of Mahabharata, is often addressed as ‘Kaunteya’ (son of Queen Kunti) in the text. Lord Krishna is likewise addressed as ‘Devakiputra’ (son of mother Devaki) in the Chhandogya Upanishad and elsewhere. The Aitareya Upanishad, one of the 10 major Upanishads (texts of Hindu spirituality), is named after Sage Aitareya Mahidasa, whose name derives from his mother Itarā. Likewise, the greatest Sanskrit grammarian Panini is also called Daakshiputra, or the son of Daakshi. The name of his father is unknown. Even though a Prince inherits his kingdom from his father, the name of his mother is mentioned before his father’s during the Hindu coronation ceremony.



**Page 228, para 3:** *“When Rama tries to prevent her from coming to the forest with him, she says: ‘What could my father have had in mind when he married me to you. Rama, a woman in the body of a man? What are you afraid of? Don’t you believe that I am faithful to you? If you take me with you, I wouldn’t dream of any man but you – I’m not like some women who do that sort of thing. But you’re like a procurer, Rama, handing me to other people, though I came to you as a virgin and have been faithful to you all this long time.’ Rama then insists that he had said she couldn’t come with him only in order to test her (2.27.3-8, 26). Yeah, sure; she will hear that ‘testing’ line again.”*

**Comment:** It is really sad that Doniger ignores the fairly long and multifaceted speech that Sita gives to Rama to convince him that he should take her also along with him to the forest, and chooses just these verses. The beautiful qualities of character that Sita come out eloquently in these chapters wherein she addresses Rama, but all that Doniger could quote was that Sita accused Rama of being a woman in a man’s body! And moreover, Doniger’s claim that Rama said that *“he had said she couldn’t come with him only in order to test her (2.27.3-8, 26)”* is a blatant lie because the text does not say so at all. Let me give the translation of the relevant verses:

Rama said to Sita: “If its price were your sorrow, my lady, I would refuse heaven itself. No, I am not afraid of anything, any more than is the Self-existent Brahma. But without knowing your true feelings, my lovely, I could not consent to your living in the wilderness, though I am perfectly capable of protecting you. Since you are determined to live with me in the forest, Maithili, I could no sooner abandon you than a self-respecting man his reputation.” [Ramayana 2.27.25-27].

The entire section when read, hardly sounds like a ‘test’ as Doniger puts it.

**Page 228, para 4:** *“In an impassioned discourse against violence and that simply carrying weapons will put wicked thoughts in his mind (3.8.1-29). ..... Even the ogress Shurpanakha echoes Sita’s concerns by querying Rama’s apparent commitment to the conflicting dharmas of asceticism and married life [3.16.11]).*

**Comment:** Doniger, in highlighting the ‘impassioned discourse’ forgets that the very first verse of this chapter says that Sita spoke to Rama in ‘an affectionate tone of voice’ [Ramayana 3.8.1]. But, she makes it appear that Sita’s discourse to Rama was more of the nature of an admonition.

The next chapter in the Ramayana has Rama's response wherein he says that in the Dandaka forest, the ascetics, who are the refuge of the society, have themselves taken refuge in him (Rama) as they are being troubled and terrorized by the Rakshasas. Due to this, he (Rama) has taken a vow to free them of their torment. Far from Doniger's insinuations, Rama actually appreciates Sita's advice because he concludes his response with these beautiful words to her, "Still, I am deeply gratified by what you have said, Sita, in your affection for me and your goodness of heart. No woman offers guidance to a man she does not love. It was worthy of you, my lovely wife, and becoming to one of your House." [Ramayana 3.10.20]. How many women would not want to be addressed lovingly like this by their husbands? What is a dialogue full of love, respect, and understanding, is converted by Doniger into an impassioned appeal by Sita to Rama to present a strained interpretation that Rama was addicted to violence and hunting.

And then, Doniger seems to equate the loving counsel of Sita, with the lust-laden and devious words of Shurpanakha who wants to seduce Rama and have him dump Sita. Is this how one should read the poetry of Valmiki?

It is again worthwhile to reproduce the reply that Rama gave to Shurpanakha, "I was compelled to come to live in the forest by command of my mother and my father, the lord of men, and I wanted to do what is right, for doing right has always been my chief concern." [Ramayana 3.17.15]

**Page 230, para 2:** Doniger accuses Sita also being violent!

She says, "*At the end of Ramayana, when Sita keeps disappearing and reappearing in a series of epiphanies, she is scorned and insulted until she commits two acts of violence that prove both her purity and her divinity.*"

**Comment:** And what exactly are Sita's two acts of 'violence'? According to Doniger, these are that she '*walks out on Rama*' (page 230, para 4) and leaves him alone their twin boys to console him (page 230, para 2). If Sita disappearing into the earth and Rama being left alone with his children are termed as Sita's 'acts of violence', then Doniger's tirades against the Hindus in her book can be justifiably called 'terrorism against the Hindus', and her sexualization of innocuous scenes involving Hindu women can be termed as her "rape of Hindu women." To my mind, Doniger is indulging in gossip-tabloid language.

**Page 230, para 3:** After accusing Sita of being ‘violent’ towards Rama, Doniger now accuses Rama of being abusive towards other women even before his incarnation! Doniger says, “....*Long ago in a battle of gods against antigods, the wife of the sage Bhrigu kept reviving the antigods as fast as the gods could kill them; Vishnu killed her, and Bhrigu cursed Vishnu, saying, “Because you killed a woman, you will be born in the world of men and live separated from your wife for many years (7.51).” So Rama has a previous conviction of abusing women even before he is born on earth.*”

**Comment:** Firstly, this episode is also from the later Uttarakanda of Ramayana. Second, how is Rama abusive towards women when all he did was to have killed a lady who was protecting the enemy in a war?

If the United States goes to war against the Palestinians and Wendy Doniger behaves like the Jihad Jane<sup>231</sup> and is caught laundering money overseas to enable the Palestinians to buy weapons for use against the US, she can surely be tried for treason and be given capital punishment. That will not make the United States ‘an abuser’ of women.

**Page 231, para 2:** Doniger quotes Sita’s argument to Ravana as to why she cannot marry him, “‘*A mortal woman cannot become the wife of an ogre (5.22.3, 5.23.3)*’” (a remark that could be read as a warning against inter-caste marriage).”

**Comment:** Doniger’s interpretation of Sita’s comment as a warning against inter-caste marriage is laughable, given the fact that Ravana was descended from a Brahmana! The verse should therefore be read for what it is and not subjected to an over-interpretation. In fact, inter-caste marriages are mentioned in the Ramayana. For instance, Sage Rishyashringa (a Brahmana) married Shanta, the daughter of King Chitraratha.

**Page 231, para 3:** “....*Rama insists (when he claims that he knew all along that Sita was chaste and that he made her go through the fire only to prove it to everyone else), “Ravana could not even think of raping Sita, for she was protected by her own energy (6.106.15-16).” Yet, that very verb meaning “to rape, violate, or assault,” is used when Ravana grabs Sita by the hair (3.50.9), a violation from which her chastity does not in fact protect her.*”

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<sup>231</sup> See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/06/jihad-jane-sentenced-10-years\\_n\\_4549438.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/06/jihad-jane-sentenced-10-years_n_4549438.html)<checked on 10th March 2014>

**Comment:** First, it was not Rama who made her undergo the fire ordeal. It is she herself who asked Lakshmana to set alight the stack of burning logs because she was so distraught that she wanted to immolate herself [Ramayana 6.104.18-19].

And, so what if the same verb is used in two different contexts? The fact is that every word has a semantic range and the exact meaning is determined by the context. The meaning ‘assault’ is more appropriate in the verse 3.50.9 (as Goldman too translates), whereas ‘violated’ is more appropriate in verse 6.106.16. And this is clear from the description in verses 3.50.8 where Ravana seizes her by hair, and verse 3.50.12 describes how he forcibly lifted her and flew into the air with his chariot.

I fail to understand the point that Doniger is trying to make. Surely, Rama knows that Sita was kidnapped forcibly. Therefore, when he uses the same verb here, it could not have meant ‘assaulted’ (because that is a given or a known fact), and must have meant only ‘violated’ or ‘broken mentally into accepting Ravana as her husband’.

Interestingly, in an interview, Doniger alleged that Ravana was projected as a lustful guy only later. Let us reproduce her distortion and Aditi Banerjee’s refutation of the same to expose Doniger’s penchant for sensationalism:

[QUOTE]According to Doniger:

Things were added on in Ramayana’s first and seventh book later on. For instance, in the seventh book we have a story long before the story of Rama and Sita about how Ravana raped one of the great apsaras, Rambha ... [Her husband] curses Ravana that if he ever touches a woman against her will, his head will shatter into a thousand pieces. So that story is then told in the Ramayana to explain why Ravana didn’t force himself on Sita despite keeping her in his house all those years. In the earlier Ramayana, there’s nothing about this ... This is a later idea that creeps in.”

It is incorrect for Doniger to say that the curse upon Ravana was a “later idea that [crept in]” to explain Ravana’s unwillingness to rape Sita. The relevant incident is found in Book 6 (*Yuddha Kanda*), almost universally recognized as part of the original *Valmiki Ramayana*. (It is the first part of Book 1 (*Bala Kanda*) and all of Book 7 (*Uttara Kanda*) that are, debatably, later interpolations.)

The account is given by Ravana in *Sarga* (Canto) 13 of Book 6 (*Yuddha Kanda*):

Once I beheld (a celestial nymph) Punjikasthala (by name) ... She was stripped of her garment and ravished by me. She then reached the abode of Brahma ... Highly enraged, the creator forthwith addressed the following words to me: “If you (happen to) violate any other woman

hence forward, your head will be forthwith split into a hundred pieces; there is no doubt about it.” Hence, afraid (as I am) of his curse, I do not violently put Sita, a princess of the Videha territory, on my charming bed by force. [3]

There is an account of Ravana’s rape of Rambha in Book 7 (*Uttara Kanda*)—but it is the incident recounted in Book 6 (accepted as part of the original *Valmiki Ramayana*) that is explicitly offered as the reason why Ravana did not rape Sita. The effect of the rape of Rambha is more generic: “[Ravana] felt inclined no more to copulate with women who were unwilling to approach him.” [4]

This is not mere nitpicking—the citation of the rape of Punjikasthala in Book 6 **discredits Doniger’s contention** that the curse on Ravana was a later interpolation interjected to conveniently explain why Ravana never raped Sita.

[3] See *Srimad Valmiki-Ramayana (With Sanskrit Text and English Translation)*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur (Sixth Edition 2001), Book Six, Canto 13, verses 4-15, (Volume 2, pp. 266-267).

[4] *Srimad Valmiki-Ramayana (With Sanskrit Text and English Translation)*, Gita Press, Gorakhpur (Sixth Edition 2001), Book 7, Canto 26, Verse 58 (Volume 2, p. 769). [UNQUOTE]

Hopefully that makes it clear the intent of Rama’s statement to Doniger and her academic progeny.

**Page 232, para 1:** Elaborating further on Sita’s ‘vulnerability’, Doniger says—“*So while Rama ultimately yields to the addiction of hunting, following the deer farther and farther than he knows he should, Sita falls for two illusions (the deer and the ascetic) that make her vulnerable to Ravana and, for many years, lost to Rama.*”

**Comment:** Doniger makes these comments to ‘prove’ that Rama and Sita were not perfect or invulnerable but were ordinary humans like us. This means, that Hindus should not worship them as divine. First, let us set the record straight. Rama was not addicted to hunting – this is just a fantasy of Doniger, born of her hatred for Rama.

Perhaps, Doniger has failed to understand the entire concept of Avatara. Really speaking, Bhagavan has no need to take an Avatara to banish evil because He/She is all pervading. Rather, to quote Swami Bhaskarananda, the Avatara’s purpose is as follows –

“God incarnates on earth to fulfill two purposes: (1) to inspire and (2) to liberate. He inspires mankind through example. He willingly takes upon Himself human limitations. Then through intense spiritual practice He goes beyond them and manifests His spiritual perfection. It should be understood here that as He is perfect from His very birth, the Divine Incarnation does

not really need any spiritual practice to attain perfection. Nevertheless, to inspire others He goes through various spiritual disciplines and thereby manifests His perfection to set an example for mankind. Just as a hen, which itself is not hungry, may pick at and gobble up birdseed to teach its young ones how to eat, so also a Divine Incarnation, for the sake of mankind, goes through various spiritual austerities to teach them how to attain perfection through spiritual practice.”<sup>232</sup>

So even if Rama and Sita showed vulnerabilities, their lives teach us how they coped with them, thereby setting an example for all human beings. And herein lies their greatness, and their divine nature. Unfortunately, all that Doniger learns from the Ramayana is dangerous sex, rape, violence, addiction, seduction etc. That is her choice, but we too have the choice of calling her a pervert.

**Page 232, para 2:** Doniger continues to sexualize the Sita, and refers to her as “*passionate, sexual Sita*.” (p. 232). Then, she alleges that Valmiki Ramayana suppressed this true Sita, and depicted her only as a subservient wife. Presto, Doniger’s conclusion is, “*The Valmiki Ramayana thus sowed the seeds both for the oppression of women in the dharma-shastric tradition and for the resistance against that oppression in other Hindu traditions.*” The ‘other traditions’ referred to by Doniger are “*other Sanskrit texts as well as many vernacular versions of the Ramayana.*” (ibid).

**Comment:** Doniger fails to establish a cause and effect relationship between Valmiki’s work and the two disparate traditions of Hinduism. She is completely wrong in alleging that the dharmashastric tradition uniformly oppresses women, and that the other traditions promote women’s resistance. In fact, the Dharmashastras often have beautiful verses on the rights of women, while the folk traditions often stereotype women.<sup>233</sup> It should be asked if those Hindus who oppress women derive their inspiration from the Dharmashastras, when they have never even heard about them, much less read them. In other words, Doniger’s claim is naïve from a historiographical perspective.

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<sup>232</sup> Swami Bhaskarananda, 2002. *Essentials of Hinduism*. Viveka Press: Seattle (US); pp. 77-78

<sup>233</sup> The following work gives a comprehensive, non-political overview of the matter (unlike the politically motivated views of Marxists like Romila Thapar, Mandakranta Bose or of Hindu haters like Stephanie Jamison): Chandrakala Padia (ed.), 2009, *Women in Dharmasastras*, Rawat Publications: Jaipur

**Page 233, para 2-3:** After defaming and demeaning Rama and Sita violently, Doniger takes aim at Lakshmana. She goes on –

*“Lakshmana cuts off the nose and breasts and ears of Ayomukhi (“Iron Mouth”) after she suggests to him, “Let us make love (3.65.7),” and he cuts off the nose and ears of Shurpanakha when she similarly propositions Rama (3.16-17).”*

However, in just the very next paragraph, Doniger describes a different moment at which Lakshmana mutilates Shurpanakha, meanwhile also taking a violent aim at Rama, *“When she [Shurpanakha] attempts to seduce Rama, he teases her cruelly: “I am already married and couldn’t stand the rivalry between co-wives. But Lakshmana is chaste, full of vigor, and has not yet experienced the joys of a wife’s company; he needs a consort. You can enjoy him and you won’t have any rival (3.17.1-5).” That’s when Lakshmana cuts off her nose.”\**

*\*Rama’s mistreatment of Shurpanakha looks even worse if we compare it with the reception that in the Mahabharata (3.13), Bhima (with the support of his family) gives to the ogress Hidimbi when she declares her love for him; He marries her, and she bears him a son.*

**Comment:** Doniger first claims that Lakshmana attacked Shurpanakha when she propositioned to Rama, and then claims that he attacked her when Rama advised Shurpanakha to marry Lakshmana! How can both be true at the same time? Likewise, Doniger’s reference to Ayomukhi is also wrong –it is just another instance of the 100s of typos in the book.

What does the Ramayana actually say? As anyone in India who has a faint familiarity with the Ramayana knows, both of Doniger’s alternatives are false or misrepresentations. Lakshmana attacked and mutilated Shurpanakha when she plunged at Sita to kill her and get rid of her so that Rama can no longer say that he is married, as a reason for refusing Shurpanakha’s sexual advances. In her hatred for Rama, Doniger leaves out the vital detail that Shurpanakha was mutilated when she plunged to kill Sita.

Let us quote the relevant verses:

*“[Shurpanakha said:] “It is on account of this misshapen slut, this hideous wife with her pinched waist, that you [Rama] care so little for me. I am going to devour this human female at once, before your very eyes, free of any rival, I shall live happily with you.” And with this, she flew into a rage, and with eyes flashing like firebrands she shot toward the fawn-eyed princess [Sita], like a giant meteor toward the star Rohini.” [Ramayana 3.17.15-17]*

This is when Rama shielded Sita, restrained Shurpanakha and asked Lakshmana to mutilate her.

So quite clearly, Doniger believes that Rama would have been just to Shurpanakha only if he had responded favorably to her booty call. Doniger is perhaps upset at Rama for having turned down Shurpanakha because that has deprived her of an opportunity to go into another frenzy of gossip-tabloid Indology; and because Rama refused to take Doniger's bait so as to be accused of being an unfaithful polygamist. Rama is damned if he does it, and damned if he does not do it!

And Doniger distorts the Ramayana, which does not describe the episode the way Doniger depicts. Ramadoes not say that he couldn't withstand the rivalry of cowives. What he says is, "I am already married, my lady, and I love my wife. And for women such as you, to have a rival wife is a source of bitter sorrow." [Ramayana 3.17.2]

And Doniger has clearly revealed her own penchant for free sex by praising Bheema (who married Hidimbi) and comparing him favorably to Rama, who is held as an exemplar of fidelity to one wife by the Hindus. She leaves out crucial details of the differences between the two situations, in her pervert zeal to indulge in Freudian free-association. The five Pandava brothers (including Bhima) had shared a single wife, whereas Rama had a wife to himself. Hidimbi's brother had sent her to spy on the Pandavas and assist in killing them. In the ensuing fight, he is the one who gets killed. Hidimbi is in love with Bheema and aids him in killing her own brother. She does not attack the Pandavas' wife Draupadi whereas Shurpanakha tries to kill Sita and also refuses to marry Lakshmana who was available.

**Page 234, para 3:** Moving along, Doniger now insinuates that Rama was a sinner. She says –

*"Years later, after Rama has banished Sita, he resolves to perform a ceremony of royal consecration, but Lakshmana tactfully persuades him to perform instead, a horse sacrifice, "which removes all sins and is an infallible means of purification (7.84.2-3)." To persuade him Lakshmana tells him stories of two people who were restored by a horse sacrifice: Indra was purged of Brahminicide after killing a Brahmin antigod, and a king who had been cursed to become a woman regained his manhood. Thus Rama performs the ceremony to expiate his sins, which are never mentioned, but which surely include his killing of Ravana.....and the banishing of Sita, a sin against a woman that*



*corresponds, roughly, to the error of the king who became a woman.” [Emphasis added].*

**Comment:** Again, Doniger completely distorts the account of the Uttarakanda of Ramayana, because she wants to give a ‘conspiracy theory’ twist to the episode.

Rama has a discussion with Bharata and Lakshmana (Ramayana 7.83) and proposes that he performs the Rājasūya Yajna. However, Bharata advises against it and says that the performance of this Yajna angers all the kings and will lead to bloodshed. Rama agrees to Bharata and drops the idea of performing the Rājasūya because he does not want to cause hurt to anyone.

Thereafter, Lakshmana proposes that Rama should perform Ashwamedha Yajna which removes all sins. Then he narrates the story of Brahminicide by Indra and how Indra was purged of it by performing an Ashwamedha. The reason for the narration of this story is not necessarily to remind Rama of the killing of Ravana, but the fact that the killing of a Brahmin is considered the highest evil and Ashwamedha is said to purge the doer of even that evil deed.

Thereafter, Doniger is wrong in claiming that Lakshmana narrates the story of a king who loses his manhood, and weaves/insinuates a fantasy that Lakshmana wants to remind Rama that having banished Sita, Rama too has lost his manhood. The claim is fake and the interpretation is nonsense, because this story is not narrated by Lakshmana to Rama, but by Rama to Bharata and Lakshmana! [see Ramayana 7.87]. It appears that Wendy Doniger will stop at nothing to distort the Ramayana and indulge in sexual fantasies.

**Page 235, fn:** *“Only after the horse sacrifice are we told of subsequent sacrifices, “He did not choose any wife other than Sita, for a golden image of Janaka’s daughter appeared in every sacrifice, fulfilling the purpose of a wife (7.89.4).”*

Doniger’s insinuation is that Sita was missed in this Yajna only because she was needed to lie next to the dead horse for a night whereas she might not have been needed for the other Yajnas (page 236, para 1). By implication, since the other Yajnas did not require Sita to lie with a dead horse, she was dispensable.

**Comment:** Now this is another of her perverse and sensational interpretation in line with others in the shoddily written book. A simpler

and straightforward explanation is that the Uttarkanda (again, note that she uses the interpolated book of Ramayana) does not mention Rama having performed any Yajna earlier! So obviously, the absence of Sita will be felt the first time during the horse sacrifice. Once again, Doniger indulges in sensationalizing a straightforward narrative and converts a molehill into a mountain.

**Page 236, para 1:** After describing the dilemma of Hanuman as to which language he should address Sita in, when he saw her in Lanka, Doniger says, “*He finally does address her in Sanskrit.....and she is suitably impressed. She does not scream...*”

**Comment:** Throughout the book, Doniger has repeated the claim that in ancient India, women spoke in Prakrits or in vernaculars but not in Sanskrit. While that might have been true after Sanskrit ceased to be a spoken language, this one instance proves that in the remote past, women did understand and speak this language. So it is quite strange that Doniger does not point this out.

**Page 236 para 3; Page 237, para 2:** “*Rama....murders Valin by shooting him in the back.*”  
“*...if...Rama kills Valin, why does he shoot him in the back?*”

**Comment:** Rama shot him hidden from his view, but **he did not shoot him in the back but at his chest.** Here is what the verse reads: “**Then Raghava placed on his bow a shaft like a poisonous snake loosed the great arrow at Valin’s chest. Violently struck, Valin fell to the ground.**” [Ramayana 4.16.25-26]

It might be noted that in the Hindu tradition, death at the hands of the Divine leads to Moksha. And the Ramayana says so clearly with regard to Valin: “**For that missile, shot from Rama’s bow, had opened the path to heaven for that warrior and gained for him the highest state.**” [Ramayana 4.16.8]

**Page 237, para 1:** “On another occasion, Rama says he would gladly give Sita to Bharata (2.16.33) Does he assume that you get the queen when you get the thrown?”

**Comment:** It is sheer slander and twisting of the original stanzas. The original stanza is in the context of Rama’s plea to Kaikeyi. He says that she need not have put Dasharatha in between. She could have directly asked Rama to abdicate thrown in favour of Bharat and he would have gladly done. Not only thrown he would have abandoned Sita, life, wealth

for the sake of Bharata (2.16.33). Further in the same canto he says, “If the great king, my father says, for your happiness too I will follow the vow (i.e. word given to you by my father)’ (2.16.34).

**Page 237, paras 3-4:** Once again resorting to kitsch psychoanalysis that is totally lacking in academic rigor, Doniger alleges that Rama killed Valin because the latter had usurped his own brother Sugreeva’s wife. Likewise, Rama was scared that Lakshmana would one day steal his wife Sita from him. Then she says, “*Valin also takes on the displaced force of Rama’s suspicions of another half-brother, Lakshmana. The text suggests that Rama might fear that Lakshmana might replace him in bed with Sita; it keeps insisting that Lakshmana will not sleep with Sita. It doth protest too much. (Recall that when Rama kicks Sita out for the first time and bitterly challenges her to go with some other guy, he lists Lakshmana first of all). The tension between the two half-brothers, over Sita, is a major motivation for the plot.*”

**Comment:** Again, this is a fantasy of Doniger. The text does not ‘keep repeating’ that Lakshmana might replace Rama in the bed with Sita. The Ramayana is a text of more than 20000 verses. Doniger picks half a dozen, twists them and then creates this fantasy that there was ‘sexual tension’ between the two brothers. The sexual tension is in **her** mind, not in the text, and perhaps represents her own auto-erotic fantasies. Reading her penchant for gossip, it is not difficult to understand why gossip tabloids like the National Enquirer sell well. After all, there are readers like Doniger and her followers.

Now, as to Doniger’s pointing out that Lakshmana was the first guy who Rama lists to Sita as someone she could turn to [Ramayana 6.103.22], Rama is damned if he suggests Lakshmana, and damned if he suggests someone else first. Doniger of course forgets to mention the others whom Rama mentions – Bharata, Sugreeva and then Vibhishana.

If Rama had mentioned Bharata first, Doniger would have speculated, “Rama bypassed Lakshmana because there was sexual tension between him and Lakshmana.” If he had named Sugreeva first, she would have speculated, “Rama empathized with Sugreeva because his brother too had stolen his wife Tara from him. Similarly, Rama was afraid of his own half-brother Lakshmana stealing Sita, and wanted Sita to preferably to go to Sugreeva, his own alter –ego.”

And if Rama had mentioned Vibhishana first, Doniger would have said, “Rama believed that Ravana had violated Sita, and therefore he

proposed sending her to Ravana's brother Vibhishana as an 'in your face' insult to her."

The point is that Doniger follows no credible or academically sound methodology except that of writing pornographic fiction. Doniger's methodology reminds one of the couch sessions of psychoanalysis, where the shrink knows the end point (because he has already decided it) and the starting point (because his patient told him so), and then does a lot of unscientific and loose free associations to somehow arrive from the first point to the end point, giving the appearance of a scientific methodology when it is in reality the entire process is a sham.

Turning Doniger's sleazy gossip on its head, a more straightforward explanation is that Rama proposed Lakshmana as the first alternative because 1) She was most familiar with Lakshmana, having spent more than 12 years in the forest with Rama and Lakshmana due to which he was the natural choice, and 2) Rama loved Sita and was very sure that Lakshmana would take good care of her, because he trusted Lakshmana a lot.

**Page 237, para 4 onwards:** In continuing with the allegation that Lakshmana had hots for Sita, Doniger then refers to the incident in which Rama goes to hunt the golden deer on her insistence. When the deer is shot fatally, he mimics Rama's voice and lets out a cry for help. Sita hears the cry and believes that Rama is in mortal danger. She asks Lakshmana to hurry to help his brother, but Lakshmana refuses saying that Rama is strong enough to ward off any danger himself, and that the cry is a hoax. Sita is desperate and anguished. Fearing that she is losing her husband, she accuses Lakshmana of wishing that Rama dies, so that he can have her. Lakshmana is aghast, and rushes to catch up with Rama.

According to Doniger, Lakshmana "*stalks off, leaving Sita totally undefended...*" (page 238, para 1). When he catches up with Rama, he narrates Sita's taunt to him. Rama says that he should not have left Sita succumbing to her anger.

After all this, Doniger then makes a gossip tabloid style claim, "*But why would Sita have said such a thing if she didn't fear it on some level? And why would it have made Lakshmana so mad if he did not fear it too?*"

**Comment:** Doniger's aspersions on the characters of Sita and Lakshmana are truly pathetic.

Now here is a devoted and loving wife, Sita, who is in genuine fear that her husband has been overpowered in the forest and is dying, and the only person who can rescue him is her brother in law Lakshmana. Lakshmana has full faith in his brother's prowess and knows that the cries that they have heard are fake. But, Sita is desperate to make Lakshmana leave her and go to save her husband's life at any cost. Let us quote the relevant verses: "Now when Sita heard that cry of distress in her husband's own voice, coming from the forest, she said to Lakshmana, "Go and find out what has happened to Raghava. My heart – my very life – is jarred from its place by the sound of his crying in deep distress that I heard so clearly. You must rescue your brother, who cries out in the forest. Run to your brother at once, for he needs help! The Rakshasas have him in their power like a bull fallen among lions." So she spoke, But Lakshmana, heeding his brother's command, did not go." [Ramayana 3.43.1-4]

This is a very painful and an emotional situation for a wife who believes that her husband's life is in danger, which perhaps Doniger cannot fathom as her world view is driven solely by sex, not love. To suggest that Sita feared that Lakshmana had hots for her is a reflection of Doniger's own perverse mindset.

And to blame 'Lakshmana' that he left her undefended is laughable.<sup>234</sup> What else could he have done? Had he not left her, Doniger would have said, "Lakshmana was inwardly happy believing that Rama was killed by the Rakshasas. But now when he saw Rama return unharmed, his hopes of marrying Sita were dashed."

**Page 238, para 2:** Doniger then continues with her 'proof' that Lakshmana had hots on Sita, "*When Rama, hunting for Sita, finds the cloak and jewels that she dropped as Ravana abducted her, he says to Lakshmana, "Do you recognize any of this?" And Lakshmana replies, "I have never looked at any part of Sita but her feet, so I recognize the anklets, but not the rest of her things." Yet evidently, Rama had expected him to recognize the jewels that had adorned higher parts of Sita's body.*"

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<sup>234</sup> As usual, she carefully omits to mention the Lakshmana Rekha episode that is a part of the Hindu folklore although not found in the Ramayana of Valmiki (critical edition). So much for her claim that her history is 'alternative.' She picks these alternative traditions only when it can be fit into her gossip level interpretations.

**Comment:** Doniger has the same interpretation of this episode as had ‘Acharya’ Rajneesh, who advocated free sex, drugs, booze and nudity. In her zeal to defame the love between Rama and Lakshmana, Doniger invents Rama’s request to Lakshmana to recognize the jewels and cloak, when in fact the Ramayana of Valmiki has no such verses!<sup>235</sup> No wonder that Doniger does not give the address of these verses. The request of Rama to Lakshmana are a part of the other traditions, that want to emphasize the respect that Lakshmana had for his elder sister-in-law and this is how this episode (not found in the critical edition of the Ramayana of Valmiki) is universally interpreted.

Either way, Doniger betrays her ethnocentrism while interpreting this episode and seems not to understand the Hindu culture. In the American culture, people are expected to see each other in the eye while communicating. Not doing so is interpreted in the US to mean that the person who is not seeing in the eye is hiding something, or is insincere. In contrast, in India even today, people lower their gaze out of respect while talking to their elders, teachers etc. It is considered a sign of disrespect to look into the eyes of respected people blatantly. Also, in the Hindu tradition, one’s elder sister in law is like one’s mother. Lakshmana duly followed these cultural norms (in the version of Tulsidas) that are prevalent even today, and were even more prevalent in earlier times – but Wendy seems not to understand this. So much for her ‘scholarship.’

What Wendy seems to ignore is that even in the later version, Rama himself would have been able to recognize the jewels and the cloak of Sita, but so distraught he was on losing his wife and the circumstance of the recovery of these items that he could have just passed them on to Lakshmana to recognize them. Anyone can read the 100s of verses to see the heart rending sorrow of Rama at the disappearance of Sita. In that time of great emotional distress of having lost his beloved wife (and not even knowing if she were dead or alive), Doniger still expects the husband Rama to scheme and plot against his brother! Normal people do not behave the way Wendy makes it out to be. But we must thank Doniger

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<sup>235</sup> This detail is found in the Ramacharitmanas, but of course Doniger does not mention that and makes it appear that it is in Valmiki’s Ramayana. In fact, she has done the same mistake in her other publications on Valmiki’s Ramayana too. Let the reader judge – is it academically sound to judge the relationship of Rama and Lakshmana by combining a text from 2000 years with a text that was written 500 years ago?

for her little mercies – at least she does not accuse Lakshmana of having a foot fetish!

And what does the Ramayana of Valmiki actually say? It says that Rama himself recognized the jewels and the shawl of Sita! Once again, we see Doniger lying about what really does not exist in the original critically edited text. So let us reproduce the relevant verses here:

“Then, as Rama took that garment and the bright ornaments, tears covered his face as mist covers the moon. His face was stained with the tears that he shed for love of Sita. Crying, “Ah, beloved!” he lost his composure and fell to the ground. Repeatedly, he pressed those fine ornaments to his heart and sighed deeply like an angry snake in its burrow. Through an unbroken stream of tears, Rama saw Saumitri [= Lakshmana] by his side and began to lament piteously: “Look, Lakshmana, here are the shawl and ornaments that Vaidehi let fall from her body to the ground as she was being carried away. As she was being carried off, Sita must surely have dropped these ornaments onto the grassy ground, and that is why they look like this.””[Ramayana 4.6.14-19]. In other words, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Rama never asks Lakshmana to recognize these items. This evaporates Wendy Doniger’s fantasies about ‘sexual tension’ between the two brothers.

**Page 238, para 3 onwards:** Doniger now weaves more of her perverse yarns and accuses Rama of desiring to kill Lakshmana. Talking about how Lakshmana left Rama, she says, *“Death makes Rama promise to kill anyone who interrupts them; Lakshmana guards the door. An ascetic arrives and threatens to destroy the world if Lakshmana won’t let him see Rama; Lakshmana, caught between a rock and a hard place, chooses the lesser of two evils, his own death rather than the destruction of the world. He interrupts Rama and Death, whereupon Rama says that for Lakshmana, being separated from him (Rama) would be so terrible that it would be the equivalent of death, and so he satisfies the curse by merely banishing Lakshmana, who then commits suicide. Does this episode represent a displaced, suppressed desire of Rama to kill Lakshmana?”*

**Comment:** Again, Doniger takes an episode from the interpolated Uttarakanda. It is strange that with Sita long gone, Doniger should still think that Rama wishes his brother to die! Lakshmana is damned when Sita lives (because then he is accused of desiring her) and is also damned when she is gone (here, Rama is accused of desiring to kill Lakshmana anyway)! This is a particularly low IQ gossip from Doniger, which passes as scholarship in Hinduism studies in the US these days.

But again, what does the Ramayana really say? Rama is initially shown as deeply troubled and he does not lift his weapon nor does he banish Lakshmana. It is Lakshmana who asks Rama to kill him [Ramayana 7.105.2-4] to keep his vow.

Rama is still disturbed and he consults his Guru Rishi Vashishtha. And it is the Rishi who advises Rama to forsake Lakshmana [Ramayana 7.106.8-11].

Rama accepts his Guru's advice and then says to Lakshmana that he is exiled because banishment and death are equivalent [Ramayana 7.106.13]. So how does the Ramayana 'represent a displaced suppressed desire of Rama to kill Lakshmana?' Doniger's methodology is merely spinning yarns of fantasy, like a gossip tabloid article.

**Page 240-241:** *"So too five years after Dashaaratha has banished Rama, he suddenly wakes Kaushalya up in the middle of night and tells her about this (Sharavana's death at his hands) episode which he has only now remembered"*

**Comment:** Everybody who knows Ramayana, will recall that Dasharatha died on the day Sumant, the charioteer returned to Ayodhya after he left Rama back in the woods. It was within a week. On the fifth day after Rama left Ayodhya, Dasharatha remembered that episode. He clearly states that the five days that have passed since Rama left for forest are like five years for him.

**Page 241, para 3 onwards:** Referring to the story of Kaikeyi's father who could understand the language of birds, Doniger gives a silly commentary, *"This is in keeping with the underlying misogyny of the Sanskrit mythological texts that depict men as more gifted with special powers than women; it may also reflect the sociological fact that men in India were allowed to read and speak Sanskrit, while in general women were not, as well as the custom of patrilocal marriage, so that a woman often did not speak the language of her husband's family..."*

**Comment:** Doniger's comment that due to patrilocal marriages (wherein the wife lives with her husband in his family home alone with her inlaws) often resulted in the wife not knowing the language of her husband's family is silly. Down to our present times, Hindus marry their daughters outside their gotra but within the same larger community that speaks the same language and has similar customs and traditions. It is only recently that Hindus have been intermarrying with families with a different mother tongue to any significant scale.



**Page 242, para 1:** In the Ramayana, we read of the touching episode of Jatayu, the vulture, who fights with Ravana in his attempt at rescuing Sita from his clutches. Ravana inflicts fatal wounds on Jatayu. When Rama finally encounters Jatayu while he is breathing his last, the bird tells Rama where Ravana has taken Sita. And then, Jatayu dies. Doniger summarizes Rama's attitude towards Jatayu in the following words – "*Rama says that he holds the old vulture, Jatayus, in the same esteem that he holds Dasharatha (3.64.26) (which may also be a back-handed indirect dig at Dasharatha), and he buries him with the full royal obsequies as for a father.*"

**Comment:** Once again, Doniger's speculations about Rama's 'indirect dig at Dasharatha' is nothing but cheap gossip. Rama is clearly expressing his gratitude and respect for the vulture, whereas Doniger speculates that in doing so, he is lowering the esteem of his father down to the level of a vulture! Her interpretation is certainly a result of her hatred for the Hindus and for Rama because even when he expresses his respect and gratitude for an aged creature, she sees an 'indirect' dig against his father. This is how gossip tabloids are written, not scholarly works. Throughout the Ramayana, Rama and Sita show respect for Dasharatha and there is no hint of even bitterness at what his father did to them.

**Page 248-249:** Doniger repeats the Shambuka story.

**Comment:** Again, Doniger has relied on one more episode from the interpolated Uttarakanda. She makes much out of it whereas the Hindu tradition itself ignores it by and large. So much for Doniger's claim that she is presenting the non-mainstream, alternative version of Hinduism. If she were following what she claimed to preach, she would have ignored this episode as it is not narrated in the non-mainstream retellings of the Ramayana.<sup>236</sup> Thus, it is absent in the Adhyatma Ramayana (Sanskrit) and in the retellings of Ramayana in Kashmiri, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Oriya, Nepali, Gujarati, Hindi etc. It is found only in the Ananda Ramayana (where the plot of the story is quite different) and in a Maithili version (where Lakshmana beheads Shambuka at the command of Rama). The retellings of the Ramayana in all the Puranas, and in the Mahabharata too omit this episode.<sup>237</sup> As a rule, Doniger ignores the vernacular versions of the

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<sup>236</sup> See, Balraj Sharma (2000), "Shambuka Vadha Prasanga ki Pramanikta", pp. 17-20 in *Vedavani*, volume 53, issue 8 (in Hindi).

<sup>237</sup> The Mahabharata does not include the Uttarakanda in its Ramopakhyana episode, but mentions the beheading of Shambuka once later on. Apparently, the

Ramayana (with the exception of Tulsi's Ramcharitmanas, because it is available in English translation!) and mentions just a few of them very cursorily. How can she then claim that her book is a work of 'alternative history?'

**Page 249 – 250, para 3:** Doniger also insinuates that Rama was a casteist because he refused the food offered by Guha. She says – “*Rama also had an uncomfortable relationship with the Nishadas, including a hunter named Guha, chief of the Nishadas. When Rama came into the jungle, Guha met him and offered him things to eat and drink; Rama declined for himself, arguing that as an ascetic he could not accept gifts and ate only fruit and roots (an assertion directly contradicted by the fact that after killing the ogre Maricha in the form of a deer, he killed another deer and took home the meat [3.42.21]).....There are too many excuses, and conflicting excuses at that, to explain why Rama will not eat Guha's food, and the commentaries on this episode are troubled by it.*”

Thereafter, Doniger meanders off into the episode of Trishanku which again occurs in the interpolated Uttarakanda.

**Comment:** Doniger of course does not mention in this chapter that Rama did eat food offered by the tribal woman Shabari.

Contrary to how Doniger puts it, the commentaries are not troubled by the episode. They explain the difference between Rama accepting food from Shabari (because she is a Bhakta) versus not taking it from Guha (because he is a vassal and technically a dependent of Rama, as indicated in Ramayana 2.44.14). Moreover, Rama did not want to accept favors unnecessarily from Guha whom he also regarded as a friend. But he does not hesitate to take grass for the horses of the chariot that brought them there [Ramayana 2.44.21] as Doniger herself points out. Bharata however can take food from Guha because he considers himself as a vassal of Rama (having refused to fulfill Kaikeyi's wish) and therefore at par with Guha. Moreover, Bharata was travelling with an army that had to be fed too! Rama accepts food from the Vanaras because they are friends (with no vassalage to Rama), and from Rishis because refusing them would be disrespectful per the etiquette. There is no 'discomfort' in the relationship between Rama and Guha, which is said to be of love, respect and deep friendship [Ramayana 2.44.9, 16-18]. It is again all Doniger's own imagination.

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Uttarakanda, even though an interpolation, is still quite ancient (and the same conclusion may be drawn from other pieces of evidence too, but it is beyond the scope of the present review).

**Postscript on the Chapter:** Doniger accuses all her critics of being ‘Hindu Nationalists’ or ‘Victorian Prudes.’ Perhaps, the above review will dispel her ethically unacceptable, and academically shoddy stereotypical statements about critics. The fact is, that her scholarship is extremely poor, she follows no sound methodology, and indulges in gossip, strained interpretations and considerable faking of data. She might be defended by her students but the objective and knowledgeable reader knows better.

## 12. Review of the Chapter 10, “*Violence in the Mahabharata*” by Chitra Raman

**General Comment:** The goal of this chapter is to examine the Hindu understanding of *ahimsa* or non-violence by comparing the personalities of Yudishthira in the Mahabharata and the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka. Doniger’s arguments present both personalities as being much more ambiguous in their convictions than is widely held: she cites more than one instance to support her claim that they were “hedging,” implying that they allowed themselves strategic loopholes in their interpretation of morality. The author’s central purpose in this chapter is to highlight the violence towards animals in the Mahabharata, as well as violence among them, and derive metaphors for human relationships from these conflicts. Also novel is Doniger’s contention, with no credible basis other than personal bias, that certain narratives about animals are really coded guidelines for the treatment of Pariahs.

**Page 252,** Introduction: Chronology of Mahabharata and Ramayana:

- c. 300 BCE to 300 CE – The *Mahabharata* is composed
- c. 200 BCE to 200 CE – The *Ramayana* is composed

**Comment:** Doniger begins her chapter on *Violence* by attacking conventional wisdom on the chronology and antiquity of these epics. The dates presented for their composition are apparently meant to be accepted as valid—because she says so.

These dates have become dogma, but they defy common sense. Nowhere in any version of either epic, is there mention of the major dynasties – such as the Nanda, Maurya, Shunga, Kanya -- of the period in which it was supposedly composed, nor for that matter a single monarch from that time. If we are to believe that these epics were composed 300 years after the lifetimes of Siddhartha Gautama and Mahavira, how does one explain the complete absence of any reference<sup>238</sup> either to these great

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<sup>238</sup> Buddha is referred to as a ‘future’ avatara in one interpolated verse found only in the grossly conflated Dakshinatya (Southern) version of the Mahabharata and is not mentioned in other versions (Northern and Kashmiri). The mention of Buddha in future tense clearly indicates that the interpolator (whenever he lived, say around 500 AD) considered the Buddha later than the Mahabharata. In the Ramayana, the situation is not different. Buddha is mentioned (and even that

individuals or the faiths they founded? Also consider the evidence from the Spitzer document, which indicates that the Buddha had studied the Mahabharata.<sup>239</sup> Some Hindu texts even allege that Buddha stole some of his doctrines from the Mahabharata.<sup>240</sup> The latter allegation is recorded in a Buddhist text (Madhyamaka Hridaya) from around 550 AD without refutation.

There are no corresponding Buddhist ripostes claiming that the Mahabharata was written after the time of Buddha, or that it was the Mahabharata or the Ramayana that stole their teachings from the Buddha. In fact, some scholars see the influence of the Ramayana on the Buddhacharita of Ashvaghosha who lived around 100 AD.<sup>241</sup>

In a later section of the chapter (pg 261) subtitled *The Eras of the Two Great Poems*, Doniger concedes that “the dates are much disputed” but offers no details as to why. Scholars like Koenraad Elst base the antiquity of the core Mahabharata, on precisely accurate details of astronomical phenomena in the text. He points out that given the available technology of that period, those observations could *only have been recorded first hand at the time of occurrence*, not back-calculated at a later date.

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verse has an unclear meaning) again in a solitary verse found only in Southern manuscripts, and is not mentioned in Northwestern or Northern manuscripts.

<sup>239</sup> The Spitzer manuscript dated on paleographic grounds to around 250 AD even lists the Parvans of the Mahabharata that the Buddha had studied. See Eli Franco, “The Oldest Philosophical Manuscript in Sanskrit”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 31: 21–31, 2003. The same work also gives a summary of Ramayana. Note that the manuscript is obviously later than the author who wrote it! The point is that even as early as 250 AD, the Mahabharata was considered older to Buddha.

<sup>240</sup> E.g., the Mattavilasa of King Mahendravarman (c. 600 AD) quotes a Kapalika as saying that the Buddha of stealing his doctrinal ideas from the Mahabharata and the Vedanta while the ‘Brahmins blinked’. See p. 82 in Michael Lockwood & A. Vishnu Bhat; *King Mahendravarman’s Plays*; Tambaram Research Associates; Madras; 1991

<sup>241</sup> C W Gurner, “Asvaghosa and the Ramayana”, in *Journal of the Asiatic Society* (Bengal), NS XXIII (1927), pp. 347-367

<sup>242</sup> “To the extent that there are astronomical indications in the Vedas, these form a consistent set of data detailing an absolute chronology for Vedic literature in full agreement with the known relative chronology of the different texts of this literature. This way, they completely contradict the hypothesis that the Vedas were composed after an invasion in about 1500 BC. Not one of the dozens of

It is widely acknowledged that interpolations and changes continued to be made to the texts over time. But if Doniger's dates are meant to reflect the evolutionary timelines of the epic, why stop at 300 CE for the Mahabharata? Retellings and reinterpretations of the epic continue into the present day. Doniger could as well have included B.R. Chopra's televised serial *Mahabharat* (1988-90) in her reckoning. It transfixed an entire nation. People from all walks of life paused in whatever they were doing to watch the weekly broadcast. It was a far more significant event from an anthropological standpoint than Santosh Sivan's 2001 movie *Asoka*, which Doniger brings up (pg 258) to illustrate a point about "mythmaking."<sup>243</sup>

The belief that the Ramayana predates the Mahabharata is not just a matter of accepted tradition. Scholars point to cultural elements present in the Mahabharata but not in the Ramayana that suggest the latter originated in an earlier, non-contemporaneous age. Doniger's date of origin for the Ramayana places it well after the date of Alexander's invasion of India, which seems patently absurd.<sup>244</sup>

**Page 253, Para 3:** "... the ... arguments, which deeply color the narratives of the Mahabharata on all levels, were simultaneously about the treatment of animals, about the treatment of Pariahs symbolized by animals, and about human violence as an inevitable result of the fact that humans are animals and animals are violent."

**Comment:** There is no basis for Doniger's outrageous deductive leap that animals were meant to symbolize Pariahs in the epic. It is also the height of oversimplification to reduce the *Mahabharata's* nuanced treatment of human conflict to a simple-minded syllogism equating humans and animals.

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astronomical data in Vedic literature confirms the AIT chronology" –Koenraad Elst in his essay *Astronomical data and the Aryan question*<http://koenraadelst.bharatvani.org/articles/aid/astronomy.html>

<sup>243</sup> Ironically, the Marxist historian Romila Thapar (whom Doniger quotes umpteen times in her book as an authority) is named in the movie's credits as a historical expert consulted by the movie maker!

<sup>244</sup> See Appendix 1, observations of a commentator with knowledge of the original Sanskrit texts

**Page 253, para 4:** *“But in the eighth year of his (Ashoka’s) reign, he marched on Kalinga (the present Orissa) in a cruel campaign that makes Sherman’s march look like a children’s parade.”*

**Comment:** It is absurd to compare Ashoka’s invasion of Kalinga, an event that happened approximately 2,300 years ago, with General Sherman’s march from one end of Georgia to the other.

Furthermore, if the idea was to convey a sense of scale, why not compare the Kalinga campaign with any one of the marauding Islamic incursions that inflicted waves upon waves of horror and remorseless cruelty? Doniger is strangely silent about the carnage inflicted upon Delhi by Nadir Shah, omitting it entirely from this book. She whitewashes the Islamic record in India in chapters 16, 19 and 20 and pre-empts her critics by labeling them Hindu nationalists!

Judging from her analogy, she doesn’t seem to know much about children’s parades either.

**Page 254, para 3:** *“That Ashoka renounced war at this point is perhaps less impressive than it might seem, given that he now already had most of India under his control (or at least more than anyone else had ever had and apparently all that he wanted) he was locking the stable door after the horse was safely tethered in its stall.”*

**Comment:** Doniger’s comments mislead the reader into believing Ashoka was the Mauryan ruler who subjugated most of India and brought it under his rule. Actually, the Indian subcontinent north of the Vindhyas had already been conquered by his grandfather Chandragupta Maurya, while the region south of the Vindhyas (except Tamil Nadu, Kerala and southern parts of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, plus Kalinga) was absorbed into the kingdom by his father Bindusara. Ashoka merely invaded Kalinga.

One would think Ashoka’s renunciation of war would impress any native of a country that refuses to renounce enhancements to its nuclear arsenal despite having enough to blow the world up many times over!

The key observation here is that Ashoka had “apparently all that he wanted.” And unlike other empire builders of his ilk, he called a halt to endless warfare on moral grounds rather than for strategic or logistical reasons. If this is not “impressive,” then that word must mean something

other than what the dictionary says it does. Having “more than anyone else had” has not, historically, prevented people from acquiring even more by any means necessary.

The sarcastic reference to “locking the stable door after the horse was safely tethered” presumes Ashoka deemed territories under his dominion “safe” from potential challengers. There was no way he could have known that.

**Page 254, para 3:** *“But his repentance did not mean that he had sworn off violence forever...he may have hung up his gun belt, but he still had it.”*

**Comment:** Well of course not, any more than any head of state, no matter how peace loving, can “swear off” violence entirely. Even President Obama, while accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, emphasized in his speech that he would escalate the U.S. military’s offensive against Al Qaeda.

**Page 255, para 1:** *“This [Ashoka’s] idealistic empire was reflected in the perfect world of Rama’s Reign (Ram-raj) in the Ramayana.”*

**Comment:** There is no historical basis to suggest that Ashokan concepts of Dharma influenced the notion of Ram-rajya contrary to assertions (without any evidence) by Indologists like Patrick Olivelle.

**Page 255, para 2:** *“Thus the [Ashokan] pillar....was the first representation of the horse...”*

**Comment:** The horse is represented in terracotta figurines in Harappan culture<sup>245</sup> as well as in post-Harappan and pre-Mauryan art. Several places in northern India reveal terracotta figurines of horses and bulls in the layers of the PGW phase, at least 500 years before Ashoka.<sup>246</sup> It is therefore ridiculous to suggest that the horse was first depicted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE in India.

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<sup>245</sup> Vishal Agarwal (2005), “What is the Aryan Migration Theory,” pp. 1-46 in *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Archaeology*, Vol 2, No. 1

<sup>246</sup> A Ghosh (1989), *Encyclopedia of Indian Archaeology*, vol I, Munshiram Manoharlal (New Delhi), p. 337



**Page 256, paras 2-3; Page 257, para 1:** *“Ashoka cared deeply about animals and included them as a matter of course, long with humans, as the beneficiaries of his shade trees and watering places.”*  
*“But he never did discontinue capital punishment or torture or legislate against either the killing or the eating of all animals.”*  
*“What there is the expression of a man who finds himself between a rock edict and a hard place, a man who has concern for animals’ feelings (give them shade, don’t castrate them -- sometimes) but recognizes that people do eat animals. It is a very limited sort of non-violence, not unlike the Brahmana text that pointed out that eating animals is bad but then let you eat them in certain ways, instead of outlawing it entirely, as one might have expected. Ashoka is the man, after all, who gave up war only after he had conquered all North India.”*

**Comment:** Doniger dwells on the minutiae of Ashoka’s directives regarding animals, providing a lengthy transcript of what animals could or could not be killed, which ones were to be protected from slaughter, the prohibition against feeding one animal to the other and on and on. By itself, such selective treatment trivializes the full scope and intent of Ashoka’s edicts<sup>247</sup> -- but Doniger doesn’t stop there. The reader realizes eventually that the point of all this is to portray Ashoka’s moral transformation as inherently shallow and ambiguous, if not outright hypocritical.

Finally, in case the reader missed the point of Ashoka’s “fake renunciation” in her first reference, Doniger drives it home this time with another jeering remark about the timing of Ashoka’s transformation.

For an anthropologist with her mileage, Doniger displays a stunning degree of opacity to cultures far removed in time and space from her own. And like all people of impaired understanding, she resorts to blind judgment.

The Native American culture is an example of how one may kill to eat, but yet show more respect and care for living creatures and nature than is shown by many contemporary vegetarians who remain indifferent to all considerations outside their sphere of creature comforts.

Native Americans never killed more than they needed. They had ceremonies for the creature they killed to thank its spirit for feeding and

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<sup>247</sup> See the Edicts of King Ashoka translated by Ven. S. Dhammika <http://www.cs.colostate.edu/~malaiya/ashoka.html>

clothing them. They would address the dead animal as their “brother.” This was not hypocrisy. It was their expression of humility and gratitude for nature’s bounty, an awareness of humanity’s responsibility to coexist with Nature in mutual sustenance.

In the same way, Ashoka’s meticulous directives concerning the treatment of animals in his time appear to reflect his desire to strike a balance between consumption and preservation. Not moral vacillation as portrayed by Doniger.

To reiterate the comment posted above, Doniger is wrong about history as well. It was not Ashoka who conquered all of North India. His father and grandfather had already done that.

**Page 258, para 3:** *“From about 500 BCE, kings still performed Vedic sacrifices to legitimize their kingship, but the sectarian worship of particular deities began partially to replace Vedic sacrifice... Throughout the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, we encounter people who say they worship a particular god, which is the start of sects and therefore of sectarianism.”*

**Comment:** This quote is from a section subtitled *The Rise of Sectarian Hinduism*.

The dictionary defines “sectarian” as “narrow-minded and ready to quarrel over petty differences of opinion.” Or “a narrow-minded and bigoted member of a sect.” Within the Hindu context, it is misleading and simplistic to conclude “sects: therefore, sectarianism.” The branching out of different forms of worship within Hinduism testifies to its tolerance of diversity and individualism.

The worship of a particular god does not automatically predispose a Hindu to be hostile and intolerant towards a worshipper of a different god. Were that the case, such a profusion of sects could not have arisen in the first place. Sectarianism, as and when it arises, is a separate phenomenon driven by realities more complex than just the mere existence of different sects.

**Page 259, para 2:** *“...in 150 BCE, Patanjali, the author of the highly influential Yoga Sutras, foundational for the Yoga school of philosophy, mentions a worshipper of Shiva who wore animal skins and carried an iron lance.”*

**Comment:** The reference to the worshipper of Shiva is not in the Yoga Sutra, but in the Mahabhashya of Patanjali. Modern scholarship

also holds that the Patanjali, the author of the Yoga Sutra, is different from Patanjali who wrote the Mahabhashya (a work on Sanskrit grammar).

**Page 259, para 2:** *“In the first century BCE, under the Shungas, artisans produced what is generally regarded as the earliest depiction of the god Shiva: a linga just under five feet high, in Gudimallam, in southeastern Andhra Pradesh ... Its anatomical detail, apart from its size, is highly naturalistic, but on the shaft is carved the figure of Shiva, two-armed and also naturalistic, holding an ax in one hand and the body of a small antelope in the other. His thin garment reveals his own sexual organ (not erect), his hair is matted, and he wears large earrings. He stands upon a dwarf.”*

**Comment:** Doniger is unaware that clear-cut Linga-Yoni examples are now available from Harappan sites predating the Gudimallam icon by more than 2000 years!<sup>248</sup>

A close-up photograph of the linga in question – one of the book’s rare illustrations -- appears on page 22. **It is in fact the only representation of Shiva illustrated in the book.**

Doniger is however not content to refer the reader to the illustration; she describes it in meticulous detail, including the all-important observation as to the state of arousal of the figure depicted. The details are presented without any reference to the meaning of Shiva iconography; the symbolism of the linga, of Shiva as a forest-dwelling ascetic, of the *apasmaara purusha* beneath his feet as depicting Shiva’s supremacy over the demon of ignorance.

And so, it doesn’t take a genius to guess how grotesquely this narrative would translate in the mind of the casual non-Hindu reader: *Early Hindus worshipped God in the form of a naked hunter standing on a dwarf, superimposed on a giant phallus.*

**Page 261, para 3:** *“The geographical setting of the Mahabharata signals a time earlier than that of the Ramayana. The Mahabharata is set in and around the earlier capital of Hastinapur, already a great city in the age of the Brahmanas, instead of the Ramayana’s cities of Rajagriha in Magadha and Kashi in Kosala, which were settled later.”*

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<sup>248</sup> B B Lal (2002), *The Saraswati Flows On*, Aryan Books International (New Delhi), p. 118

**Comment:** Doniger is wrong on facts again. In the Mahabharata, Magadha is a kingdom ruled by King Jarasandha who is killed by Bhima. In the Ramayana, the **region** of Magadha is mentioned but no other details are given. In fact, verse 1.31.5 mentions Girivraja and not Pataliputra or Rajagriha, which were **later** capitals of Magadha. This omission is quite glaring because in this section, Sage Vishvamitra **lists all the prominent towns in that region with the names of Kings who founded them**. If Rajagriha and Pataliputra had existed, the Sage would have surely mentioned them.

Note also that these verses are in the *Balakanda* (considered a later addition to the epic) – clearly then, the core of the epic is even earlier than that if even the late *Balakanda* does not mention Pataliputra or Rajagriha.

Doniger is also wrong in stating that the Rajagriha referred to in the Ramayana is the capital of Magadha. The epic mentions Rajagriha, the capital of the **Kekeya** kingdom in NW India, where Bharat visited his maternal grandparents (see Ayodhya Kanda of Ramayana). **This Rajagriha is completely different from the Magadhan Rajagriha** which was the capital of Magadha till c 460 BCE, when the capital moved to Pataliputra. Note also that ceramics dating to 1000 BCE have been found in the Magadhan Rajagriha, and therefore its absence in the list of cities mentioned by Sage Vishvamitra during Lord Rama's sojourn in the region is quite telling! As for Kashi, this kingdom or region is mentioned even in Atharvaveda (Shaunaka) 6.137.1 and therefore its mention or non-mention in the Ramayana is irrelevant.

In support of her views, Doniger cites findings from excavations at Hastinapur dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> to seventh centuries BCE, which present “a far cry from the fabulous palaces described in the Mahabharata.”

Quite apart from arguments surrounding the dates of the Mahabharata, the author's expectations of finding intact structures to corroborate events of such antiquity – and her conclusions from not finding them – are incredibly absurd. Topography can undergo vast transformations across the time scales considered. When mountains can be flattened or created by geologic forces, what chance do mortal structures stand for survival?

Hastinapur is located near the tectonically active region of the Garhwal Himalayas.<sup>249</sup> Even at the present time, the entire state of Uttar Pradesh is known to lie in a zone of moderate to high tectonic activity.<sup>250</sup> The river Ganga is known to have changed course at least once and completely inundated the city. There is no way of knowing whether, in fact, portions of the old city currently lie under the present course of the Ganga; or at some other location removed from the excavation site. But even if the exact coordinates of the ancient city were known, one cannot reasonably expect physical traces of it to have survived centuries of geomorphology.<sup>251</sup>

**Page 262, para 2:** “The text [the Mahabharata] refers to the quasi-Mauryan Artha-Shastra....”

**Comment:** The entire Mahabharata does not mention Kautilya Arthashastra even once. On the contrary, it refers to the ancient Arthashastra works of Brihaspati, Ushanas, Indra (Vishalaksha), Bharadvaja etc., and these very authors are cited by Kautilya in his own ‘quasi-Mauryan’ Arthashastra as his predecessors.

**Page 262, para 4:** “The Mahabharata is generally regarded as having reached its final form later than the Ramayana, but also to have begun earlier; the Ramayana is shorter and in many ways simpler, certainly more coherent, but not necessarily chronologically prior. Both texts were in gestation so long, and in conversation during so much of that gestation period, that each of the great poems precedes the other, like Brahma and Vishnu, or dharma and moksha. The Ramayana cites the Mahabharata from time to time, and the Mahabharata devotes an entire long section to retelling the Ramayana (3.257-75), a version of the story that is probably later than the one told in the Ramayana itself.”

**Comment:** See Appendix 1 for a more detailed commentary on the chronology of these epics.

To sum up, the *Ramayana* does **not** quote the *Mahabharata* (pace, Doniger); and the positions of dharma and moksha are not interchangeable. Dharma or righteousness **leads to moksha**, or

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<sup>249</sup> Tectonic activity in Garhwal Himalayas <http://www.ias.ac.in/currsci/feb252002/407.pdf>

<sup>250</sup> map showing areas of tectonic activity in Uttar Pradesh <http://asc-india.org/maps/hazard/haz-uttar-pradesh.htm>

<sup>251</sup> See Appendix 1

freedom from rebirth, when the soul merges with the Infinite. Moksha being the ultimate goal attainable, it makes no sense whatsoever to say dharma can follow moksha.

**Page 262, para 4; Page 263, para 1:** *“There is a famous Sanskrit poem that can be read, depending upon how you divide the compounds and choose among the multiple meanings of the words, to tell the story of either the Mahabharata or the Ramayana. In many ways, the two stories are two sides of the same coin.”*

**Comment:** Doniger’s end notes list the work referred to as the *Raghavapandaviya* of Dhananjaya. Dhananjaya, also referred to as Hemasena,<sup>252</sup> is said to have composed this work in 1123-1140 AD<sup>253</sup> to display his intellectual mastery of a literary form known as *slesha*, or double-entendre. What bearing this work could possibly have on the chronology of the great epics is a mystery. Equally baffling is how Doniger believes Dhananjaya’s creative retelling, composed in an age so far removed from the origin of the epics could be used to support her claim that the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are flip sides of the same coin !

**Page 236, para 2:** *“The Mahabharata is a text of about seventy-five thousand verses\*....*  
*\*Sometimes said to be a hundred thousand, perhaps just to round it off a bit.*

**Comment:** The number 75000 is the number of verses in the critical edition of the text published in the last century and has no real basis in the Hindu tradition. The count of 100000 always includes the appendix Harivamsha (which has an additional 6000+ verses in the critical edition).

The text was traditionally said to have 100000 verses precisely because it did have these many verses. For example, the earliest commentator on the Mahabharata (Devabodha, before c. 1150 CE) gives a book by book number of chapters and verses, and totals the number of verses as 102555.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Western Ganga Dynasty  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western\\_Ganga\\_Dynasty#cite\\_note-pand-135](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Ganga_Dynasty#cite_note-pand-135)

<sup>253</sup> Jainism in South India <http://www.terapanth.com/impressions/south-india.htm>

<sup>254</sup> R N Dandekar (ed.), *Commentary by Devabodha on the Adi Parvan of the Mahabharata*, BORI (Poona), p. 17 (1941)

**Page 264, para 2:** *“European approaches to the Mahabharata often assumed that the creators did not know what they were doing, and blindly cutting and pasting, accidentally created a monstrosity. But the Mahabharata is not the head of a Brahmin philosophy accidentally stuck onto a body of non-Brahmin folklore, like the heads and bodies of the Brahmin woman and the Pariah woman in the story. True, it was like an ancient Wikipedia, to which anyone who knew Sanskrit, or who knew someone who knew Sanskrit, could add a bit here, a bit there. But the powerful intertextuality of Hinduism ensured that anyone who added...was well aware of the whole textual tradition behind it ... It is a brilliantly orchestrated hybrid narrative with no single party line on any subject...The contradictions at its heart are not the mistakes of a sloppy editor but enduring cultural dilemmas that no author could have ever resolved.”*

**Comment:** With friends like Doniger, who needs enemies? Even as she seems to be attempting to rescue the Mahabharata from the slings and arrows of outrageous European scholars, she equates the unparalleled literary masterpiece to a Wikipedia stub that anyone “who knew someone who knew Sanskrit” could “add a bit here, a bit there.”

The unspecified “contradictions” perceived by Doniger in the Mahabharata might come from the fact that it was never meant to read like a set of absolute commandments. Instead, it leads individuals to personal conclusions about right and wrong conduct. It does this by portraying the consequences of critical choices made by actors who combine heroism and frailty, whose moral dilemmas, human failings, as well as strengths are just as recognizable to us now they were in ancient times.

An analect of Confucius states:

*“By three methods we may learn wisdom:  
first, by reflection, which is noblest;  
second, by imitation, which is easiest;  
and third, by experience, which is the bitterest.”*

One way of avoiding the bitterness of personal experience is to live it through the narrated experience of others. The Hindu tradition achieves this through the genius of its two major epics and its rich mythological lore. Those who see only its contradictions are missing the whole point.

**Page 264, para 3:** *“...the career of King Pushyamitra, the Brahmin who became a general and reinstated Hinduism over Buddhism in his kingdom, may*

*have inspired an important episode in the Mahabharata, the tale of Parashurama....the son of a Brahmin father and Kshatriya mother.”*

**Comment:** This is pure speculation and rests on the assumption that Brahmins actually considered the Mauryas (who were deposed by Pushyamitra) as Kshatriyas. In fact, the Mauryas were considered a low caste lineage in the Brahmin imaginary.<sup>255</sup>

It is simply more conservative to attribute Parashurama's elevation in the Mahabharata to the 'Bhriuguization'<sup>256</sup> of the epic. In the Ramayana, Parashurama is finally overcome by Lord Rama, another Kshatriya, whereupon the Sage then retires. It is interesting to speculate what Doniger might construe as the historical inspiration for that part of Parashurama's story!

**Page 267, para 2:** *“Take dogs. Hindu dharma forbids Hindus to have any contact with dogs, whom it regards as unclean scavengers, literally untouchable ( a-sprishya), the parasites of Pariabs who are themselves regarded as parasites....As for dogs symbolic of low castes, though the Gita insists that wise people cast the same gaze on a learned Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, or a dog cooker (5.18) , the Mahabharata generally upholds the basic prejudice against dogs as in this story, which also makes clear the analogy between dogs and upwardly mobile Pariabs:*

*THE DOG WHO WOULD BE LION*<sup>257</sup>

*“...This dog even has a human heart, but he must not be allowed to get ideas above his station....Both the dog and the sage are all wrong from the very beginning. The dog violates dog dharma by being a vegetarian, whereas he should be a carnivore, and the sage is wrong too to protect the dog...But the sage does not reciprocate the dog's devotion or attachment to him. Whereas the dog recognizes himself as a human, the sage in the end is cruel as a dog.”*

**Comment:** This book's value could be considerably enhanced if it were made into a case study for failed intercultural communication. It is replete with reminders that successful communication depends as much on the processing skills of the receiver, as it does on the skills of the communicator.

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<sup>255</sup> R C Majumdar (1968), *Ancient India*, Motilal Banarsidass (New Delhi), p. 104

<sup>256</sup> A term from Indology referring to the transmission and expansion of the Mahabharata by Brahmins tracing their lineage to Bhrgu; Parashurama being of the same ancestry, was given prominence.

<sup>257</sup> A transcript of the story as narrated by Doniger appears in Appendix 2 [Chitra].



Doniger appears not to have read the story she summarizes (reproduced in Appendix 2) before jumping to her outlandish conclusions about dogs that are actually Pariahs.

What is the story really saying? There is an enlightened sage, and a devoted dog that subsists on a diet of fruits and roots in order to please him. This could be interpreted as the human tendency to engage in ritual piety when in a state of powerlessness, as a way of winning favor with the particular entity that one worships.

Then, in a time of real adversity, when the dog implores the sage for help, he is given the strength to overcome each successive trial. But in the end, when the dog becomes powerful and feared, he forgets how he got that way in the first place, and **tries to eat the sage!** This detail is inexplicably underplayed by Doniger in her single-minded focus on making a Pariah out of the dog.

The story is in fact an allegory for the adage “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

The dog in this story is emblematic of an individual lacking humility, gratitude, and introspection.

The dog’s real violation of dharma has nothing to do with his temporary vegetarianism, which as we see was evidently a superficial behavior aimed at pleasing the sage. His real failing was succumbing to greed and pride when given freedom and power.

In the end, he is symbolically transformed back to his original form not because he is really a Pariah with illusions of grandeur, but because his character fails to evolve in keeping with the “upwardly mobile” opportunities that he is given. Finally, possessed by hubris, he tries to devour the very agent of his good fortune.

The sage could have been termed cruel if he capriciously changed the dog back for no good reason, or maliciously put the dog in harm’s way.

He does neither. He waits until the dog proves himself unworthy. In the end, the dog is driven out of the ashram because he will never be fully reconciled to being a dog. He mopes resentfully out of his lack of awareness of what he did to deserve his fate.

And the sage in the story is not meant to be representative of a Brahmin – Doniger is either ignorant or forgetful of the fact that *sanyasins* (ascetics) in the Hindu tradition have no caste. Given his role in the story, it is more likely the sage symbolizes the Almighty.

For more analysis of this story, see Appendix 1.

**Page 268, para 2:** “...Yudhishtira refuses to go to heaven without the stray dog who has attached itself to him... What is most striking about that passage is the god of Dharma himself becomes incarnate in this animal; it is as if the god of the Hebrew Bible had become incarnate in a pig.”

**Comment:** Besides being offensive, this observation by Doniger is highly dishonest. She knows full well that the god of Dharma is not a counterpart to the all-powerful immutable Creator God of the Old Testament. In the Semitic tradition, only Satan may take the form of a beast.

Once again, Doniger fails to grasp the point that Dharma is an **aspect** of God, a lesser deity, emblematic of a governing principle that permeates the world. The story is meant to illustrate Yudhishtira’s strength of conviction. But by making the dog the central character of this tale, and truncating it at the point of Yudhishtira’s admission into heaven, Doniger perverts its message to fit her inflammatory theory that the dog is a symbol for Pariahs.

No practicing Hindu would see this story as anything but a parable for steadfast righteousness. One has never heard anyone interpret it as a veiled justification to ill-treat or exclude Pariahs! That species of insight is reserved for scholars like Doniger who approach Sanskrit text as though it were a Rorschach inkblot, subject to the same arbitrariness of meaning.

The dog that is Dharma in disguise is not an “illusory cop-out” (as Doniger states in the next chapter, page 281) but a reminder that the code of ethics must be applied in all circumstances to all beings. And the dog is only part of Yudhishtira’s test, which continues after he enters heaven.

That part of the story is presented as a separate excerpt by Doniger in Chapter 11, which is beyond the scope of this review. A

commentary on Doniger's presentation of Yudhishtira's experiences in heaven is attached in Appendix 3.

**Page 269, para 5:** *"...it is just a story – and not only just a story, but just a test (as they used to say of air-raid signals on the radio), one of a series of tests that Dharma set for his son, all of which he passed (17.3.18). For the dog never does go to heaven, never violates Hindu law, because there was no dog; it was all an illusion. In case of a real dog... what then? The story shows just how rotten the caste system is but does not change it. No dogs get into heaven."*

**Comment:** This self-righteous blather does not deserve to be dignified with a response. See Appendix 3 for a commentary on Yudhishtira's experiences in heaven.

The irony of Doniger's pious distaste for the imagined endorsement of the caste system emerges in the next and final excerpt. Of course, Doniger ignores the positive images of dogs in classical Hinduism, where four dogs are sometimes said to represent the four Vedas! For example, the deity Dattatreya is accompanied by four dogs. In the hagiographies of Shankaracharya, Lord Shiva and the four Vedas appear before the sage in the form of a Chandala and his four dogs.

**Page 271, fn.:** *"No mother in India nowadays names her son Yudhishtira, as she might name him Arjuna or even Indra."*

**Comment:** Untrue. A simple Google search will reveal some individuals with this name. This reviewer personally knows a gentleman with this name (nicknamed 'Yudi').

**Page 275, Para 2:** INDRA'S ANIMAL SACRIFICE DEBATE

*"Once upon a time, Indra began a great sacrifice, involving the slaughter of many animals. But as the sacrificial animals were seized...the great sages...were consumed by pity... a sacrifice performed with materials wrongly obtained, or with an evil mind, does not yield the fruits of dharma.*

*People – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras – do go to heaven by giving away what they have gleaned, and also by compassion to all creatures, and chastity, and sympathy (14.94.1-34 )"*

**Comment:** Aha. So there IS a story in the Mahabharata after all, that lays out a way for everyone belonging to every varna to get into heaven. And they may do so not just by going through the prescribed motions of some ritual sacrifice but by demonstrating key qualities of

character. Perhaps this is what Doniger means by “contradictions” in the Mahabharata – those annoying details that spring up despite her most vigilant efforts to exclude them -- that defeat her best efforts to create chaos out of order.

**Postscript:** This is just a critique of some 24 pages out of a total of 690, one chapter out of 25. And though it appears exhaustive, there are aspects of the chapter that remain unaddressed. A complete analysis with supporting research would practically require an alternative book. In her introduction, Doniger describes what she terms her “double agenda”:

*“...first to point out the places where the Sanskrit sources themselves include vernacular, female and lower-class voices and then to include, wherever possible, non-Sanskrit sources. The (Sanskrit) medium is not always the message; it’s not all about Brahmins, Sanskrit, the Gita. I will concentrate on ... the times of the “mixing of classes” (varna –samkara) that the Brahmins always tried – inevitably in vain – to prevent.”*<sup>258</sup>

Having stated that, *she proceeds to devote the major portion of the book to discussing the Sanskrit texts -- Rig Veda, the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, the Shastras, and the Puranas – all of which might be considered “mainstream” Hinduism.* There is just one chapter on Bhakti in South India. She omits mentioning significant works from Tamil literature, the great Tirukkural of Tiruvalluvar being just one example.

Avvayar and Tiruvalluvar were among the greatest philosopher-poets of Tamil literature. Avvayar’s verses appear simple, but encompass profound social truths. Tiruvalluvar, a weaver by trade, wrote a literary masterpiece on ethics and statecraft that even today is sworn on in South Indian law courts.<sup>259</sup> Some sources claim Avvayar and Tiruvalluvar were siblings, born to Bhagavan, a Brahmin, and Adi, a non-Brahmin. If this is true, it would mean that Indian society took *varna-samkara* pretty much in stride some 2000 years BD (Before Doniger).

As the survivor of a hurled egg at her 2003 lecture in the UK, Doniger passionately describes her overarching sense of mission. She responds to the accusation that she

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<sup>258</sup>*The Hindus ...* by Wendy Doniger, Preface, page 2

<sup>259</sup>*Dancing with Siva* by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, page 620

*“cited a part of the Hindu textual tradition that one Hindu ‘had never heard of,’ my reply is: Yes! And it’s my intention to go on doing just that. The parts of his own tradition that he objected to are embraced by many other Hindus and are, in any case, historically part of the record. One reason why this book is so long is that I wanted to show how very much there is of all that the egg faction would deny. And so I intend to go on celebrating the diversity and pluralism, not to mention the worldly wisdom and sensuality of the Hindus that I have loved for about fifty years now and still counting.”*<sup>260</sup>

And there, in plain view, lies the answer to the question as to why Doniger mocks, diminishes, and misrepresents Hinduism over the greater part of a nearly 700 –page book. Love hurts.

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<sup>260</sup>*The Hindus....*by Wendy Doniger, Preface, Page 16

## APPENDIX 1: CHRONOLOGY OF THE MAHABHARATA AND THE RAMAYANA

By K S Ramachandran

Doniger says that cities like Hastinapura were established before other cities like Varanasi (Kashi) in Eastern India. The basis for this assertion is not clear.

If Doniger bases her rationale on the Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT), which visualizes Aryans coming in from Central Asia, via the Khyber pass and gradually moving into India from the Northwest down through the Ganga valley to Eastern India – she is on very thin ice. The AIT currently stands challenged, if not totally discredited. Any conclusions based on that theory – like the inference that Western Indian cities MUST have been settled earlier than the Eastern Indian cities— should be considered equally discredited or challenged.

Doniger claims that the Ramayana makes reference to Mahabharata from time to time. I have never heard anything this in all my 80 years. I consulted Dr. L. Swaminathan, an individual who made it his life's mission to translate the Valmiki Ramayana into English for the younger generation of India, releasing the first eight volumes back in 2002. He has spent years reading every word of it. He states categorically that there is no such reference to the Mahabharata in the Ramayana.

There are innumerable retold and amended versions of the major epics. It is said that there are over 300 different versions of Ramayana in Sanskrit and the 14 major languages of India. In an Indonesian version, Hanuman is the hero and Rama the minor player. However, the only versions relevant to a discussion of chronology are the Valmiki Ramayana and Vyasa's Mahabharata.

With respect to Doniger's contention that the Mahabharata narrative was composed earlier than that of the Ramayana, the following specific points are relevant:

- a. The Ramayana does not refer to the Mahabharata, but the Mahabharata refers to the Ramayana.
- b. During the Pandavas' stay in the forests, Draupadi sends Bhima to find a Parijata flower. On his way, he comes across an old monkey which later reveals himself as Hanuman, the devotee of Rama.

- c. When some years later, Bhima asks for Hanuman's assistance in the war against the Kauravas, Hanuman refuses to fight. He agrees to sit on top of the chariot of Arjuna in his flag to give him moral support. However, he insists on facing away from the battlefield, stating that he has no interest in witnessing any battle after participating in the greatest of them all, between Rama and Ravana.
- d. Toward the end of the epic, Krishna is mistakenly shot with a poisoned arrow by a hunter. Krishna tells him that he forgives the hunter, because the latter was Vaali in his previous birth, who was killed by Rama (the previous birth of Krishna). The incident ending the Krishna avatar squares up the accounts for the wrongful killing of Vaali from behind a tree in the Rama avatar.
- e. In the Ramayana, the area south of the Vindhya is described as Dandakaranya, a densely forested region populated by monkeys, bears and Rakshasas. In the Mahabharata, Arjuna's travels take him all over India, including South India. Reference is made to his having married Princess Chitrangada of the Pandya kingdom in the extreme south of India. At the Kurukshetra battle, the kings of 56 States of India participated. This suggests that the subcontinent was more widely settled during the Mahabharata period than that of the Ramayana, where, with the exception of the kingdom of Sri Lanka, there is no reference to other established southern states.

### THE DOG WHO WOULD BE A LION

Doniger takes the story of the sage and the dog and imparts to it her own ingenious distortions. She sees it as symbolic of the upwardly mobile aspirations of an untouchable being cruelly thwarted by a higher caste mentor-turned-oppressor. The simple truth is that this story has never been viewed in this light in India, nor was it intended to be. Here first is the moral that an Indian would draw from it.

The dog ultimately was banished from the ashram by the sage for its **ingratitude**, which is regarded as an unpardonable offence. The following story, possibly from the *Katha Sarit Sagara* by Somadeva (11<sup>th</sup> Century CE) conveys the same lesson:

A prince fleeing from a tiger clammers up a tree. When he thinks he is safe from the tiger, he finds that there is a big bear on the same

branch where he took refuge. The bear tells the prince not to be scared: “Do not worry, I will protect you.”

Later that night, when the prince nods off, the tiger tells the bear to push the prince down. “We are animals, and this prince is a human, whose only purpose in coming to the forest is to hunt us down. So it would not be wrong for you to betray him. Throw him down so that I may feast on him.” The bear refuses.

In the latter part of the night, when it is the bear’s turn to sleep and the prince keeps vigil, the tiger tempts him to push the bear down. “That way you can be absolutely sure you will be safe,” the tiger says. The foolish prince agrees and tries to push the bear. But the bear, ever vigilant, wakes up and curses the prince. It says:

*Mitra-drohi, krutaghnascha  
Yascha vishvasa-ghaatakaha  
Triyasthey narakam yaanti  
Yaavat chandradivaakaram.*

*The betrayer of a friend, an ungrateful person  
and one who commits a breach of faith  
all these three go to hell  
as long as there is a sun and a moon.*

Here it is the animal that curses a human being, even though he is from the second-highest caste. Beyond the moral admonishment of the final verse, this story teaches one to look beyond external attributes to gauge the true worth of an individual. Fine clothes and high birth do not automatically bestow high character; a bear may well have more integrity than a prince.

But Doniger’s inventive genius may yet divine some hidden justification for caste oppression from this story!

Returning to the story of the dog and the sage, the following points come to mind with respect to Doniger’s analysis:

- a. The dog did not **ask** to be made a leopard. It simply went to the sage for protection. It was the sage who turned the dog into a leopard in order to save it. In other words, the dog did not **seek** “upward



mobility,” only safety. But it was **granted** upward mobility by the sage, not once, but several times over the course of the story.

b. The sage converted the dog back not because he suddenly decided he was against the dog’s “upward mobility,” but because the dog that has been made a lion is so blinded by his sense of power and self-importance that he decides to eat the sage.

c. Most significantly, the dog does not aspire to be the sage. The dog aspires only to have power over the sage.

d. The stronger animals are not portrayed as having any objection to a dog being made one of their species

In short, no reasonable person could draw the conclusions derived by Doniger, that this is a story that illustrates the resistance of the upper castes to the upward aspirations of the lower castes.

There is a more subtle lesson in the sage’s actions. The sage ultimately sends the dog away because he has become too attached to it, and projects too much of his personal expectations and standards on the dog. This likely comes at the expense of his intellectual and philosophical pursuits. Detachment is one of the primary requirements of a *sanyasin*, a sage.

And there is no wisdom without discrimination. When we find ourselves pouring ourselves into supporting thankless individuals or causes that consume us without yielding any positive outcome, the greatest wisdom may lie in knowing when to stop and channel those energies inward.

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## Appendix 2: THE DOG WHO WOULD BE A LION

Once there was an ascetic of such goodness that the flesh-eating wild animals – lions and tigers and bears, as well as rutting elephants, leopards and rhinoceroses – were like his disciples. A dog, weak and emaciated from eating only fruits and roots, like the sage, became attached to him out of affection, tranquil, with a heart like that of a human being. One day a hungry leopard came there and was about to seize the dog as his prey when the dog begged the sage to save him. The sage turned him into a leopard, and then, when a tiger attacked, into a tiger, and then a rutting elephant, and a lion.<sup>261</sup> Now that he was carnivorous, all the animals feared him and stayed away, and finally he wanted to eat the sage, who read his thoughts and turned him back into a dog, his own proper form by birth (*jati*). The dog moped about unhappily until the sage drove him out of the hermitage. [12.115-19]

**Source:** *The Hindus, An Alternative History* by Wendy Doniger; Chapter 10, Page 267

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<sup>261</sup> He also becomes a *sharabha*, a fierce mythical beast, variously described.

### Appendix 3: Yudhishtira in Heaven

In Chapter 11, Doniger manages again with tedious predictability to misrepresent the point of Yudhishtira's experiences in heaven. She introduces her version of the narrative with the absurd statement that *"The Mahabharata totters on the brink of a full-fledged concept of the transfer of karma, in ... the story after Yudhishtira has entered heaven ( with Dharma, no longer incarnate as a dog)."* (Page 280)

To summarize, in the original *Svargavarohanika Parva* of the *Mahabharata*, Yudhishtira is angered by the sight of Duryodhana enjoying himself in the best part of heaven. Yudhishtira demands to be taken to his brothers and Draupadi. He is led to an evil-smelling and hideous place where he hears voices calling out in torment. As he is about to return, the voices ask him to stay, identifying themselves as Draupadi and his brothers. Furious and grief-stricken that they should be languishing in such a foul place, he rails against the gods, and declares he will stay behind to alleviate their discomfort. It is at this point that Yudhishtira's stature as the epitome of dharma is confirmed, the illusion dissolves, his virtue is extolled by the gods led by his father Dharma, and he is restored to heaven -- where those he seeks were really residing all the while.

However, the distinguishing quality of Yudhishtira's commitment to dharma entirely eludes Doniger, who is intent on making her point about "the transfer of karma." She says, *"Yudhishtira's ability to ease his brothers' torments takes the form of a cool, sweet breeze that counteracts the hot, putrid air of hell, through a kind of transfer of merit."* (Page 281) She adds in a footnote: *"There is a rough parallel to this idea in the Catholic practice of offering up your suffering to shorten the sentences of souls in purgatory."*

The parallel is ridiculous. The point is not that Yudhishtira eased anyone's suffering -- the suffering he witnessed was an illusion meant to test him. Nor is karma presented here as a kind of transferable currency that can be loaned out -- **in fact the exact opposite is shown to be the case.** The reason Yudhishtira experiences hell, however briefly, is punishment for his only transgression on the battlefield: that is, deceiving Dronacharya into believing that the latter's son, Aswaththama, was dead.

The Hindu understanding of karma is completely distinct from the Catholic concept of expiation, which visualizes one's sins as being absorbed and nullified by the very act of surrender to their savior. Hindus certainly have their rituals of expiation, such as bathing in holy rivers and

performing specific Pujas. However, these are instruments of mitigation, rather than total erasure, of bad karma. Every individual is regarded to be subject to the consequences of his or her karma – not even Krishna was exempt. His death at the hands of a hunter is presented as expiation for his wrongful killing of Vaali in the previous Rama avatar.

### 13. Review of the Chapter 11, “*Dharma in the Mahabharata*” by Vishal Agarwal

**General Comments on Chapter 11:** Feminists can interpret the attire choice of skimpily clad women models in two ways – One is that they these models have the agency to do what they want, and therefore their attires reflect their freedom. And the other is that they degrade and demean women by projecting themselves as sex-objects to ogling males. Doniger would vehemently disagree with the second perspective. She claims that her book gives a voice to the women of the Hindu society, and that she highlights their contributions to the Hindu tradition.

But in reality, the Hindu women featured in her book are projected primarily in relation to their sexual acts – whether it is rape, prostitution, polyandry, polygamy, incest, adultery, orgies and so on. In doing so, Doniger has debased Hindu women and has truly demeaned them by hypersexualizing them. Doniger’s claim that it is all in the Hindu scriptures is merely a pretense, because when we examine the original sources, we find Doniger’s descriptions largely a reproduction of her own fertile and perverse imagination. One can almost feel her sense of jealousy as she describes her characters’ polyandry, adultery etc. Doniger just makes a perfunctory mention of the fact that the women of the Mahabharata are not push-overs, but are feisty and daring. But beyond that mention, she only seems to be interested in their real or imagined sexual lives. There are many genuinely scholarly works available that demonstrate how the women in the Mahabharata were not just the extra rib of men, but acted as their teachers, guides, leaders, philosophers, rulers and so on.<sup>262</sup> But Doniger has a unique perspective, and she sees them only through one aperture, as do male chauvinist pigs.

In an online blog, Doniger once complained that the US politician Sarah Palin’s “*greatest hypocrisy is in her pretense that she is a woman.*” In a later interview, she elaborated that although ‘she isn’t an expert on Sarah Palin’s hormones and doesn’t doubt that Palin has a womb, but

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<sup>262</sup> For example, see:

Badrinath Chaturvedi (2008), *The Women of the Mahabharata*, Orient Longman (Hyderabad)

Vanamala Bhawalkar (1999), *Woman in the Mahabharata*, Sharada Publishing House (Delhi)

Palin wasn't acting like a woman.<sup>263</sup> Doniger reserves the same lewd, crude and rude attitudes towards the women characters of the Mahabharata. In fact, it is Doniger who seems to be acting like a sexist male all the time. And by implication, her book projects the Hindu male as a woman-oppressing beast. One looks in vain for her references to Queen Vidula, whose story is cited by Kunti to rouse her sons to reclaim their kingdom; or the wise Subala who debates with King Janaka; or the sagacious counsels of Draupadi to Yudhishtira. Doniger does not seem to find anything interesting in them.

And when she treats the Tribals and lower caste Hindus, she fails to note their contributions or achievements as recorded in the Mahabharata itself. She completely distorts the narrative on Ekalavya ignoring what the Harivamsha Purana (the appendix to the Mahabharata) has to say about him – that he was a cousin of Krishna given in adoption to the Nishada king! Verses in the Mahabharata that question birth as the basis of caste are cherry-picked to distort the Mahabharata's perspective on the matter. Doniger could have written something about how the Kshatriya status of Krishna was challenged by Shishupala, and that his community, the Yadavas, are considered Shudras today. Or how the Mahabharata mentions Rishis like Kapinjalada who was a Chandala, or Madanapala, the son of a boatwoman. But perhaps, these examples would not have given her a chance to interpret things through the lens of kinky sex.

Doniger starts the chapter on the correct note – that the Mahabharata is mainly about Dharma. But then, she does not tell the reader what the Mahabharata really says about Dharma. She treats the Gita very perfunctorily and in a very shallow manner, often distorting what the verses of that scripture say. She has nothing to say about the vast didactic sections in the Vanaparva, Shantiparva, Anushasanaparva and the Ashvamedhaparva; or even what Vidura, the son of a Shudra maid, had to say about Dharma, or what these sections of the Mahabharata had to say about women or animals. Quite clearly, the title of the chapter does not fit the contents. A better title would have been, "Wendy Doniger's rides on the horse of Adharma."

Doniger's book is witty, but very misleading, and demeaning to the Hindus. Projecting the Hindus as "The Erotic Other" seems to be the

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<sup>263</sup><http://thismodernage.wordpress.com/2008/09/11/dr-wendy-doniger-on-gov-sarah-palin/> <checked on 24 February 2014>

new form of racism in Indology these days. Like the rest of the book, this chapter also abounds in typos and wrong references to Hindu scriptures. In many cases, we discover Doniger's claims to be totally false. We give a few examples of these below.

**Page 282, para 3:** "*Krishna had been gracious enough to offer to be Arjuna's charioteer, an inferior position, though appropriate to Krishna's quasi-Brahmin nature.*"\*

*\*As the priest Vrisha had served as the charioteer for King Tryaruna.....In that mock Gita, the inversion of power and status (the great warrior as lowly charioteer) foreshadows that of the Gita, in which as Arjuna was to the prince, so Krishna is to Arjuna, a creature of great destructive power who velvets his claws for the sake of human affection."*

**Comment:** Doniger's characterization of Krishna as a quasi-Brahmin is based on the solitary example of Vrisha serving as King Tryaruna (in a Brahmana text) and is quite a stretch. The Hindu tradition uniformly perceives it as the grace of Krishna on his devotee Arjuna that He chose to be Arjuna's charioteer. To characterize Krishna as 'a creature of great destructive power' is very crude and offensive, given that the Hindus regard Krishna as a Divine Incarnation.

**Page 283, para 3:** "*The Gita sets out a paradigm of three paths (margas) to salvation, also called three yogas: karma (works, rituals), jnana (cognate with "knowledge" and "gnosis"), and bhakti (2.49, 3.3).*"

**Comment:** Neither of the two verses of the Gita cited talk about Bhakti. Verse 2.49 says that following Buddhiyoga is superior to mere Karma, whereas Gita 3.3 says that there are two paths of Karmayoga and Jnanayoga.

**Page 283, para 3:** "*One way in which bhakti modifies moksha is by introducing into the Upanishadic formula – that you are brahman (the divine substance of the universe) – a god with qualities (sa-guna) who allows you to love the god without qualities (nir-guna).*"

**Comment:** Doniger's text makes it appear that Bhakti is absent in pre-Gita era. In fact, Bhakti is attested as early as the Rigveda.<sup>264</sup> We find references to it in the Upanishads, in Shvetashvatara Upanishad

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<sup>264</sup> See: Jeanine Miller (1996), *Does Bhakti Appear in the Rgveda*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (Mumbai)

6.23<sup>265</sup> and in Kaivalya Upanishad 2.<sup>266</sup> It is somewhat anachronistic to use the Saguna-Nirguna categories in the context of Upanishads, which seem not to draw a sharp distinction between the two aspects of Brahman.

**Page 283, fn.:** *“The Gita also recapitulates the Upanishadic idea of the third path of no return: Krishna says that he hurls cruel, hateful men into demonic wombs in birth after birth, so that they never reach him but go the lowest way to hell (16.19-20).”*

**Comment:** Contrary to what Doniger implies, the Upanishads nowhere say that a soul goes to some eternal hell and then never reaches Brahman. Likewise, she misinterprets the Gita verses 16.19-20 to read the eternal Christian hell in them, whereas Hinduism does not believe in the notion of an eternal hell. For instance, Gita 4.36 states that even the greatest sinner is redeemed when he turns towards Bhagavān.

**Page 286, para 2:** Doniger alludes to the color symbolism of the four Varnas in the Mahabharata and then gives a very fanciful speculation derived from Brian Smith’s book ‘Classifying the Universe’<sup>267</sup>: *“In the course of one of the long discussions of dharma, one sage says to another, “Brahmins are fair [white], Kshatriyas ruddy [red], Vaishyas sallow [yellow], and Shudras dark [black].” These adjectives can denote either skin color or the four primary colors that are symbolically associated with the four classes, as well as with the three qualities of matter plus yellow (saffron? Ochre?) for the transcendent fourth of spirit.”*

**Comment:** Doniger’s reading of the symbolism of the colors falls flat because she is forced to equate yellow (Vaishya) to the transcendent spirit. This would make the Vaishyas superior to the Brahmanas. There is a more straightforward explanation - The Brahmanas are embodiments of wisdom, learning, virtue and truth. Their character and behavior are ‘spotless’. Therefore, they are assigned the color white. Kshatriyas are the protectors of their society, rulers and have to exert all

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<sup>265</sup> The Upanishad is probably cited in chapter 13 of the Gita.

<sup>266</sup> This Upanishad is cited by name by Adi Shankaracharya in his commentary on the Aitareya Upanishad (introduction part) and so was obviously considered an ancient Upanishad by his time.

<sup>267</sup> For a critical look at this book, refer to Vidyanath Rao’s review at <http://www.voiceofdharma.org/indology/briansmith.html> <checked on 24 February 2014>



their power and anger against the enemies of the society and the country. Red is the color of violence, passion and anger, and has been assigned to Kshatriyas. The yellow color reminds one of gold, and the color of several grains such as wheat. Vaishyas have the yellow color because they are associated with food and other wealth. Shudras are illiterate and ignorant, and as a result, they do not know the distinction between what is right, and what is wrong as well as other members of the society. Therefore, the color assigned to them is black, indicating the darkness of ignorance and falsehood.

**Page 286, para 3:** Doniger then quotes Mahabharata 12.181.5-14 that contains a dialogue between Rishis Bhrigu and Bharadvaja on how the four colors are found in all of the four Varnas. The text states how everyone belonged to the Brahmana varna initially but most acquired other Varnas by giving up their original Dharma and acquiring newer ones. Doniger concludes her discussion of this passage with the comment that this privileges the Brahmanas because they alone are said to have stuck to their original Dharma whereas the others fell from the original Dharma and were therefore demoted to other Varnas (page 287, para 1).

**Comment:** This is a very idiosyncratic interpretation of the passage because its central import seems to be totally different than what Doniger implies. The passage rather seems to argue that it is not birth but one's characteristics and behavior that determine our true Varna. This interpretation is supported by the verses that occur in the next chapter –

Sage Bhrigu said: He who has been purified by Jātakarma and other rites of passage (samskāras), who is engrossed in the study of the Vedas, who performs the six duties (twilight worship of sandhyā, ablutions, japa or recitation of sacred texts, homa or Vedic fire sacrifice, worship of deities and serving guests and all other living creatures)...**Mahabharata 12.182.2**

Who is saturated with purity and good conduct, who eats only the food that is left over after offering to the Deities, who is the beloved of his Guru, always keeps his religious vows and always pursues truth – he is indeed called a Brahmana. **Mahabharata 12.182.3**

Truth, charity, control over senses, absence of enmity, absence of cruelty, forgiveness, compassion and austerity – in whom these characteristics are seen, he alone is called a Brahmana. **Mahabharata 12.182.4**

He who pursues the duties of protecting masses, is engrossed in the study of Vedas, gives alms and collects taxes is called a Kshatriya. **Mahabharata 12.182.5**

Agriculture, dairy farming, trade, give charity, study the Vedas and remaining pure – he who has these characteristics is called a Vaishya. **Mahabharata 12.182.6**

That person who is always engrossed in enjoying material objects, who performs manual tasks, is impure, does not study the Vedas and indulges in inappropriate behavior – such a person is called a Shūdra. **Mahabharata 12.182.7**

If the characteristics of a Shūdra are not seen in a Shūdra, then he is not a Shūdra. And if the characteristics of a Brahmana are not found in a Brahmana, then he is not a Brahmana. **Mahabharata 12.182.8**

And even elsewhere, the Mahabharata conveys the same message as we have explained above, not what Doniger interprets it to be. For example, we can cite these additional verses:

*The snake asked:* There are four Varnas in this world – Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shūdras. All the four of them accept the authority of the Vedas. If a Shūdra exhibits qualities of character such as truth, charity, forgiveness, refined behavior, ahimsa and compassion, then will he become a Brahmana? **Mahabharata 3.177.18**

*Yudhishtira replied:* If the expected characteristics are not seen in a Brahmana or in a Shūdra, then that Brahmana is not a Brahmana and that Shūdra is not a Shūdra. **Mahabharata 3.177.20**

But the Shūdra in whom these qualities (of a Brahmana) are present is a Brahmana, and in the Brahmana in whom the qualities of a Shūdra are present is a Shūdra indeed. **Mahabharata 3.177.21**

*Yudhishtira said:* O Snake, in my opinion, all human beings in this world have an admixture of Varnas in them. Therefore, it is very difficult to determine their true Varna from their lineage. **Mahabharata 3.177.26**

I see that men of all Varnas beget children from women of all Varnas. Speech, sex, birth and death – these are common to all human beings. **Mahabharata 3.177.27**

‘May we sacrifice to the Devas, whoever we are’ – through the force of this Vedic statement, all humans perform Vedic yajnas. Therefore, the wise consider character alone as the primary factor (in deciding one’s Varna). **Mahabharata 3.177.28**

If, even after the performance of the sacred rites of passage (samskāras), an absence of good character is seen in a person, then consider an admixture of castes to be the strongest cause (of why that person does not conform to the nature of his Varna). **Mahabharata 3.177.31**

Therefore, he who is cultured and has a good character alone has been described by me as a Brahmana. **Mahabharata 3.177.32**

It is our interpretation alone (and not Doniger’s) that makes complete sense of the passages cited by Doniger herself:

*Sage Bhrigu said:* (Prajāpati Brahmā) made white as the color of Brahmanas, red as the color of Kshatriyas, yellow as the color of the Vaishyas and black as the color of the Shūdras. **Mahabharata 12.181.5**

*Sage Bharadvāja asked:* If the four Varnas were assigned different colors, then it appears that there has resulted in an admixture of Varnas in members of all the four Varnas. **Mahabharata 12.181.6**

Lust, anger, fear, greed, sorrow, worry, hunger and physical labor – these are found in all the four Varnas. Then how come there arose four distinct Varnas? **Mahabharata 12.181.7**

Sweat, feces, urine, mucous, phlegm and blood – these come out of everyone’s bodies. Then how come color decided the Varna of humans? **Mahabharata 12.181.8**

**Page 287, para 2:** Doniger then continues on how the Gita’s emphasis on Svadharma puts the non-Brahmins at a permanent disadvantage: “*Krishna’s declaration to Arjuna in the Gita that “it is better to do your own duty poorly than another’s well” (echoed in Manu [10.97]) ignored the fact that Arjuna’s own duty as a warrior would forever doom him to relative inferiority vis-à-vis Brahmins whose sva-dharma just happened to conform with the universal dharma that dictated non-violence.*”

**Comment:** It appears that Doniger has really not understood the Gita well enough. Performance of Svadharma by non-Brahmans does not ‘permanently’ (or even temporarily) relegate them to an inferior status. The Gita clearly says, immediately after describing the duties of the four varnas (verses 18.42-44) in its concluding chapter that,

“Devoted each to his own duty man attains perfection....He from whom all beings arise and by whom all this is pervaded – by worshipping Him through the performance of his own duty does man attain perfection. Better is one’s Svadharma though imperfectly carried out than the Dharma of another carried out perfectly. One does not incur sin when one does the duty ordained by one’s own nature. One should not give up the work suited to one’s nature, O son of Kunti, though it may be defective, for all enterprises are clouded by defects as fire by smoke. He whose understanding is attached everywhere, who has subdued his self and from whom desire has fled – he comes through renunciation to the supreme state transcending all work.”  
(Gita 18.45-49)<sup>268</sup>

These verses make it clear that members of **all Varnas** are equally entitled to Moksha and that non-Brahmanas are not at a disadvantage because what really matters is that we do our Svadharma with a spirit of renunciation and as an offering to Bhagavan.

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<sup>268</sup> I have used S. Radhakrishnan’s translation.

Quite clearly, Doniger does not understand this central message of the Gita nor has she comprehended the other spiritual scriptures of Hindus very well.<sup>269</sup> Her chapters on the Upanishads and the Darshanas also show that she is totally clueless, notwithstanding her other book on Karma and Rebirth in Hinduism. Ironically, Doniger here equates the Svadharma of Brahmana with Ahimsa, but elsewhere, she considers the Svadharma of Brahmana as a violent Vedic Yajna. Not having understood the import of the Hindu scriptures, she ties herself into knots.

**Page 289, para 2:** Doniger then narrates the story of Ekalavya in great detail, following the current political propagandist interpretations. She says, *“First of all, who is Ekalavya? He is a prince among his own people, but that wins him no points with the Pandava princes. The Nishadas here embrace Hindu Dharma and Hindu forms of worship but they are still beneath the contempt of the caste system. For such a person to stand beside the Pandava princes in archery classes was unthinkable; that is what Drona, who “knew Dharma,” realized.”*

**Comment:** First, we need to understand that Ekalavya was not a Nishada by birth as assumed by Doniger. Krishna’s father Vasudeva had five brothers. One of them named Shrutadeva. His son Ekalavya was raised by a tribal chief named Hiranyadhanus. Therefore, Ekalavya was the cousin of Krishna, even though he grew up to be the Prince of the Nishāda (tribal) kingdom.<sup>270</sup>

Several years later, when Yudhishtira was crowned as the Emperor of India in his capital Indraprastha (modern Delhi), Ekalavya represented his people and carried the shoes of the Emperor. The Mahābhārata and Harivamsha Purāṇa note that all the cousins of Krishna, except the Pāṇdavas, got into conflict with Him for some reason or the other. In one

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<sup>269</sup> Within the Gita itself, Krishna assures that those following Bhakti, whether male or female, Brahmanas or Shudras or even Chandalas and animals (‘paapayonayah’) can attain Moksha. In his Anugita in the Ashwamedha Parva, Krishna also opens the path of Dhyana Yoga to all classes of the society (citing the same verse that he uses for Bhakti Yoga). Likewise in the Kapila-Asuri samvaada found in southern manuscripts of the Mahabharata, the path of Jnana is opened even to ‘Pulkassas and Chandalas’. All this is very consistent with the core Hindu viewpoint that the path of Moksha is open to all.

<sup>270</sup> These details of Ekalavya’s family are given in the Harivamsha Purāṇa. For a scholarly treatment of the Ekalavya story and his antecedents, refer to T R N Rao’s contribution in T R N Rao and S Kalyanaraman (2010), Eds.; *Portrayal of Hinduism in Western Indology*, World Association of Vedic Studies (USA)

such conflict, Ekalavya sided with King Pundraka, an enemy of his cousin Krishna. Ekalavya killed numerous soldiers of Dwārakā in the war. Balarāma, the brother of Krishna, challenged him to a mace-duel, and chased out Ekalavya to live on an island off the coast of western India. However, even from that island, Ekalavya continued to attack the kingdom of Dwārakā and harass the Yādava community till Krishna finally killed him.

And Drona, although he knew Dharma, did not practice it. He rejected Ekalavya because he had promised to Bhishma that the Pandavas will be the greatest warriors, in return for great wealth from the Kuru treasury. The Mahabharata does not eulogize Drona and projects him as a jilted friend (due to his childhood friend King Drupad's betrayal) who lost all perspective while amassing wealth for the sake of his son Ashvatthāmā. To read caste too much into this reality is a distortion of the text, as Doniger has done.

**Page 294, para 1:** “...*the five Pandavas have one mother (and one wife) and one human father but different divine fathers.*”

**Comment:** The Pandavas had two mothers – Kunti and Madri, not one. Doniger does mention Madri in the chapter but in her zeal to sound witty and cute, she forgets it here in this sentence.

**Page 295, para 2:** “*The sun god Surya took her [Kunti] seriously, despite her vigorous protests and entreaties, he raped her...*”

**Comment:** The Mahabharata does not say that Surya raped Kunti ‘despite her protests and entreaties’ (as Doniger puts it), and it appears that Doniger *wants* Surya to have raped her, given her preference for all kinds of unnatural sex and her perverse mind. It is really all in her mind.

Let us quote the translation of the relevant verses straight from J A B van Buitenen’s version, accepted by Indologists, “*At these words of the Brahmin she grew curious; and, being still a virgin, she gloriously called up the Sun God. There she saw the Sun come who makes the worlds thrive; and stunned, the flawless maiden stared at that great wonder. The burning God whose work it is to spread light planted a child in her; and by him she gave birth to a hero....The supreme light restored her virginity to her....To hide her misconduct and out of fear for her*

*relations, Kunti then threw the boy who bore the marks of his greatness into the river.”*<sup>271</sup>

Doniger lives in a country that has one of the highest rates of teenage pregnancies in the world, and many of them result from the curiosity of the participating teenager couples. Perhaps Doniger would term all of them as rapes because she has a special fondness for words like ‘rape’, ‘addiction’, ‘seduction’.

**Page 295, para 3:** *“Beneath the sterile or impotent fathers lie angry women. The lineage of the heroes is a series of seductions and rapes; of Satyawati, Amba, Ambika, Ambalika, Kunti and Madri.”*

**Comment:** Doniger just wants to somehow use the words ‘seduction’ and ‘rape.’ None of the six women mentioned were raped in the Mahabharata unless we stretch the definition of rape to include a lot of things beyond what rape actually is, and I am not being Clintonesque here. Other than Satyawati, none of the women was seduced. Once again, it is all in Doniger’s perverse mind. Nor does the text depict Madri, Kunti, Satyawati, Ambika or Ambalika as angry women.

**Page 295, para 4:** *“Other events in the lives of these women suggest their unprecedented and, alas, never again duplicated freedom.”*

**Comment:** Reading this section of the chapter, it appears that to Doniger, ‘freedom’ meant the ability of women to have several sexual partners, because the entire section following this sentence deals with polyandrous relationships. One can see a hint of jealousy in Doniger’s tone when she describes Draupadi who had five husbands. This revealing remark explains Doniger’s obsession with sex when dealing with the women of the Mahabharata. Hindu women do not need Doniger’s sexualization to be liberated. Doniger has in fact, demeaned Hindu womanhood by her monomaniacal obsession with the sex lives of Mahabharata women, rather than focusing on their teachings, leadership, guidance to men and other qualities.

**Page 297, para 3:** *“When Duryodhana has Draupadi dragged into the assembly hall, much as Rama summons Sita to the public assembly...”*

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<sup>271</sup> J A B van Buitenen (1973), *The Mahabharata I. The Book of the Beginning*, The University of Chicago Press (Chicago), p. 241

**Comment:** This is a completely unwarranted parallel (that juxtaposes a villain Duryodhana with the virtuous Rama), and is a deliberate insult to the Hindus who revere Rama as a Divine incarnation. Doniger's deliberate provocation reveals her juvenile mindset.

**Page 298, para 2, fn.:** Doniger refers to the scene of the disrobing of Draupadi by Dushasana, and his inability to do so because every time he pulls off one Sari, another appears beneath it to cover her. Dushasana pulls off Sari after Sari till a small heap is formed, and then he gives up, tired.

The critical edition of the Mahabharata considers the verses in which Krishna responds to her prayers and extends her clothes endlessly as an interpolation. Doniger thinks that this interpolation takes away agency from Draupadi (because it credits Krishna with protecting her chastity and not Draupadi herself). She says, with regard to this supposed interpolation, *"There is a real loss of feminist ground here."*

**Comment:** It is quite a stretch to examine this episode and the supposed interpolations through the feminist lens. The Hindus have always interpreted Krishna's miracle as proof that the Divine protects His devotee (here Draupadi) when the latter surrenders to Him. There are several other episodes in the Mahabharata where Krishna comes to the rescue of Draupadi, and this is just one of them.

Far from the loss of feminist ground, it rather reinforces the rights of women who are abused against their will. For whereas in many ancient cultures women who were abused violently were considered defiled, the so called 'interpolation' actually shows that God himself upholds the dignity of a woman who was being disrobed in public.

To conclude therefore, Doniger's interpretation is simply juvenile and totally contrary to how the Hindu tradition sees it. But then, many of Doniger's interpretations are actually in the realm of fantasy.

**Page 299, para 3:** *"...A Brahmin's right to demand the sexual services of any woman he fancied evoked violent protest in ancient Indian texts, and Draupadi is herself subjected to such sexual harassment (unconsummated) on one occasion when she is in disguise as a servant and not recognized as the princess Draupadi (4.21.1-67)."*

**Comment:** This is quite an inane comparison, just like dozens of others in the book. Draupadi was harassed by Keechaka, who was not

a Brahmana but the brother in law and army commander of King Virata of the Matsya kingdom.

**Page 300, para 2, fn.** Doniger refers to the decision of Madri to immolate herself with her husband Pandu's corpse. Kunti wants the honor of immolating herself with her husband in lieu of her younger co-wife but Madri prevails upon her to live on with the children. Doniger says, (fn), "*The text regards this as Madri's triumph and privilege, but a feminist might wonder if she gets this dubious honor of committing suttee as a punishment for killing Pandu by enticing him (naturally it is the woman's fault) to the fatal coupling.*"

**Comment:** Once again, Doniger's interpretation is focused only around sex. The relevant verses are very clear that it was Pandu who seduced Madri. Moreover, a crucial detail is omitted by Doniger deliberately, because that detail would derail her inane interpretation.

That detail is that Madri requests Kunti to stay alive because she (Madri) will not be able to treat her twin sons equally with Kunti's three boys if Kunti immolates herself, whereas she was confident that Kunti will treat all of their five sons equally.<sup>272</sup>

Instead of paying attention to what the text says clearly, Doniger again meanders off and weaves a silly interpretation. Adopting her methods, anyone can interpret anything out of everything.

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<sup>272</sup> Mahabharata 1.116.25-30



## 14. Review of the Chapter 12, “*Escape Clauses in the Shastras 100 BCE to 400 BCE*” by Vishal Agarwal

### **General Comments on the Chapter- How Not to Read the**

**Shastras:** Like the rest of the book, this chapter also abounds in typos and wrong references to Hindu scriptures. In many cases, we discover Doniger’s claims to be totally false. And worst, this chapter is beset with numerous methodological flaws.

First, she restricts the term ‘shastra’ to texts produced supposedly in this period (100 BCE to 400 CE) alone. One can dispute whether Manusmriti and Athashastra belong to this period. But even if they do, there were many other texts in the category ‘shastra’ that were produced before and after this period. In the field of Dharma itself, we have several Dharmasutras (Doniger refers to them very cursorily) which definitely precede this period. Likewise, Kautilya’s Arthashastra itself quotes numerous predecessors who definitely lived before this period, but whose works do not survive. Even the Kamasutra refers to more ancient works.

Second, she restricts the chapter to a comparison and contrast of primarily three texts: Manusmriti for Dharma, Athashastra for Artha and Kamasutra for Kama. There were numerous other texts in the category ‘shastra’ (e.g., Dharma works of Apastamba, Gautama, Yajnavalkya are quite important too) but she uses them very sparingly, if at all. As a result, her chapter is very deficient in the diversity of perspectives reflected in the tradition, and ignores the importance of intertextuality in this case.

Third, Doniger thoroughly misuses Manusmriti to weave her yarns. She acknowledges that the shastras, including Manusmriti, refer to a multiplicity of opinions and she also acknowledges that this scripture probably does not reflect social reality accurately or that it was even the law of the land. Therefore, it defies our understanding why she uses Manusmriti alone and ignores numerous other works of the period to create a historiographically naïve picture of the role of women and lower castes in the Indian society. Data from other archaeological and historical sources is used very perfunctorily which makes her narrative very impoverished.

Fourth, even while referring to Manu’s opinions on different topics, she cherry-picks verses that suit her narrative, ignoring contradictory verses. And she projects Manusmriti as a confused

scripture, ignoring her own statement that Manu provides an array of diverse opinions in the spirit of inclusiveness. The Indian shastric etiquette requires that while listing different opinions, the author narrates them in the increasing order of his own acceptance of these opinions, and then give his own conclusion if at all. In other words, he first lists the opinions that are less acceptable to him, and then those which are more acceptable. The last of the various opinions represent the author's own opinion (or the one acceptable to him). Doniger ignores this elementary understanding about how Hindu Shastras deal with multivalent topics and therefore, lands up misrepresenting the purport of these Shastras.

Fifth, Doniger portrays the period as the age of chaos in India due to constant invasions from the north-west. In reality, large parts of India, at any time during the given period, remained free of foreign rule. The Kushana rule was restricted to what is now Pakistan, and a few parts of northern India. Central and peninsular India were wholly free of foreign rule.

These considerations apart, it is not out of place to mention here that Doniger's translation of Manusmriti has come in for severe criticism.<sup>273</sup>

### **Doniger's claim of Hinduism being a 'Brahmin Imaginary':**

Throughout the chapter and elsewhere in the book, Doniger vents her hatred towards the Brahmanas and portrays them very negatively. Her designation of Manu as a Brahmana is somewhat puzzling, because as a king, he would be a Kshatriya. **Vaivasta Manu (who is said to be the author of the text according to some verses in Manusmriti)<sup>274</sup> is also the Rishi of a Rigvedic hymn, and the later Arshanukramanis clearly list him as a Kshatriya.**

Throughout the book, Doniger repeats numerous times that the Hindu scriptures represent the 'Brahmin Imaginary' and that she has tried to 'recover' the lost voices of women and low castes from them, by removing the 'Brahminical filter' through which these voices passed

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<sup>273</sup> See [http://list.indology.info/pipermail/indology\\_list.indology.info/1995-November/003514.html](http://list.indology.info/pipermail/indology_list.indology.info/1995-November/003514.html)

<sup>274</sup> Other verses credit Swayambhuva Manu as the author. But even he, being a king, would be a Kshatriya, and not a Brahmana.

before becoming a part of the scriptures. Doniger's claim is not only false (because she hardly 'recovers' anything except her orientalism, and fantasies of sex and violence) but also gratuitous. In fact, her so called 'Brahminical Imaginary' is not really unique to Hinduism, because all religious traditions in the world have been shaped and given their form by a few people belonging to the elites. For instance, in Islam, the entire Koran is due to Muhammad, a member of the exalted Quraish tribe. The Old Testament of the Jews and Christians is due to Pharisees and other Jewish priestly families. The Sikh scriptures are predominantly the creations of Khatri (who were more privileged than Brahmins in the Punjab) and Brahmins, except for a few Bhagat Baani hymns. The Buddhist scriptures are largely the work of converted Brahmins.

But is her claim of Hindu scriptures being a Brahminical Imaginary even true? First of all, it is anachronistic to talk about the four castes in the context of the Rigveda. In the four Vedas combined (mantra portions), hardly 1% of the verses mention castes. Sutas play an important role in the amplification of the Mahabharata, and in the narration of the Puranas. Veda Vyasa himself was of mixed parentage, and would be considered a non-Brahmin by the Dharmashastras. Valmiki, the author of the Ramayana, is considered a chandāla in the later Hindu tradition. Rama was a Kshatriya. Krishna was a Yadava, who are today classified as Shudras. Shiva is termed as a Kirata (tribal). Aitareya Mahidasa, associated with 1 of the 10 main Upanishads, was the son of a maid, and therefore of mixed caste. We can keep multiplying examples, but there is no point in repeating what scholars have already demonstrated – that Hinduism is not Brahmanism,<sup>275</sup> despite Doniger's fantasy of the 'Brahminical Imaginary' and her pretensions of being the savior of Hindu women and low castes.

Now let us look at specific statements in her book.

**Page 304, para 1; Page 307, para 3:** “150 CE Rudraman publishes the first Sanskrit inscription at Junagadh.”

“Himself of uncertain class, Rudraman leaned over backward to praise dharma....His is the first substantial inscription in classical Sanskrit (Ashoka and Kanishka had written in various Prakrits, usually Magadhi or Pali). Rudraman's choice of Sanskrit underlined by the fact that he wrote right on top of the Prakrit of Ashoka, may have

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<sup>275</sup> Arvind Sharma, “Of Sudras, Sutas, and Slokas – Why is the Mahabharata Pre-eminently in the Anustubh Metre”, pp. 225-278 in the Indo-Iranian Journal, vol. 43

*been designed to establish his legitimacy as a foreign ruler, “to mitigate, the lamentable choice of parents,” as the historian D D Kosambi suggested.”*

**Comment:** This is outdated information! It is apparent that Doniger has relied on outdated Marxist historians like D D Kosambi to spin a historical yarn. But she is not alone in this regard – the outdated fact of Rudraman’s inscription being the first one in Sanskrit is repeated ad nauseum in numerous other books of Indian Marxist historians like Romila Thapar and D N Jha.

A recent work<sup>276</sup> cites archaeological reports from 1980s to the effect ‘Yavanarajya inscription’ found at Mathura was inscribed to record the donation of a Brahmana and is in chaste Sanskrit. The date of this inscription is 70-69 BCE. (p. 254-256). Two other Mathura inscriptions from the period 150 BCE to 100 CE found in Mathura, and recording Brahmana donors are also in chaste Sanskrit. Of these, the Jamalpur Tila stele inscription is from a mound whose remains are dated to as early as 150 BCE (p. 19, 100, 260) but the inscription itself may be a century younger. The other, the Mirajpur Stele inscription (p. 100, 259) also predates Rudraman and is probably from the Maha-kshatrapa period (75 BCE – 50 CE). The point to note is that all of these inscriptions are due to Brahmana patrons, who had no need to prove their orthodoxy to other Hindus. *In other words, chaste Sanskrit inscriptions are found that are almost 250-300 years older than what Doniger supposes.*

Doniger’s ‘facts’ are therefore outdated by three decades. And therefore, her pseudo-history following antiquated Marxists historians like D D Kosambi is lamentable. It is triply lamentable because Doniger repeats the same outdated information about Rudradaman’s inscription twice in earlier chapters as well.

**Page 305, para 2:** “*The Brahmin imaginary has no canon, but if it did, that canon would be the body of shastras, which spelled out the dominant paradigm with regard to women, animals, and castes, the mark at which all subsequent antinomian or resistant strains of Hinduism aimed.*” Note (from Vishal): Wendy uses the word ‘shastras’ for texts like Manusmriti, Athashastra of Kautilya, Kamasutra of Vatsyayana and Ashvashastra of Nakula.

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<sup>276</sup> Quintanilla, Sonya Rhie. 2007. *History of Early Stone Sculpture at Mathura ca. 150 BCE-100CE*. Leiden ; Boston : Brill, 2007

**Comment:** Incorrect claim. If there is any canon that Hindus admit, it is the Shruti which incorporates the Vedic Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, the Upanishads; and sometimes also the Bhagavad Gita and the Tantras (Agamas).

**Page 305, para 3:** *“Some Indian nationalist historians regarded it as the Age of Invasions, the decadent age of non-Indian dynasties, when barbarians (mlecchas) continued to slip into India. But it looks to us now rather more like a preimperial Age of Diversity, a time of rich cultural integration, a creative chaos that inspired the scholars of the time to bring together all their knowledge, as into a fortified city, to preserve it for whatever posterity there might be.”*

**Comment: Misleading remark.** It was the Gupta period following this era, that we see a great efflorescence in the literature and art of Hindus. Most of the ancient Puranas, ancient Agamas, Kavyas etc. were given their final forms during the Gupta era.

It is fashionable among Marxist historians and their western collaborators like Patrick Olivelle to demean anything that is Hindu or Indian, and exalt anything that is foreign to India. Doniger's comments fall into the same category of glorifying the early centuries of the common era because parts of India were beset with invasions at that time.

**Page 305, para 3:** *“The art and literature of this period are far richer than those of either of the two empires that frame it, the Mauryas and the Guptas.”*

<sup>5</sup> Keay, *India*, 102

**Comment:** Doniger copies Keay, who has relied on the thesis of India's Marxist historians. The latter cannot accept that major advances in Indian art, literature and science could have happened in India without a 'foreign' impetus. The reason for this is their phobia for 'Hindu fundamentalism'. The Marxist historians and their followers Keay and Doniger worry that if major advances in Hindu culture, literature etc., are attributed to the Gupta era, it would fuel Hindu fundamentalism!<sup>277</sup>

**Page 307, para 3:** *“In 150 CE, Rudraman, a Shaka king who ruled from Ujjain, published a long Sanskrit inscription in Junagadh, in Gujarat; he carved it, in the palimpsest fashion favored by many Indian rulers (temples on stupas, mosques*

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<sup>277</sup> For a criticism of the Marxist historians' downgrading of the Gupta period, see pages 72- 88 in Shankar Goyal (2000), *Marxist Interpretation of Ancient Indian History*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (Pune)

on temples), on a rock that already held a set of Ashoka's Prakrit Major Rock Edicts."

**Comment:** Doniger seems to equate the displacement of Hindu temples by mosques with the overlaying of Ashoka's inscription by that of Rudradaman's. This is the **eighth** place in the book, where without ANY context, Doniger is writing an apologia for large scale destruction of Hindu and Jain temples and Buddhist monasteries and universities by fanatical Muslim rulers.

If the Hindus destroyed many Buddhist shrines, where is the literary evidence for that? Where are the ruins of these Buddhist shrines? Which Hindu scripture asks for destroying the shrines of other faiths?

In chapter 21, Doniger claims that Hinduism is a British construct and did not exist before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. So how can she claim that 'Hindus' destroyed Buddhist shrines in the ancient period? In other words, Doniger repeats this lie chapter after chapter in her book that Hindus destroyed Buddhist stupas in the Goebbelsian hope that a lie repeated a 100 times comes to be taken as truth.

**Page 308, para 1:** *"They [the Satavahana rulers] were orthodox in their adherence to Vedic sacrifice and Vedic gods, and they made land grants to Brahmins, but they also patronized Buddhism, in part because it was more supportive of economic expansion than Hinduism was: It channeled funds into trade instead of sacrifice and waived the caste taboos on food and trade that made it difficult for pious Hindus to travel."*

**Comment:** Following Marxist historians, Doniger unnecessarily attributes economic motives behind the Satavahana patronage of Buddhists, so as to depict Hindus in a negative light. First, where is the proof that significant amount of funds were channeled into sacrifice by the Brahmins? Second, it ignores the fact that Hindu dynasties in general always supported a variety of religious traditions within their realm, in keeping with the proverbial Hindu tolerance. Not only the Satavahana, but many earlier as well as later Hindu rulers patronized Buddhists, Jains and Hindus who followed traditions different from their own – whether we look at the Sungas, Guptas or any other Hindu dynasty. The Satavahanas were not an exception in this regard. Where is the proof that ancient Hindu traders were more Buddhist than Hindus? Even in the later times when India was overwhelmed with Islamic rule, the Hindu traders retained their control over trade (both domestic as well as international) to a great extent, despite the scriptural taboos. In other words, Doniger has

merely regurgitated simplistic theories of Marxist historians like Romila Thapar. When the Satavahanas ruled, it was not just Buddhism but also Hinduism that was transplanted by Indian traders in S E Asia. This clearly shows that the scriptural taboos were flouted in practice and Hindu traders were present in large numbers in S E Asia.

**Page 308, para 3:** “*The Hindu response to the Buddhist challenge was not only to reclaim dharma from dhamma and but to extend it. Dharma in the ritual sutras had been mostly about how to do the sacrifice; the dharma-shastras now applied it to the rest of life, dictating what to eat, whom to marry. So too, while karma in the ritual texts usually designated a ritual act, in the dharma-shastras, as in Mahabharata, it came to be understood more broadly as any moral consequential act binding one to the cycle of death and rebirth.*”

**Comment:** Again, a totally false statement. The Dharmasutras are a part of the ritual sutras (Kalpasutras) and are seemingly uninfluenced by Buddhism. Except for the idiosyncratic views of Patrick Olivelle who post-dates them after King Ashok, all scholars place them in the time period of 600-400 BCE roughly. And these Dharmasutras do talk a lot about what to eat, whom to marry, the moral consequences of our Karma, rebirth, Moksha and so on. The Apastamba Dharmasutra for instance has an entire section called the Adhyātma Patala that has a commentary on it by none other than Shankaracharya.<sup>278</sup>

**Page 309, para 3:** “*Shastra means “a text, or a teaching, or a science”; ashva-shastra in general is the science of horses, while the Ashva-shastra is a particular text\* about the science of horses.*”

\* *Attributed to Nakula, the Pandava son of one of the twin equine gods, the Ashvins.*

**Comment:** Misleading remark. Doniger seems to be unaware that there are at least five Ashvashastras that exist even today and only one of them is attributed to Nakula. lists the following 5 as oldest treatises on Asvasastra –

- (1) Asvayurveda of Vagbhatta, son of Vilrama
- (2) Agnipurana, section on Asvacikitsa
- (3) Asvacikitsita of Nakula
- (4) Asvavaidyaka of Jayadatta

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<sup>278</sup> All that Doniger had to do to avoid this blooper and many others in this chapter was to consult the following work of her fellow Indologist who neatly arranges the parallel sections of the Dharmasutras: Patrick Olivelle (2005), *Dharmasutra Parallels*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited (New Delhi).

(5) Sarasamuccaya

P. K. Gode proposes<sup>279</sup> that all these texts were composed during AD 700-1300 when there was a revival of princely interest in horse rearing due to Islamic invasions marked by a superior cavalry of the invaders. In other words, the Ashvashastra does not even belong to the historical period that Doniger deals with in this chapter.

**Page 311, para 3:** *“The rise of myriad social groups at this time created problems for the taxonomists of the social order. Someone had to put all this together into something like a general theory of human relativity. That someone is known to the Hindu tradition as Manu.”*

**Comment:** Again, a wrong statement because the supposed origin of mixed castes (=myriad social groups) is discussed in the Dharmasutras that are regarded as older to Manusmriti by Indologists. For example, we can cite the following passages of Dharmasutras that discussed these myriad social groups:

Apastamba Dharmasutra 2.2.6-7

Gautama Dharmasutra 4.16-28

Baudhayana Dharmasutra 1.16.6-16; 1.17.1-15; 2.3.29-30; 1.2.13

Vasishtha Dharmasutra 18.1-10

Doniger’s obsession with Manusmriti makes her unable to see similar material in older works and therefore she lands up making false assertions.

**Page 314, para 2:** *“Manu regards the Pariahs as the Kali Age of the body.”*

**Comment:** False assertion. Manusmriti does not equate or regard the Pariahas as the Kali Age of the body or anything.

**Page 315, para 3:** *“In a contemporary Indian Classic Comic version of the Mahabharata, Pandu cites Manu to justify his decision to allow Kunti to be impregnated by five gods.”<sup>31</sup>*

<sup>31</sup>*Amar Chitra Katha, Mahabharata* # 3, “The Advent of the Kuru Princes,” 13, paraphrasing the Sanskrit text, *Mahabharata* 1.111.31, which in turn paraphrases, and indeed reverses the point of Manu 9.158-60

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<sup>279</sup> P. K. Gode (1961), *Studies in Indian Cultural History, volume I. V. I. Series – 9*, Vishveshvaranand Vedic Research Institute: Hoshiarpur, p. 240.



**Comment:** A wrong statement because Kunti bore the children of *three* gods. It was the second wife Madri who bore children from the Ashwini Kumara twins. In any case, Mahabharata 1.111.31 does not have Pandu ask Kunti to be impregnated by ‘five gods.’

**Page 316-317:** Doniger devotes an entire section to Manu’s opinions on meat eating versus vegetarianism. She says -

*“In one verse, Manu seems actually to punish a person for not eating meat at the proper time: “But when a man who is properly engaged in a ritual does not eat meat, after he will become a sacrificial animal during twenty-one rebirths (5.35)” Thus he encourages people to eat meat – if they follow the rules. Elsewhere he describes meat eating too as an addiction that some people cannot give up entirely: “If he has an addiction (to meat), let him make a sacrificial animal out of clarified butter or let him make a sacrificial animal out of flour; but he should never wish to kill a sacrificial animal for no (religious) purpose (5.37).” Clearly Manu has sympathy for the vegetarian with his veggie cutlets, but also for the addicted carnivore.”*

**Comment:** Doniger’s hurried conclusion sacrifices intellectual rigor at the altar of literary cutisms. Manu is not confused as Doniger portrays him to be. Rather, Manusmriti refers to a multiplicity of views on the question of meat eating: That we can eat in an unbridled manner (Manusmriti 5.28-30), that we can eat it only under certain restrictions like only during Yajnas (ibid. 5.31-5.44), that we must not eat meat at all (ibid. 5.45-55). Each succeeding view is more acceptable to Manu than the preceding ones (if we follow the Shastric conventions that Doniger seems not to understand). Given the highly contentious nature of this issue, Manu then concludes with a compromised view that best reflects his own position:

*There is no fault in eating meat, in drinking liquor or in having sex, for these are the natural tendencies of creatures. But he who abstains from these attains great rewards. Manu Smriti 5.56*

This last verse in fact reflects the nuanced attitude towards meat eating that the Hindu society (when seen as a whole) seems to have. Most Hindus eat meat, but most of them also believe that being vegetarian is morally and spiritually better. The same goes for the average Hindu attitude towards sex and liquor – most Hindus indulge in these but transcending them is their desired goal.

Doniger’s crude interpretation does no justice either to the Manusmriti, not to the social mores of the Hindus.

**Page 317, para 2-4:** Doniger cites “Manusmriti 5.38.48-53” and claims that “*The last line alone expresses actual sympathy for the suffering of the slaughtered animals.*”

**Comment: Doniger’s citation is wrong, because she has quoted only verses 5.38, 48-49 and not Manusmriti 5.38. 48-53. This is just another one of the numerous careless typos in this chapter.**

Funnily, Doniger’s own translation of these verses proves that it is not only verse 5.53 (= 5.49) that shows sympathy for the animal that is being slaughtered, but also the previous verse 5.52 (= 5.48). Let us quote that verse 5.48:

Meat cannot be obtained by causing injury to living creatures, and killing living creatures prevents one from reaching heaven. Therefore, one should completely abstain from eating meat. **Manu Smriti 5.48 (= Vishnu Dharma Sutra 5.71)**

Doniger implies that Manu lacked sympathy for the suffering of animals. If Manusmriti is examined carefully, what we see is that Manusmriti is often light years ahead in the matter of animal rights when compared to texts of many other religions. For example, it prescribes atonements and penances for even accidental killing of animals, birds, insects and aquatic creatures (e.g., **Manu Smriti 11.69, 71**). These penances are required to atone for killing not just domesticated creatures, but even for wild creatures (**Manu Smriti 11.132-142**). Animals also have legal rights in Manusmriti, and the state can punish a person who assaults not just a human being, but also an animal. For e.g.,

If someone hits a human being or an animal in order to cause them pain, the King shall impose a punishment on the perpetrator of the assault in proportion to the severity of the pain caused. **Manu Smriti 8.286**

Likewise, if a vehicle driver kills or injures animals by running over them, he is punished by the state his carelessness (**Manu Smriti 8.295-298**).

Manusmriti also forbids a rider from whipping the horse he rides too hard, and asks farmers not to yoke bulls and other draught animals beyond their comfort and capacity. Similar verses are found in many other Dharmashastras. It is only Doniger who sees a lack of sympathy that Hindu Rishis had for animals because of her own prejudiced views about Hinduism.

**Page 318, para 5:** “*Manu transforms five of the earlier Vedic sacrifices (animal sacrifices in which violence is assumed) into five Hindu vegetarian sacrifices that avoid violence (3.70-74).*”

**Comment:** Her characterization that Vedic sacrifices necessarily involve animal sacrifices is wrong. Only a small fraction of the Shrauta Yajnas require an animal sacrifice (and many sacrificers actually do not sacrifice any animal even in these). In any case, claim that these domestic vegetarian sacrifices (Five Mahayajnas) are transformations of more ancient Vedic animal sacrifices is entirely questionable because many scholars like Hermann Oldenberg were of the view that the domestic rites (Grihyayajnas) might actually predate the Vedic sacrifices (Shrautayajnas). The domestic and Vedic sacrifices are not substitutes in which one transformed to another; rather they are complementary and belong to different spheres of life.

**Page 319, para 4:** “*Finally, Manu invokes the argument from equivalence: ‘The man who offers a horse sacrifice every year for a hundred years, and the man who does not eat meat, the two of them reap the same fruit of good deeds (5.54).’ That is, to sacrifice (to kill) or not to (kill and) eat an animal is the same thing.*”

**Comment:** This is a grossly simplistic interpretation, and a very juvenile one at that. The Ashwamedha is considered the acme of all Vedic Yajnas and he who performs a 100 of them in his lifetime becomes fit to become Indra in heaven in the Hindu tradition. Therefore, the verse is not equating the killing of animals to not killing them. Rather, it exalts vegetarianism and says that the mere vow of not eating meat equals the supreme feat of ritualistic Dharma that one could perform. So once again, we question Doniger’s skills of interpretation which are often sacrificed in favor of literary cutisms.

**Page 320, para 5:** “*The Brahmins emitted the shastras, as frightened squid emit quantities of ink, to discipline the addiction that could invade the rational faculties, as the barbarians from the north would invade India in the Kali Age.*”

**Comment:** Doniger’s claim, often repeated ad nauseum by India’s Marxist historians and now by some western Indologists like Olivelle is simply devoid of any cogent evidence. Doniger’s claim is tantamount to saying that these shastras (Manusmriti, Arthashastra, Kamasutra) are the first texts in their respective genres. In fact, they are one of the last surviving specimens or redactions of older shastras or shastric traditions. For instance, both the Arthashastra as well as the

Kamasutra quote numerous older authorities from whose works they have drawn (and Doniger herself acknowledges that Kamasutra refers to Shvetaketu and other older authorities). Then, Manusmriti is quoted by the older Dharmasutras which were clearly created before the invasions of Scythians or Greeks. It is possible that the Smriti underwent a redaction during the period 100 BCE – 400 BCE (considered in this chapter) but the available evidence is sufficient to prove that these Shastric traditions pre-date these foreign invasions. Even otherwise, the Dharmasutras are Shastras which predate the period in question (100 BCE – 400 BCE) and they are similar in style to Manusmriti. Therefore, Doniger's claim is naïve and inaccurate.

**Page 323, para 4:** *“Manu’s entire text is an intricate regimen for the control of the senses, essential for anyone on the path to release but also a desideratum for people on the path of rebirth. Kautilya, by contrast, tosses off the need for control of the senses with just a few, rather unhelpful lines: ‘The conquest of the senses arises out of training in the sciences (vidyas) and is accomplished by renouncing desire, anger, greed, pride, drunkenness, and exhilaration (1.6.1).’”*

**Comment:** Doniger's complaint against Kautilya is like complaining that she did not find penguins in Sahara or that she did not find camels in Antarctica. Manusmriti is a Dharmashastra, and so obviously, it will focus more on matters of Dharma like control of one's senses than the Arthashastra. The Arthashastra deals with matters like economics and politics and therefore obviously moral and spiritual matters will be mentioned only when they relate to its main topic. The entire book is similarly filled with inane comparisons and useless complaints.

**Page 324, para 3:** *“Sex is the only inborn addiction: We are all, in this Hindu view, naturally inclined to it, exposed to it all the time, inherently lascivious.”*

**Comment:** Doniger is very fond of the word 'addiction' because it goes well with her obsession with drugs, sex, booze, rapes, incest and similar topics that her book is all about. Perhaps, it is proper to point here the difference between 'attachment' (which is what the Hindu scriptures refer to) and addiction (the incorrect word used by Doniger) – “Addiction is something more than just being overcome by lust: addiction is a

"compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance...characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal."<sup>280</sup>

**Page 325-328:** These pages deal with Doniger's presentation of what Manu says on women.

E.g.1 (Page 326, para 2): *"This lack of independence meant that in Manu's ideal world, a woman had very little space to maneuver within a marriage, not she could get out of it."*

E.g. 2 (Page 327, para 4): After citing (or rather Mis-citing) Manu 5.149 that women should remain under the control of their father, husband and then their son in their childhood, married life and in the old-age respectively, Doniger then quotes Manu 9.10-11 but terms these verses as "cynical" because they reflect well on Manu's concern about forcible oppression of women by menfolk.

**Comment:** Doniger of course does not state that these various verses represent different opinions of men about women that Manu cites in his characteristic style. But worse, she cleverly omits all verses that Manu says in praise of women. In other words, she has cherry-picked data and has indulged in propaganda. Let us take two examples of her misinterpretations:

As an example of her extreme claim that we have cited from these pages, let us see whether Manu totally traps a woman in her marriage. For example, a wife can abandon a husband who has gone abroad without providing for her.<sup>281</sup> She also cannot be forsaken if she hates her husband for being important, losing his caste, having become sick with a deadly disease etc.<sup>282</sup> **Note that Doniger mis-cites Manusmriti 5.147-147 as 4.147-149. Typos of this kind litter the book page after page (see more below) and reflect very poorly on the author and the reviewers hired by the publisher.**

Let us cite these verses that Doniger refers to:

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<sup>280</sup> See the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/addiction> as quoted by Aditi Banerjee at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262511> <checked on 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2014> in another critique of Doniger's book.

<sup>281</sup> Manusmriti 9.74-76

<sup>282</sup> Manusmriti 9.79

No man can completely guard women by force; but they can be guarded by the employment of the following expedients;  
**Manusmriti 9.10**

Let the husband employ his wife in the collection and expenditure of his wealth, in keeping everything clean, in the fulfillment of religious duties, in the preparation of food, and in looking after the household utensils. **Manusmriti 9.11**

Now it is unclear why Doniger skips the concluding verse:

Women, confined in the house under trustworthy and obedient servants, are not well guarded; but those who of their own accord keep guard over themselves are well guarded.

**Manusmriti 9.12**

We fail to understand what is so ‘cynical’ about these verses as Doniger interprets. In fact, Manusmriti 9.10-12 gives the agency to women themselves for their protection and warns men that protecting or guarding women does not mean that they should be confined forcibly within their homes. It was a very practical advice in an age when women did not work out of home much in certain sections of the society (but it does not apply today).

In fact, a question that arises is, “What does Manu really mean by saying that men should guard women?” The purport can be understood by look at other Dharmashastras that deal with this issue and it becomes clear that it does not mean controlling women<sup>283</sup> but rather providing for them and protecting them from worldly harm:

In the beginning, Brahmā cleaved one body into two halves. **Vyasa Smriti 2.12**

From one half became a woman, and from the other half became man. The Vedas themselves say that a man does not become complete till he marries. **Vyasa Smriti 2.13**

From one half, no progeny is born. ‘Procreate’ – such is the command of the Vedas. Indeed, the wife is as great as the entire earth, for she plays a vital role in the attainment of Dharma, Artha and Kāma, and only her husband can marry her. **Vyasa Smriti 2.14**

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<sup>283</sup> As Patrick Olivelle translates in his recent and often tendentious/idiosyncratic translation of Manusmriti.

Therefore, the husband should always take care of his wife, lest she abandon him and find another protector. **Vyasa Smriti 2.15a**

If a husband abandons his wife who is obedient, skillful in her tasks, mother of brave sons and a polite speaker, the King should confiscate 1/3 of that man's wealth and hand it over to the abandoned wife. If the husband is poor, then the King should instead ensure that the wife is given food and clothes by her errant husband. **Yājñavalkya Smriti 1.76**

It is no one's case that Manusmriti advocates equal rights for men and women, because perfect gender equality was not present in any ancient society and is absent in practically all countries even today. However, a careful scholar looks at all the pieces of evidence to paint a nuanced picture, instead of the naïve and stereotypical narration given by Wendy Doniger who seems to be pursuing an agenda in her book.

**Page 326, para 5:** Doniger laments that Manu does not permit widows to remarry, and then says – “*The man of course can and indeed must remarry* (4.167-169).”

**Comment:** Doniger completely ignores the worldview of Manu which requires a twice-born man to carefully maintain the Vedic fires in his home, but which he cannot, if he does not have a wife. Manu's prescription for a widower to remarry is meant for the man who wishes to re-kindle his domestic Vedic fires, because he does not allow a man to live a lifestyle that is outside the four Ashramas. A widower who does not remarry cannot kindle the domestic fires in his home because he does not have a wife. Let us quote the relevant verses of Manusmriti (**note that Doniger gets the chapter in her citation wrong. The verses are in chapter 5 and not in chapter 4**) along with a parallel verse from a later Dharmashastra which explains the context further –

A twice born man, versed in the sacred law, shall cremate a dead wife of equal caste, who conducts herself according to the Dharma of a virtuous wife, and dies before him, with the sacred fires used for the Agnihotra, and with the Yajna implements. **Manusmriti 5.167**

Having thus, at the funeral, given the sacred fires to his wife who dies before him, he may marry again, and again kind the fires. **Manusmriti 5.168**

Living according to the rules, he must never neglect the five great Yajnas and, having taken a wife, he must dwell in his own house during the second period of his life.**Manusmriti 5.169**

A son becomes entitled to take over his father's duty of performing the daily Agnihotra if his father's wife dies, or if his father travels to a distant location, or if his father gets tainted with a sin.**Atri Samhita 1.106**

In fact, this view is so old that even in the Aitareya Brahmana, a question is asked as to how can a widower, who does not wish to remarry, still do his Agnihotra. The answer given is that he should imagine 'shraddhā' (deep faith) as his wife. So, all these verses of Manu and other Dharmashastras have to be seen as a part of that world view where a man must keep the sacred fires burning, or pass the duty on to his son.

In other sections, Doniger contrasts Manu with Vatsyayana (the author of Kamasutra) and Chanakya to show how the latter two had more liberal views. So it is somewhat a puzzle as to why she does not cite them on their views about widow remarriage. The omission is understandable in the obsessively negative view of Hindu scriptures that Doniger wants to project. After all, Arthashastra clearly accepts widow remarriage.

If only Doniger had not restricted herself to three scriptures, she would have learned that other Hindu scriptures, some of them even more authoritative than Manusmriti, clearly allow the remarriage of widows.

The Vedic texts<sup>284</sup> indicate that widow remarriage was allowed. The Dharmasutras appended to various Vedic schools also permit widow remarriage.<sup>285</sup> This general permission for remarriage of widows was maintained in some texts of classical Hinduism<sup>286</sup>. In certain cases, if the husband went abroad for longer than a particular period of time, the woman was permitted to remarry as well.<sup>287</sup>

Doniger seems to imply that with the passage of time, the status of women only degraded. But even later scriptures seem to allow remarriage. For instance, a Purana says –

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<sup>284</sup> E.g., Atharavaveda 9.5.27; Rigveda 10.40.2

<sup>285</sup> Baudhayana Dharmasutra 4.1.16; Vasishtha Dharmasutra 17.19-20 etc.

<sup>286</sup> Parashara Smriti 4.30; Garuda Purana 1.107.28; Agni Purana 154.5

<sup>287</sup> Manusmriti 9.76



If the husband is untraceable, dead, or has renounced the world, is impotent or degraded - in these cases of emergency a woman can remarry. **Garuda Purāṇa 1.107.28**

**Page 330, para 3:** *“Manu insists that the marriages of the ghouls and the antigods should never be performed and that all classes but Brahmins, the best marriage is when the couple desire each other.”\**

*\*He adds that the first six are right for a Brahmin, the last four for a Kshatriya, and these same four, with the exception of the ogre marriage, for a Vaishya or Shudra. Other people say that only one, the ogre marriage, is for the Kshatriya, and only the antigod marriage for a Vaishya and Shudra, while still others say that only the marriages of the centaurs and ogres are right for rulers.”*

**Comment:** Again, she has quoted Manusmriti selectively, because at the conclusion of this section, the final verses seem to give what seems to be his siddhānta, viz. the first four are good marriages and the last four lead to bad progeny. See below for these verses.

**Page 331, para 2:** *“A dharma-sutra in the third century BCE lists only six forms of marriages; it was left for all three of the later shastras to add the last two and worst forms, rape and drugging, a change that signals a significant loss for women. By regarding these two as worse than the other forms of marriage, but not to be ruled out, the shastras simultaneously legitimized rape as a form of marriage and gave some degree of legal sanction, retroactively, to women who had been raped.”* The Dharmasutra cited by Doniger is Apastamba Dharmasutra 2.11.17-20, 2.12.1

**Comment:** Wendy Doniger is completely wrong in saying that *only* Manu, Kautilya and Vatsyayana introduce the last two types of marriages for the first time. The Baudhayana Dharmasutra 1.20.1-16 and Gautama Dharmasutra 4.6-15 are both Dharmasutras that list all the eight types of marriages. But a mere listing of them does not mean that they approve these or even acknowledge them as legitimate marriages! The list of Manu merely reflected social practices that happen even today for we do see Hindu women in Sindh being abducted and married off to Muslim men against their will! Even Gautama Dharmasutra says that the first six or according to some only the first four are legitimate kinds of marriage.

Far from what Doniger seems to imply, even Manu explicitly rejects the Dharmic legitimacy of these obnoxious ‘marriages’ and says –

From the four marriages, (enumerated) successively, which begin with the Brāhma rite spring sons, radiant with knowledge of the Veda and honored by the Shishtas (good men).

**Manusmriti 3.39**

Endowed with the qualities of beauty and goodness, possessing wealth and fame, obtaining as many enjoyments as they desire and being most righteous, they will live a hundred years.

**Manusmriti 3.40**

But from the remaining (four) blamable marriages spring sons who are cruel and speakers of untruth, who hate the Veda and the sacred law. **Manusmriti 3.41**

In the blameless marriages, blameless children are born to men, in blamable (marriages) honorable (offspring) are born. Therefore one should avoid the blamable forms of marriage.

**Manusmriti 3.42**

So it is quite clear that after listing what happened in his society, Manu clearly advocated the first four types of marriage. To conclude, Doniger lacks elementary skills of interpreting religious texts.

## 15. Review of Chapter 13, “Bhakti in South India” by Vishal Agarwal

### General Comments: ‘Bhakti is Violence, or it is Imported’

Throughout the chapter, Doniger tries to prove the following theses-

1. Bhakti equates to violence and adherents of Bhakti indulged in frequent persecutions of the Jains and the Buddhists,
2. Bhakti did not really liberate women and low-castes,
3. The better aspects of Bhakti are due to influences from Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Islam.

Doniger does not know any of the four major South Indian languages, and has relied completely on partial translations of Tamil sources by a handful of Western Scholars like A K Ramanujan (her colleague), John Carman and McGlasham. She has completely ignored even complete translations of the works of Nayanars and Alvars by Indian scholars. Her chapter is largely a cut and paste from second-hand generalist works of Romila Thapar, John Keay, Gavin Flood, Herman Kulke and Dietmar Rothermund and Partha Mitter. She has largely ignored the works of Alvars, because they do not easily fit her paradigm of Bhakti as sex and violence. These omissions result in a very slanted, desiccated and a negative treatment of south Indian Bhakti. Let us discuss some of the agendas in her chapter on South India Bhakti below.

### Bhakti was Violent, and promoted persecution of Buddhists and Jains:

At the very beginning of the chapter, Doniger says that though Bhakti empowered women and lower castes with its inclusive ideology, “yet the violence of passions that it generated also led to inter-religious hostility (p. 338).” She ends the chapter with the words, “*The violent power of bhakti, which overcame even the god, transfigured the heart of religion in India ever after* (p. 369).” It appears that for Doniger, Hinduism is a very violent religion, because in her book she makes statements like, “...the Vedic reverence for violence flowered in the slaughters that followed Partition,” (p. 627); and has described the Gita as a “dishonest book” in a newspaper interview because in her opinion, the scripture promotes war. She also concludes her book with the words, “...we must curb our optimism by recalling the violence embedded in many forms of bhakti, and by noting that it was in the name of bhakti to Ram that the militant Hindu nationalists tore down the Babri Mosque (p. 690).” Of course Doniger has nothing to say on the violence of Islamic ‘bhakti’ when in the aftermath of the destruction of single abandoned mosque, more than 450

temples were demolished or vandalized by Muslims in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, England and even in Canada, or on more than 50 temples demolished in Kashmir *before* the demolition of Babri Mosque. It is only the Hindus whose traditions and philosophies are violent, pornographic and oppressive. What a pity that Doniger has wasted five decades of her life hating her objects of study – the Hindus.

To advance her thesis of violent Bhakti in this chapter, she focusses solely on Tamil Shaiva saints, and even therein, she focusses only on their biographies in the Periyapuram (e.g. p. 361–362), referring to other works only tangentially. This narrow focus is methodologically flawed for several reasons. First, although the Nayanmars lived from 500 – 900 CE according to her (p. 338), the Periyapuram was composed at least 250 years later according to internal testimony of the text.<sup>288</sup> Scholars have pointed out that Cekkilar, the author of Periyapuram, has greatly exaggerated the violence mentioned in the earlier sources that he had used. And finally, the violence in the lives of Nayanmars is unique in the entire history of Hindu Bhakti with very few parallels in other Bhakti traditions within Tamil Nadu, and even those outside of Tamil Nadu.<sup>289</sup> Yet, Doniger uses these few instances to paint a pervasive picture of South Indian Bhakti as a violent ideology.

While she dwells constantly on Hindu polemics against the Jains and the Buddhists (p. 362–363), she barely gives any example of how the latter depicted the Hindu Deities. Many Jain scriptures send Rama and Krishna to hell for instance. Is it Doniger's case that these Jain narratives incited them to commit violence towards the Hindus? Hundreds of Hindu kings ruled different parts of India over thousands of years and it is almost a certainty that a handful of them would have persecuted people of religious persuasions different from theirs. This is in contrast to the Islamic rule, where guided by their religious teachings, most Muslim rulers discriminated against or persecuted the non-believers. Doniger offers the following 'proof' of Hindu persecution of the Buddhists, "*In other parts of India, from time to time, Hindus, especially Shaivas, took aggressive action against Buddhism. At least two Shaiva kings\* are reported to have destroyed monasteries and killed monks. \*Mikirakula (early sixth century) and Sasanka (early 7<sup>th</sup> century).*" Now, it is questionable if these two examples should be sufficient to warrant a blanket conclusion as Doniger does. Secondly, are even these

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<sup>288</sup> Anne Mous, "Love, Violence, and the Aesthetics of Disgust: Saivas and Jains in Medieval South India," *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 32, pp. 113–172 (2004)

<sup>289</sup> Ibid, p. 123

two examples appropriate? Mihirakula is remembered as a tyrant by no less than Kalhana, and he was a Huna invader. Shashanka has not been glorified in traditional Hindu records before he became a hero for some recent Bengali nationalists.<sup>290</sup> This stands in stark contrast to Ghori, Ghaznavi and Aurangzeb who are glorified in the Islamic tradition.

Doniger of course does not even consider the possibility that the Shaivas were reacting to the preceding Kalabhra period when the Jains had persecuted Shaivites.<sup>291</sup> Nor is she aware of the opinion of some historians that the same Kalabhra Jains were perhaps responsible for the persecution of Buddhists in the Pandiyan territory.<sup>292</sup> Other than a passing reference, she does not mention Jaina epics like Nilakesi that reserve their worst invectives for Buddhist monks. All said and done however, even these polemics in the works of the three faiths, or their acts of religious persecution were miniscule in quantity or in their nature when compared to how the Abrahamics treated the 'non-believers'. There is simply no Dharmic parallel to the widespread Jihads, Crusades or the European civil wars between Protestants and Catholics. The average American reader, for whom Doniger presumably wrote the book, will get the impression from her statements that the Hindus were as violent as the Abrahamics towards other religions. This is what she says repeatedly in her book to overturn the conventional and the correct view that Hindus are very tolerant as a religious community. Perhaps, in writing her book, she wanted to overcome her own white guilt, if I may be permitted to psychoanalyze her, just as she keeps doing to us Hindus.

Then, she claims that, "*Only in Bihar and Bengal, because of the patronage of the Pala dynasty and some lesser kings and chiefs, did Buddhist monasteries continue to flourish. Buddhism in eastern India was well on the way to be reabsorbed into Hinduism, the dominant religion, when Arabs invaded the Ganga Valley in the twelfth century* (p. 364)." Her implication is that the Islamic invaders had no role in the destruction of Buddhism in India as is generally believed, and the disappearance of Buddhism in India was due to persecutions by the Hindus. This is a revisionist viewpoint, and ignores how Buddhism was extinguished by Islamic invaders in Central Asia,

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<sup>290</sup> Mayurika Chakravorty, 'Skeletons of History: Fact and Fiction in Rakhaldas Bandhopadhyaya's Sasanka,' *South Asia Research*, vol. 24. No. 2, November 2004, pp. 171 - 183

<sup>291</sup> M Arunachalam (1979), *The Kalbhras in the Pandiya Country and their Impact on Life and Letters There*, University of Madras: Madras, pp. 94 sqq.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, p. 95

Sindh, Gilgit-Baltistan, Chitral, Swat and many other parts of the world. Buddhism continues to be a major force in Nepal, a predominantly Hindu country. Within India, it lasted the longest in Orissa and parts of Tamil Nadu, which were relatively free of Islamic rule. It was the Muslim invaders like Bakhtiyar Khilji who destroyed Buddhist universities like Vikramshila and Nalanda in Bihar and gave Buddhism a final death blow. Later, Doniger claims, *“From time to time too, Shaivas tore down Shaiva temples, or Vaishnava temples, looting the temples and hauling the images home. In other words, as was the case later with the Turkish invasions, warfare had political and economic motives more than religious ones* (p. 366).” So once again, she tries to absolve Islam of widespread iconoclasm in India during the Islamic rule or at least blunt it by equating it to a few random acts of Hindu iconoclasm. Islam has an avowed theology of Iconoclasm which Hinduism lacks, and we have covered this point in more detail in our review of chapter 16 of her book.

According to her, the construction of temples itself was an act of violence (p. 348-349) and focusses excessively and tendentiously on the argument that there is ‘no free temple’. She gives the example of Brihadeeshvara temple and complains that the king used war booty for this purpose, and taxed villages (p. 347).<sup>293</sup> By this perverse logic, all toll-roads and bridges in the United States are an act of violence because people using them have to pay a toll. Citing the works of apologist scholars like Richard Davis, Doniger argues that the Cholas looted and desecrated other temples to build their own but acknowledges that this has little to do with religious persecution (p. 349). Given the prolific interfaith narratives in her book, she does not contrast how Hindu iconoclasm (similar burning down a library after retrieving all the books and then housing them in a new library) differs from Islamic and Christian versions (burning down a library together with the books). In Hinduism, the temple is merely a house for the Deity, and therefore even marauding kings, if they did desecrate temples, first took the images out of the site to install them elsewhere. Eight times in her book, Doniger equates these two iconoclasms despite their different natures, and despite the fact that the Hindu version was very restricted in space and time (compared to the Islamic variety), to paint Hinduism as violent (if not more) a religion as Islam and Christianity.

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<sup>293</sup> Ironically, Doniger ignores the beautiful story of Alagi, the woman, who was apparently asked by the Chola king to play an important role in the inauguration of this temple.

Well, someone did destroy the Hindu temples. So Doniger makes a sinister attempt to shift the blame from Muslims to the Jains! Referring to the verses, “*I [Bhakti] was born in Dravida [South India] and grew up in Karnataka. I lived here and there in Maharashtra; and became weak and old in Gujarat. There, during the terrible Kali Age, I was shattered by heretics. But after reaching Vrindavana I became young and beautiful again* (pp. 367-368),” Doniger rightly points out that this passage is traditionally taken to describe the destruction of Hindu temples by Islamic invaders. But she counters this by saying that Gujarat was a “*Jaina stronghold*” (p. 368), that these ‘heretics’ “*...may very well be Jains* (p. 368).” She supports her argument by saying that the Bhagavata Mahatmya, in which these verses are found, is a north Indian text because it mentions Vrindavana. Her logic is unclear, and questionable because Mathura and other places associated with the childhood of Krishna are mentioned in the writings of Alvars who are from South India. And the Bhagavata Purana itself is associated with South India.<sup>294</sup> It appears that Doniger will clutch at any straws to absolve Islam of iconoclasm, even if it means a ‘displacement’ of guilt to the non-violent Jains. Therefore, I submit that Doniger’s writings are in fact verbal violence against the Hindus and Jains, or hatemonger with scholarly pretensions.

### **Bhakti did not liberate Women:**

The focus of Doniger remains on the imaginary violent aspects of Bhakti, and she gives quite a perfunctory treatment to women Bhaktas. Just about a page and a half are devoted to women Nayanmars and Alwar Andal. Doniger laments that only one Alwar out of twelve, namely Andal, was a woman (p. 353). How does this compare to the record of other religions? Doniger is a Jew, and her scripture, the Old Testament, has only 2 out of 39 books named after women. In the 27 books of the New Testament, not even one is named after a woman. In Islam, the entire Koran of 114 chapters was revealed to a male prophet. All the 10 Gurus of Sikhs were men. In Jainism, all the 24 Jain tirthankars were men. And what she does not note is that of the twelve Alvars, two are considered the most important and they are none other than Andal (a woman) and Nammalvar (a Shudra). Also, Doniger is perhaps unaware that to this day, Tamils sing the verses of Andal during the month of Margazhi every year in the memory of Andal. But after dismissing Andal in a few lines (p. 353), she does not give the reader any idea of her religious compositions that are an important part of Shri Vaishnava liturgy even today.

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<sup>294</sup> K A Nilakantha Shastri (1966), *History of South India*, Oxford University Press (Madras), p. 342

### **Bhakti did not liberate lower castes:**

Doniger does mention that Nammalvar was of a low caste, but quickly adds that a later Brahmin hagiographer claimed that Nammalvar shunned his own low-caste family (p.360-361). However, she conveniently forgets to mention that he is regarded as the greatest of all the twelve Alvars, and that his Tiruvayamoli is considered as the Tamil Veda by the Shri Vaishnava community.<sup>295</sup> The Tiruvayamoli attracted a commentary by no less than the saintly Pillan, to fulfill one of the three life goals of Shri Ramanujacharya. Even today, in their temples, the priest places a crown with a pair of feet embossed on them on the head of a visiting devotee. The crown represents Nammalvar, who was the crown or the highest of Alvars, with the feet being the feet of Bhagavan Vishnu.

While devoting considerable text to Kannappar and Nandanar (pages 357-360), she fails to mention that more than a quarter of the Nayanmars are Shudras or untouchables, and many of the remaining are Vaishyas.<sup>296</sup>

### **Bhakti was inspired by other Religions:**

Although it is admirable to demonstrate how various traditions have intermingled with each other and have done mutual borrowings in India, Doniger's examples all practically show how it is Hinduism that has borrowed from others and not the reverse. The reader is left with the impression that Hinduism is a cul-de-sac that passively absorbs foreign influences, without teaching much goodness to others. Coming to Bhakti, Doniger clearly exaggerates the influence of other religions. She makes very strained attempts to derive the non-violent elements of Bhakti from teachings or influences of other religions. In order to do so, she presents a very inadequate picture of Bhakti in the Vedic texts, and then pre-dates Abrahamic holy books by several centuries.<sup>297</sup> Several scholars have argued that elements of the nine-fold Bhakti can be traced in Rigvedic hymn themselves.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Vasudha Narayanan and John Braisted Carman (1989), *The Tamil Veda*, University of Chicago Press (Chicago)

<sup>296</sup> See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nayanars> <checked on 10 March 2014>

<sup>297</sup> E.g. on page 339, she dates the Hebrew Old Testament containing the account of Solomon (not the king himself) to 1000 BCE when most Biblical scholars post-date the Old Testament books to several centuries later.

<sup>298</sup> Jeanine Miller (1996), *Does Bhakti Appear in the Rgveda*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan (Mumbai)



Doniger makes an ahistorical claim that St Thomas, one of the apostles, had visited India. This claim has political<sup>299</sup> and Christian fundamentalist<sup>300</sup> overtones and has no credible historical evidence to back it.<sup>301</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that Doniger should support this claim. What is surprising however is her statement that the Acts of Thomas may date from the first century C.E., when all credible Biblical scholars argue that it was written in Syriac in Edessa in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century C.E.<sup>302</sup> In fact, even the canonical four gospels are often dated after the first century C.E. In recent times, a section of Indian Christians have been propagating this myth to claim India for Christ (because ‘one of the 12 Apostles himself visited India’) even though historical evidence suggests that these Christian communities are perhaps descendants of refugees from Syria who landed in the mid-fourth century C.E.<sup>303</sup> In the modern revisionist version (being propagated by Indian Marxist historians), St Thomas lies buried in the Mylapore Church close to Chennai, which is improbable given the myriad accounts of his place of death and numerous graves associated with him all over the old world.<sup>304</sup> For Doniger however, it serves the agenda for implying that Bhakti had something to do with Christian influences.

Doniger argues that Hinduism added elements of Islam into its Bhakti ideology (p. 344). She says, “*At the same time, there were many opportunities for positive interactions between Islam and bhakti in South India. For instance, the idea of “surrender” (prapatti), so important to the Shri Vaishnava tradition of South India, may have been influenced by Islam (the very name of which means “surrender”). More generally, the presence of people of another faith, raising awareness of previously unimagined religious possibilities, may have inspired the spread of these new, more ecstatic forms of Hinduism and predisposed conventional Hindus to accept the more radical teachings of the bhakti poets* (p. 368).”

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<sup>299</sup> This is why Romila Thapar gives credence to the historical untenable theory in her *Early India*.

<sup>300</sup> See Rajiv Malhotra (2011), *Breaking India*, Amaryllis (New Delhi), p. 129 sqq.

<sup>301</sup> See Ishwar Sharan (2010), *The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition), Voice of India (New Delhi). The book is available online at <http://ishwarsharan.wordpress.com/> <checked on 25 March 2014>

<sup>302</sup> Willis Barnstone ((1984), *The Other Bible*, Harper Collins Publishers (San Francisco)

<sup>303</sup> Sita Ram Goel (1996), *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters*, Voice of India (New Delhi)

<sup>304</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_the\\_Apostle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_the_Apostle) <checked on 10 March 2014 >

This claim of Islamic influence in the shaping and acceptance of Bhakti is laughable, to put it mildly. Which aspect of Hindu Bhakti parallels Islamic ‘surrender’ – sakhya, vaatsalya, or maadhurya? Which Bhakti practice has a parallel in Islam – Paadasevanam? Kīrtanam? Archanam? Even if the depth and variety of Bhakti were to be found in Islam (which it is not), what is the evidence that Malabar Muslim traders had an influence on Shri Vaishnavas or on Shaivas? To cut the long story short, Ishvara-praanidhaana (surrender to Ishvara) is mentioned in the pre-Islamic Yogasutra as one of the three practices of Kriyaayoga (Sutra 2.1) and as one of the five Niyamas (Sutra 2.32). In Sutra 1.23, it is said to be one of the means of obtaining Samaadhi. And commenting on this Sutra, the pre-Islamic commentary of Vyasa defines the term as a ‘form of Bhakti’. The commentary on Sutra 2.1 and 2.32 defines it as surrendering one’s Karma and the fruit or result thereof to Ishvara, the Supreme Guru. Now let us examine the claim from the reverse side. Indian traders travelled to Middle East too. Will Doniger dare to suggest that their Hindu religious beliefs influenced Prophet Muhammad?

Coming to Buddhism, Doniger argues that the practice of Darshana was partly inspired by Buddhist viewing of the relics in Stupas (p. 352). No proof is offered for this speculation. Writing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, Patanjali writes in his Mahabhashya that the Mauryas used to install images to induce gullible people to make monetary offerings to them. From the context, it appears that they were not likely Buddhist images of which the people took Darshana.

Doniger also claims that the building of temples was partly a response to the Buddhist practice of constructing Stupas, and of the Buddhist and Jainas worshipping the statues of their enlightened teachers (p. 353). This is a claim repeated elsewhere by her in the book (chapter 9) too. As an example, she mentions the Jaina temple at Aihole with an inscription dated to 636 CE and refers to it as one of the earliest temples in India. One does not understand the purpose behind giving this isolated example, because older Gupta period temples are found in northern India and even in northern Pakistan, where a temple in Chakwal (at the Hindu pilgrim center of Katasraj) is dated to as early as late 5<sup>th</sup> cent. C.E.<sup>305</sup> Moreover, what is so unique about construction of places of worship that

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<sup>305</sup> <http://www.arthistory.upenn.edu/meister/pakistan.html> <checked on 10 February 2014>

See also: Michael Meister (2010), *Temples on the Indus*, Brill Academic Publishers (Leiden, Netherlands)

the Hindus must necessarily borrow it from others? All religions have their shrines and temples and by Doniger's logic, these places of worship must have been constructed in 'response' to competition from other religions. As to the origins of Hindu temple architecture, an earlier critique of her book points out that,

“....the Sathapatha Brahmana portion of the Shukla Yajur Veda, dating back to at least 1500 BCE, describes a special form of tabernacle, distinct from the Agni-shala of the household, for which a special fire-priest, the Agnidhra, was designated. Through the kindling of the fire, the tabernacle became the dwelling place of the Vishvedevas (all the gods). This is a prototype for later Hindu temples, where icons replaced the sacred fire as the focus of worship. In other words, if one wants to be polemical, one can definitely argue that the genesis of formal temple construction vidhis – rules and methods – certainly pre-dates the advent of Buddhism.”<sup>306</sup>

Doniger follows up on her thesis of foreign origins of Bhakti in other parts of the book as well. She does not describe how Ramananda and other saints carried the doctrine of Vaishnava Bhakti to northern India.<sup>307</sup> And later, in chapter 20, she credits the Mughals as having supported the rise of Bhakti movements in northern India. And so, the organic link between and continuity between the South India Bhakti and the Pan-Indian Bhakti gets downplayed while the largely imaginary non-Hindu well-springs of Bhakti get emphasized.

To conclude, this chapter too, instead of appreciating the depth of the Bhakti philosophy and practices, portrays in the most negative terms. Doniger would never dare presenting other religions in such a hateful manner.

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<sup>306</sup> Aditi Banerjee (2009), “Oh, But you do get it wrong,” online at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262511>

<sup>307</sup> Even today, the followers of Chaitanya and Swaminarayan trace their lineages to Madhvacharya and Ramanujacharya respectively. The Ramanandi Sadhus are perhaps the most numerous of all ascetic groups in India and trace their spiritual ancestry to Ramanuja through Ramananda.

## 16. Review of Chapters 14, 15 and 17 by Vishal Agarwal

Chapter 14: “*Goddesses and Gods in the Early Puranas*”

Chapter 15: “*Sects and Sex in the Tantric Puranas and the Tantras*”

Chapter 17: “*Avataras and Accidental Grace in the Later Puranas*”

**General Comments:** Wendy Doniger devotes 3 chapters in the book to the Puranas: 14, 15 and 17. The intervening chapter 16 is idiosyncratically devoted to the Sultanate period as if the Puranas covered in chapter 17 postdate the early decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Chapter 15 deals primarily with the Tantras and the Shaakta Puranas. On the other hand, chapters 14 and 17 are thematically linked better to each other.

Doniger classifies the Puranas as early and later. In the ‘Early’ category are included the Harivamsha, Vishnu, Matsya, Markandeya, Vayu, Brahmanda, Kurma, Skanda, Vamana, Varaha, Shiva and Padma Puranas which are dated by her to have been written from 250 – 1150 CE. In the ‘later’ category are included the Puranas Agni, Bhagavata, Bhavishya, Brahma, Brahmavaivarta, Devibhagavata, Garuda, Kalika, Mahabhagavata, Saura, Linga – these are collectively dated to have been composed between 500 – 1500 CE. It is unclear why some Upapuranas are included in her lists while other ancient ones (Narasimha, Vishnudharmottara, Vahni etc.) are omitted. The possible reason, as we will show below, is that some of her reckless and speculations fall flat when these ignored Puranas are considered!<sup>308</sup> The omission is unfortunate because many of these Upapuranas are said to be more ancient than the Mahapuranas.

Much like rest of the book, Doniger’s treatment of the Puranas and the supposed historical periods in which they lie are riddled with flaws. She presents an oversexed and a colonial attitude while treating these scriptures, and errs on facts as well as interpretations. There is no distinction between the facts and fantasies presented by her because her fantasies (not even interpretations) are often given as facts.

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<sup>308</sup> Even though the Vahni Purana was published only recently (in 2012), R C Hazra has summarized his comments decades earlier.

It would appear that the Hindus are not capable of developing any tradition on their own without external stimuli. Thus, Doniger, speculates that the form of the Kalki Avatara might be influenced by Christian apocalyptic writings, that the very notion of Avataras might be inspired by Jainism, or that even the Radha-Krishna loves story in Gitagovinda have something to do with the influences of Sufi romances!

It is sad to note that extremely shoddy writings like Doniger's book passes as scholarship in Hinduism studies. I have deliberately kept this review short although the chapters are long, focusing more on factual errors bearing on history rather than on interpretations of the Hindu scriptures. Below are some specific comments on these chapters.

**Page 370, para 1:** *"320 – 550 The Gupta dynasty reigns from Pataliputra"*

**Comment:** Inaccurate statement. The dynasty ruled from various capitals including Pataliputra, Ayodhya and Ujjaini.

**Page 370, para 1:** *"455 – 467 The Huns attack North India"*

**Comment:** The Huns kept attacking India well into the 6<sup>th</sup> century. A simple google check even will confirm that. The period mentioned by Doniger only refers to the first attacks by the Huns.

**Page 374, para 4 onwards:** *"It is a general perversity of Indian history that its greatest architectural monuments – both the great temple clusters and the great palaces and forts – were created not in the centers of power like Pataliputra but in relatively remote provinces, and this is certainly true of the Gupta Age.<sup>14</sup>"*

<sup>14</sup>Keay, *India*, xx

**Comment:** Perhaps, there is a simpler explanation. The primary centers of Hindu-Buddhist India were prominent and repeated targets for destruction by invaders, whereas the remote locations escaped. There is no dearth of medieval Muslim chronicles that gleefully describe the complete destruction of prominent cities, palaces and shrines of India. These cities include Varanasi, Thanesar, Multan, Kurukshetra, Mathura, Kannauj, Ujjain, Anhilwara Patan etc etc. And that is the reason why the surviving few monuments from ancient India are merely remnants of a vast architectural and artistic heritage that was largely destroyed.

**Page 375, para 3:** Quoting the Marxist historian Romila Thapar who along with her fellow comrades tend to downgrade the

Gupta period in order to fight 'Hindu communalism', Doniger says, "*The description of the Gupta period as one of classicism is relatively correct regarding the upper classes, who lived well according to descriptions in their literature and representations in their art. The more accurate, literal evidence that comes from archaeology suggests a less glowing life-style for the majority. Materially, excavated sites reveal that the average standard of living was higher in the preceding period.*"<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Thapar, *Early India*, 281

**Comment:** This view of Marxist historians has come in for severe criticism. A historian summarizes the archaeological record, which actually refutes the contention of these Marxists –

"...it is hard to believe that the period in which a great empire was built, imposing temples were erected, exquisite sculptures were carved, magnificent murals were painted, sophisticated literature was produced and notable scientific progress was made, and hence was called the Golden Age, was an age of decline and degeneration if the archaeological evidence is any indication. The age which can be compared with the Periclean in Greece has been branded as an era of decay [by the Marxist historians]. To answer the natural question 'how could this happen?', Dhavalikar suggests that we should distinguish between the early Gupta (260 – 450 AD) and the late Gupta (450 – 600 AD) phases; the latter is doubtless marked by degeneration but not the former. Fa-Hien (399 – 414 AD) who travelled mostly in north India, found the people numerous and happy. The gold coins of the Guptas indicate that the country was at the pinnacle of prosperity under Chandragupta II (380 – 415 AD), and Kumaragupta maintained the empire intact but towards the end of Skandagupta's reign (422 – 67 AD), decline set in. His gold coins, weighing 144 – 146 grains, betray debasement as the gold content is reduced to 70 grains and later still to 54 grains in the coins of Narasimhagupta and Kumaragupta II. This was in all probability due to the Huna invasion which devastated many parts of the empire. A large scale destruction of the cities and religious edifices was caused by the Hunas as recorded by Hieun Tsang. The decline begins in the latter half of the fifth century. Could it be that what we call Kushana levels in archaeology also cover the early Gupta and can be extended upto 450 AD? At most of the sites, the dating has been done on the basis of Kushana coins, some pottery forms and terracottas. So far as coins are concerned, they were current even later for a couple of centuries. The same is the case of that graceful pottery known as Red Polished ware which was in use from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD.

As regards the evidence of Kushana bricks, Dhavalikar points out that all the buildings, religious and secular, which stood in the Kushana and the early Gupta towns, were razed to ground by the Hunas, and when rehabilitation began in the late Gupta times, which was marked by economic misery, there was no alternative but to build structures from the debris of the earlier ones. This happened everywhere in the Indo-Gangetic plains and in Central India which was Gupta territory. Beyond that in the lower Ganga basin, the Gupta and post Gupta habitations were in a somewhat better state....”<sup>309</sup>

**Page 392, para 2; Page 392, para 5 onwards:** *“One goddess who has played an important role in the lives of real women is Sati, the wife of Shiva, who is occasionally implicated in justifications for the custom of widows themselves on their husbands’ pyres, called suttee.”*

*“Sati is not a sati (a woman who commits suttee). Her husband is not dead; indeed, by definition, he can never die. But she dies, usually by fire, and those two textual facts are sometimes taken up as the basis for suttee in later Hindu practice.”*

**Comment:** It is wrong to claim the episode of Daksha and Sati is used as the basis of the later custom of women immolating on their husband’s pyre. Doniger does not provide any basis for her claim except that Sati sounds the same as ‘suttee’ (a colonial spelling, the two words being spelled and pronounced identically in Indian languages contrary to what Doniger seems to indicate).

Her amusing attempt to spell ‘suttee’ correctly reminds me of the Charles Dickens’ novel in which the rude, crude, lewd and ignorant headmaster corrects his student on the spelling of ‘botany’ and says that it should be spelled as ‘b-o-t-t-i-n-e-y.’

**Page 392, para 3:** *“Several early Puranas too tell the story of Daksha and Rudra/Shiva without mentioning any wife of Shiva’s, or mention her just in passing.”*

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<sup>309</sup> Shankar Goyal (2000), *Marxist Interpretation of Ancient Indian History*, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (Pune), pp. 82-83

**Comment:** Again, an inaccurate statement. Several ‘early’ Puranas do narrate the story in detail and do not mention Sati just cursorily. For example, see:

Vayu Purana, chapter 30

Matsya Purana, chapter 5

Shiva Purana, Vayaviya Samhita chapter 18

Shiva Purana, Rudra Samhita chapters 29-30

The Kurma Purana (an ‘early’ Purana) too gives some details but its plot is different from that of other Puranas.

The inaccuracy of Doniger’s claim can be verified by reading the relevant scholarly literature on this topic.<sup>310</sup>

**Page 399, para 1:** *“In contrast with the Vedic gods who rode on animals you could ride on (Surya driving his fiery chariots, Indira on his elephant Airavata or driving his bay horses), the sectarian Hindu gods sit cross-legged on their animals or ride sidesaddle...”*

**Comment:** This is not entirely true. Many Vedic devatas too have vāhanas of animals that one would not normally ride. E.g. Agni has a ram, Varuna has a crocodile, Vayu has an antelope, Yama has a water buffalo, Pushan has a chariot pulled by goats and Kubera uses a man! How many more counter-examples does she want?

**Page 439, para 3:** *“One scene [in the Elephanta caves] represents the myth, told in the Ramayana (7.16) and elsewhere, in which Ravana, objecting to the lovemaking of Shiva and Parvati on Kailasa, lifted the mountain....”*

**Comment:** This is another example of how Doniger sexualizes the entire episode. First, the sculpture in the Elephanta Caves does not show any sexual scene between Parvati and Shiva, as I who has actually visited the caves, can confirm.

Second, Ravana’s objection was not to the fact that Shiva and Parvati were making love, but that his airplane stopped before the

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<sup>310</sup> Annemarie Mertens (1998), *Der Daksamythus in der episch-puranischen Literatur Beobachtungen zur religionsgeschichtlichen Entwicklung des Gottes Rudra-Siva im Hinduismus*, Beiträge zur Indologie 29, Harrassowitz Verlag: Wiesbaden  
Klaus Klostermaier (1991), “The Original Dakṣa Saga”, pp. 110-129 in Arvind Sharma, ed., *Essays on the Mahabharata*, E. J. Brill: Leiden



mountain, which was then out of bounds for everyone because Shiva was spending time in solitude with Parvati (the verb used is ‘kreedati’ in verse 7.16.10 which includes lovemaking but is not restricted to it). The episode projects Ravana as an egotist who has no respect for Shiva and wants his chariot to be allowed to pass over the mountain. The main plot of the story is very well known to ordinary Hindus and I refrain from repeating it here. Suffice it to see, Doniger’s attention, as usual, goes only towards lovemaking in the text even though the cave sculpture does not depict it.

**Page 444, para 1:** Doniger speculates on why some temples were not plundered and destroyed by the Muslims, “*The Orissan temples, as well as the temple of Jagannatha at Puri (built during Muhammad bin Tughlaq’s reign, in the late 10<sup>th</sup> to the late eleventh centuries),<sup>126</sup> may have escaped because they were too remote to attract Muslim attention.*”

<sup>126</sup>Keay, *India*, 278

**Comment:** Muhammad bin Tughlaq ruled in the 14<sup>th</sup> century CE from 1325 – 1351 CE, not in the 10<sup>th</sup> or the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries when Islamic rule had not yet penetrated northern India outside of the Punjab (let alone in Orissa, which is in eastern India). It appears that Doniger has confused the Jagannatha temple with the Konarka temple, which was built by the Ganga dynasty kings when Tughlaq ruled the Delhi Sultanate (as her reference Keay also says, which she paraphrases incorrectly).

The reason why many Hindu temples in Orissa survived iconoclasm was that except for brief intervals, Hindu rulers continued their rule, warding off Islamic invasions in the area. And to say that the Jagannatha Puri temple was not attacked is historically wrong. Later in her book, Doniger herself says on pages 450-451: “...*Firoz Shah Tughluq (1351 – 1388), desecrated the shrine of Jagannath at Puri, was said to have massacred infidels, and extended the jaziya to Brahmins...*”

It is quite an understatement that he ‘was *said* to have massacred infidels.’ In his campaign against Orissa itself, after he had desecrated the Jagannath Temple, his armies marched towards an island in the Lake Chilika region, where (according to the contemporary chronicle *Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi*) about 100,000 terrified Hindus had taken refuge after escaping from Jainagar. Then, “...*the auspicious stirrups [of horses in Tughlaq’s army] were turned in that direction, and troops were so distributed on all sides that they might converge at a point and convert the island into a basin of blood by the massacred of the unbelievers with the sharp sword....*”. “*Captive and married, women bearing only female ones, women with a few and many children, widows, bashful women, chaste ladies, women endowed with natural beauty were pressed as slaves, slave-maiden, maid*

*servants, female singers, nurses and midwives, into service in the house of every soldier. The rest of the women were taken captives along with the elephants; women with babies and pregnant women were haltered, manacled, fettered and enchained and no vestige of the infidels was left except their blood.” – so goes this chronicle.<sup>311</sup>*

And in fact, this was not the only temple in Orissa that was plundered or damaged by Muslim invaders. A visit to the Lingaraj temple in Bhuvaneshvar will reveal the vandalism caused to the main Murti. Likewise, during the time of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the Bengal Sulta Ala-ud-din Husain destroyed a number of temples in Orissa, as Doniger has said herself on page 459 of the book.

**Page 473, para 1:** “c. 1398 – 1448 Kabir lives”

**Comment:** Wrong date. Kabir is traditionally held to have died around 1518 CE, and therefore modern scholarship holds that he was born around 1450 CE. Tradition says that he lived for 120 years, which would still make his life span 1398-1518 CE.<sup>312</sup> In fact, the story of Kabir’s persecution by Sikandar Lodi (reigned 1489-1517) is so well known that this error by Doniger is easily caught by anyone with even a cursory knowledge of medieval Indian history. Doniger’s dates make it appear that Kabir died even before Sultan Sikandar Lodi was born!

**Page 474, para 2:** “*The Jaina concept of Universal History, which claims nine appearances of a savior in each world epoch, may have played a role in the development of the Hindu schema...*”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Kirfel, *Kosmologie*

**Comment:** There was a lot of give and take between sister Dharmic traditions in India, and Doniger never misses an opportunity to claim that Hindus have borrowed many of their core traditions and beliefs from others. The reference cited by Doniger is wrong. It should be “*Die Kosmographie der Inder*.”

**Page 479, para 2:** Writing about Gitagovinda of Jayadeva in the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE, Doniger speculates, “*The romance of two adulterous lovers*

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<sup>311</sup> Harekrushna Mahtab, “Invasion of Orissa in 1360 A.D.” in *Orissa Historical Research Journal*. Vol 1, no. 1 (1952), pp. 31-35

<sup>312</sup> David Lorenzen (1991), *Kabir Legends and Ananta Das’s Kabir Parachai*, SUNY (New York), p. 18

*[Radha and Krishna] may owe something to the Persian romances that were becoming known in India through the Muslim presence at this time, in some Sufi sects.<sup>19</sup>*

<sup>19</sup>Behl and Weightman, *Madhumalati*

**Comment:** This ridiculous remark is just another attempt to deprive the Hindus of any originality. The *Gitagovinda* was written in late 12<sup>th</sup> cent. in Orissa which remained outside of Sufi or Persian influence for several decades after the Jayadeva completed his work and had passed away. It is unclear why Doniger gives the reference of the translation of *Madhumalati* other than the fact that she wanted to promote her protégés and students because this particular romance post-dates *Gitagovinda* by 4 centuries. Nowhere in the book do Behl *et al* say anything about Jayadeva borrowing from Sufi romances.

**Page 480, para 2:** “...in general, there is little evidence of Rama worship in temples at that time (the Gupta period) nor, in dramatic contrast with *Krishna*, is Rama’s story elaborated upon to any significant degree in the earlier Puranas.”

**Comment:** Doniger’s claims are politically motivated. Recently in India, there was an attempt by the Marxist historians like Romila Thapar *et al* who argued that *Rambhakti* does not go beyond the 10<sup>th</sup> cent. C.E. Doniger’s remarks are meant to support them and this becomes clear when we read of her propaganda in chapter 24 of the book.

Doniger is off the mark in saying that the Rama story is not elaborated in any of the earlier Puranas. First, why restrict oneself to the Puranas? Kalidasa in the 5<sup>th</sup> century wrote *Raghuvamsham* on the lineage of Rama (from his ancestor Raghu onwards)<sup>313</sup> and there is even a commentary by the Kashmirian author Vallabhadeva written on it in the 10<sup>th</sup> cent. CE. In the 8<sup>th</sup> cent. C.E., Bhavabhuti wrote the *Uttararamacharita* on the life of Rama after his coronation. And the *Mahabharata* itself has the several hundred verse long summary *Ramopakhyana* in the *Aranyaka Parva*.

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<sup>313</sup> Of the plays of Bhasa, who lived at least 200 years before Kalidasa, two (namely *Pratima Nataka* and *Abhisheka Nataka*) are based on the *Ramayana* although many doubt the authenticity of all the plays of Bhasa. For arguments in favor of the authenticity of Bhasa’s plays, see: Manjula Gupta (2012), *Mahakavi Bhasa*, pp. 325-328 in *Advaitamanibh*, ed. by Pravesh Saxena and Priti Kaushik, Vidyaniidhi Prakashan (Delhi). [In Hindi]

Coming to the Puranas, the Ramayana is in fact well summarized in fairly early Upapuranas from around 500 AD (which is also the date of early Puranas as well) like the Narasimha Upapurana.<sup>314</sup> This Upapurana narrates the story of Rama many times longer than that of Krishna. The Vahni Purana<sup>315</sup> was given a Vaishnava recast to incorporate a retelling of the Ramayana. This retelling of the Ramayana is 50% of the text of 12,000 verses. The editor of the Vahni Purana demonstrates that the Vaishnava recast was done around 500 CE, which is earlier than most of the ‘early’ Puranas.<sup>316</sup>

Coming to early temples and sculptural representations from the Ramayana, considerable evidence going back to 200 BCE (terracotta from Kaushambi depicting the abduction of Sita by Ravana) onwards has been marshalled in a recent excellent work.<sup>317</sup> In other words, Doniger’s claim is outdated, or perhaps she has not looked at the available archaeological evidence carefully.

**Page 481, para 6:** “*The Buddha avatar is mentioned in of the Mahabharata:*<sup>26</sup> “*At the beginning of the Kali Age, Vishnu will become the Buddha, son of Shuddhodana, and he will preach in the Magadha dialect. All men will become bald, like him, and wear the ocher robe, and priests will cease to offer oblations or recite the Veda.*”<sup>27</sup>”

<sup>27</sup> Kumbhakona ed. Of Mahabharata 2.348.2; 12, appendix I, no. 32, lines 1- 17; Doniger O’ Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, 188.

**Comment:** It is surprising (or perhaps not) that Doniger uses an interpolated version in the highly conflated Kumbhakona edition to ‘prove’ that Buddha is mentioned in the Mahabharata. The reference given itself is wrong.

Nowhere in any version of the Mahabharata, is there mention of the major dynasties – such as the Nanda, Maurya, Shunga, Kanva -- of the period in which it was supposedly composed, nor for that matter a single monarch from that time. If we are to believe that these epics were

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<sup>314</sup> See the works of R C Hazra for the dating of Upapuranas.

<sup>315</sup> This was the original Agni Purana. The current vulgate Agni Purana is a later work which pushed the original text into the background.

<sup>316</sup> Anasuya Bhowmik (2012), *Vahni Puranam*, The Asiatic Society (Kolkata), Page. xci

<sup>317</sup> Meenakshi Jain (2013), *Rama and Ayodhya*, Aryan Books International (New Delhi)

composed 300 years after the lifetimes of Siddhartha Gautama Buddha and Mahavira, how does one explain the complete absence of any reference<sup>318</sup> either to these great individuals or the faiths they founded? Also consider the evidence from the Spitzer document, which indicates that the Buddha had studied the Mahabharata.<sup>319</sup> Some Hindu texts even allege that Buddha stole some of his doctrines from the Mahabharata.<sup>320</sup> The latter allegation is recorded in a Buddhist text (Madhyamaka Hridaya) from around 550 AD without refutation.

There are no corresponding Buddhist ripostes claiming that the Mahabharata was written after the time of Buddha, or that it was the Mahabharata or the Ramayana that stole their teachings from the Buddha. In fact, some scholars see the influence of the Ramayana on the Buddhacharita of Ashvaghosha who lived around 100 AD.<sup>321</sup>

**Page 485, paras 2-3:** Doniger claims that Buddhism was assimilated into Hinduism in three stages:

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<sup>318</sup> Buddha is referred to as a ‘future’ avatara in one interpolated verse quoted by Doniger and found only in the grossly conflated Dakshinaty (Southern) version of the Mahabharata and is not mentioned in other versions (Northern and Kashmiri). The mention of Buddha in future tense clearly indicates that the interpolator (whenever he lived, say around 500 AD) considered the Buddha later than the Mahabharata. In the Ramayana, the situation is not different. Buddha is mentioned (and even that verse has an unclear meaning) again in a solitary verse found only in Southern manuscripts, and is not mentioned in Northwestern or Northern manuscripts.

<sup>319</sup> The Spitzer manuscript dated on paleographic grounds to around 250 AD even lists the Parvans of the Mahabharata that the Buddha had studied. See Eli Franco, “The Oldest Philosophical Manuscript in Sanskrit”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 31: 21–31, 2003. The same work also gives a summary of Ramayana. Note that the manuscript is obviously later than the author who wrote it! The point is that even as early as 250 AD, the Mahabharata was considered older to Buddha.

<sup>320</sup> E.g., the Mattavilasa of King Mahendravarman (c. 600 AD) quotes a Kapalika as saying that the Buddha of stealing his doctrinal ideas from the Mahabharata and the Vedanta while the ‘Brahmins blinked’. See p. 82 in Michael Lockwood & A. Vishnu Bhat; *King Mahendravarman’s Plays*; Tambaram Research Associates; Madras; 1991

<sup>321</sup> C W Gurner, “Asvaghosa and the Ramayana”, in *Journal of the Asiatic Society* (Bengal), NS XXIII (1927), pp. 347-367

First Stage: “First, Buddhism was assimilated into Hinduism in the Upanishads, Ramayana, and Mahabharata. This was a period of harmony....among Hindus and Buddhists and Jains, in actual history....”

Second Stage: “....around the turn of the millennium and after, the Buddhists (in history) became more powerful and were sometimes seen as a threat. The first set of Puranic myths about the Buddha were composed at this time (the Gupta period), when Hinduism was still fighting a pitched battle against Buddhism, Jainism, and other heresies; the scars of the battle may be seen in these Puranic stories that contemptuously denounce the shastras of delusion (i.e., the Buddhist and Jaina scriptures) and the people who use them,<sup>49</sup> assimilating this conflict into the pattern of second alliance myths of the corruption of the virtuous antigods.<sup>50</sup>

Third Stage: “But then, in the third stage, when Buddhism, though still a force to reckon with in India, was waning, the texts have a more conciliatory attitude, and the Hindus once again acknowledged their admiration of Buddhism. In mythology, the texts revise the myth of Vishnu as the Buddha to make it generous and tolerant.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup>Huntington, *A Study of Puranic Myth*, 33

<sup>50</sup>Doniger O’Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil*, 179.

<sup>51</sup>ibid, 204-05

**Comment:** Doniger’s ‘First Stage’ is non-existent because the Buddha or the Buddhists or even their doctrines are not at all mentioned in the Upanishads, the Ramayana<sup>322</sup> or the Mahabharata (see more on this point above).

In the ‘Early’ category are included the Harivamsha, Vishnu, Matsya, Markandeya, Vayu, Brahmanda, Kurma, Skanda, Vamana, Varaha, Shiva and Padma Puranas which are dated by her to have been written from 250 – 1150 CE. In the ‘later’ category are included the Puranas Agni, Bhagavata, Bhavishya, Brahma, Brahmavaivarta, Devibhagavata, Garuda, Kalika, Mahabhagavata, Saura, Linga – these are collectively dated to have been composed between 500 – 1500 CE.

Given this classification, Doniger’s claim that Buddha is reviled in the ‘early’ Puranas and is treated with conciliation in the ‘later’ Puranas really does not stand to scrutiny. For instance, Buddha’s teachings are said

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<sup>322</sup> An interpolated passage in the Balakanda has the word Buddhas Tathagatam but scholars believe that it does not refer to Buddha. See Ram Shankar Bhattacharya (1982), “Buddha as Depicted in the Puranas”, pages 384-404 in *Purana*, vol. 24, issue No. 1

to delude even in later Puranas like the Bhagavata 1.3.24; Garuda 1.1.32 or even in the really late Brihad Dharma Purana 2.11.72.<sup>323</sup>

The fact of the Buddhist doctrine being unacceptable is different from the fact of him being regarded as an Avatara of Vishnu. Even though Buddha is regarded as an Avatara (and therefore worthy of worship), is doctrine is still considered unacceptable by Hindus (because it was intended to delude).

To conclude, Doniger's pseudo-history looks good in theory (like Freudian and Marxian theories) but have no basis in reality and are not supported by facts.

**Page 485, para 3:** *"A Kashmiri king of the tenth century had a magnificent frame made for 'an image of the Buddha Avatara,' and the image that he used was a Buddha figure that had probably been under worship by Buddhists; this frame may have been made for the Buddhist figure in order to 'Hinduize it,'<sup>52</sup> just as the doctrine of Buddha was placed in the 'frame' of Puranic mythology to Hinduize it and as the Hindu temples were built on Buddhist stupas and later, Muslim mosques on Hindu temples."*

<sup>52</sup>Goetz, *Studies in the History and Art*, 77-80, discussing a frame in Srinagar Museum, of Shankara-varman (r. 883-902)

**Comment:** In her hatred for Hinduism, Doniger characterizes the straightforward expression of Hindu tolerance by the Kashmiri ruler as an act of appropriation. Doniger's attempts to equate Islamic iconoclasm with 'Hindu iconoclasm' are derived from the writings of apologists of Islam (e.g., Richard Eaton) and Indian Marxists. A historian, criticizing these views, puts the historical record in its correct perspective –

"Apologists for Islam, as well as some Marxist scholars in India, have sometimes attempted to reduce Islamic iconoclasm in India to a gratuitous 'lust for plunder' on the part of the Muslims, unrelated in any direct way to the religion itself, while depicting Hindu temples as centers of political resistance which had to be suppressed. Concomitantly, instances have been described in the popular press of Hindu destruction of Buddhist and Jain places of worship, and the idea was promoted that archaeological evidence shows this to have happened on a large scale, and hence that Hindu kings could be placed on a par with the Muslim invaders. The fact is that evidence

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<sup>323</sup> Refer to *ibid.* for several references.

for such 'Hindu iconoclasm' is incidental, relating to mere destruction, and too vague to be convincing."<sup>324</sup>

**Page 486, para 1:** *"The idea of the final avatar may have entered India at this time, when millennial ideas were rampant in Europe and Christians were proselytizing in India; the Hindu rider on the white horse may have influenced, or been influenced by, the rider on the white horse in Christian apocalyptic literature,<sup>55</sup> his cloak soaked in blood, sent to put the pagans to the sword."*

<sup>55</sup>Revelation 19.11-15

**Comment:** It is strange that Doniger does not relate the Kalki to the Indian rulers who drove out the Huns, one of whom was actually born where Kalki will incarnate. So once again, we see Doniger depriving the Hindus of the ability to conceive the Kalki Avatara by speculating that proselytizing Christians might have brought the idea into India.

But where exactly were these Christians because we do not have any historical evidence of their existence in northern India (where Kalki will incarnate) for another 1000 years! At best, there were communities in Kerala and unless Doniger can demonstrate that the idea of Kalki moved north from Kerala, her claim is insulting to the Hindus.

**Page 489, para 3:** *"What is most puzzling is why this out-of-control boy of mixed birth [Parashurama]....is regarded as an appropriate addition to the list of Vishnu's avatars."*

**Comment:** Parshurama was a Bhargava, or a descendant of Rishi Bhrigu through his father Rishi Jamadagni. Perhaps Doniger should re-read a book that has referred to herself in the bibliography: Goldman, Robert (1977), *Gods Priests and Warriors – The Bhrgus of the Mahabharata*, Columbia University Press (New York).

**Page 589, para 3:** *"Kalki is modeled on barbarian invaders and kills barbarian invaders, Parashurama is a Kshatriya who kills Kshatriyas."*

**Comment:** Parashurama is considered a Brahmana, not a Kshatriya. And Doniger fails to demonstrate how Kalki is modelled on barbarian invaders.

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<sup>324</sup> Andre Wink (1997), *Al-Hind*, vol. II, Brill (London). pp. 309-310



**Page 491, para 4:** “*Prablada in the Brahmanas and in parts of the Mahabharata is a typical, demonic demon – angry, lustful, opposing the gods.*”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Taittiriya Brahmana 1.5.9.1, Mahabharata 12.160.26-28

**Comment:** Doniger has misinterpreted the passage of Taittiriya Brahmana. For a correct explanation of this passage, refer to the relevant article by Anantakrishna Shastri.<sup>325</sup> As for the Mahabharata verses cited, they only describe the demons as angry and greedy. As usual, Doniger had to imagine ‘lust’ even though the verses do not say anything to that effect. And perhaps Prahlāda is mentioned only for sake of completing the list of Asuras. That seems to be a more plausible explanation given the numerous episodes in which Prahlāda is singled out as a virtuous demon within the Mahabharata itself.

**Page 498, para 3:** “*(Robbing temples, you will recall, was a very real problem at this time: South Indian kings, Muslim conquerors, everyone was doing it.)*”

**Comment:** There are at least 8 occasions in the book where without any context, Doniger justifies Islamic iconoclasm in India directly or indirectly. Refer to our comments on a similar statement given in page 485 of the book above. Although a Jew herself, Doniger seems have taken more after the Nazi Goebbels, who believed in repeating a lie a 100 times so that the listener starts considering it as the truth.

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<sup>325</sup> Anantakrishna Shastri (1961), Prahladacharitasya Shrutimulakatvam, pages 288-295 in *Purana*, Volume 3, issue 2 [In Sanskrit].

## 17. Review of the Chapter 16, “*Fusion and Rivalry under the Delhi Sultanate 650 – 1500 CE*”

By Vishal Agarwal

### General Comments: Doniger’s Apologia for Jaziya and Jihad

This is one of the worst written chapters in the book. She credits her students Manan Ahmed and Rajiv Kinra for their help with this chapter (p. 691), and clearly, they have failed her. Her reliance on non-primary secondary and tertiary sources has led her to reproduce and even amplify the errors already present in the works that she has consulted. The further one is removed from primary historical sources, the greater is the possibility of misinterpretation of historical data, and this clearly shows in this chapter (and several others) of the book. In fact, Doniger has not even digested the data from her secondary and tertiary sources, and has produced a chapter that is full of major errors, *some* of which are critiqued below.

It is difficult to understand why she calls the entire period from 650 – 1500 as the ‘Delhi Sultanate’ when more than half of it (650 – 1192 CE) comprised of Rajput and other Hindu kingdoms in practically the whole of India. The Sultanate extended over peninsular India more than a century later during the reign of Ala-ud-Din Khalji in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. To lump 550 years from 650 – 1200 CE in “Delhi Sultanate” is somewhat reminiscent of Islamist Pakistani textbooks which start their accounts of history from 712 CE, when the Arabs invaded Sindh and established the first Muslim kingdom in the Indian subcontinent proper.

Even more ridiculous is the position of this chapter in the book. Chronologically, the Delhi Sultanate immediately precedes the establishment of the Mughal Empire in India starting 1526 CE. But in Doniger’s book, this chapter is followed by two other intervening chapters:

1. Chapter 17: Avatar and Accidental Grace in the Later Puranas 800 – 1500 CE
2. Chapter 18: Philosophical Feuds in South India and Kashmir 800 – 1300 CE

So, in her book, the author discusses Avatars in the Puranas in chapter 17 and the orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy (originating even before Christ) in the chapter 18, i.e., AFTER the chapter on Delhi Sultanate that we will review here. When we look at preceding chapters 14-15, we find similar confusion – Tughlaqs are mentioned in chapter 15

too! Maybe, Doniger just loves to read everything from right to left, and hates those who write from left to right in India. Or perhaps, this is not a book on 'Alternative History', and is instead an 'Alternative to History'.

And finally, just as the neo-Nazis deny the Jewish Holocaust or obfuscate it with apologias, Doniger likes to white-wash the scale and extent of atrocities on Hindus by Islamic invaders. In doing so, she has not only copied erroneous statements and generalizations from her defective sources (notably John Keay's book and Marxist historian Romila Thapar's agenda driven writings on Somanatha temple etc.) but has indulged in wholesale fraudulent interpretations of historical data. It is no one's case that *all* Muslim Sultans persecuted Hindus or that those who did had no other task but to indulge in persecution of Hindus day and night. But to overlook the general impact of the Muslim Sultanate over the Hindu population of India and dwell on the few, exceptional bright spots, or even fudge data to invent these bright spots is simply unacceptable, both morally as well as academically.

No sensible person can argue that Islamic culture had no impact on Hindu culture or vice versa, because the Islamic rulers ruled over large parts of Hindu dominated India for almost 800 years. However, to term the mutual impact as a 'fusion' is glossing over the conflicts (or rather, persecution of Hindus) that often occurred during this period. Doniger tends to exaggerate the benign influence of Islam over Hindu culture. Conversely, she typically blames Hindus for influencing Muslims in all wrong ways. So, on one hand she paints a distorted (even derogatory) picture of Hindu culture, and on the other she projects invasions as having some kind of a benign influence on Hindus. And now for some specific comments below.

**Page 445, para 1:** "*c. 650 Arabs reach the Indus.*"

**Comment:** Misleading statement. Arab traders had traded at the Indian coast much earlier, and Arab armies were still in Khurasan in 650 C.E. They reached the Indus as invaders only in 712 CE. Arab navy attacked the port of Debal in Sindh around 634 CE but without success. Therefore, it is unclear what Doniger means by saying that 'Arabs reached the Indus around 650 CE.'

**Page 445, para 1:** "*711 – 715 Arabs invade Northwest India*"

**Comment:** Another misleading statement. It is unclear what Doniger exactly means by 'Northwest India'. She should have rather said – “Arabs invade Sindh”. Before 680, the Arabs had already invaded Baluchistan (in NW India) six times but without success, finally capturing the coast of Makran in 680. Even before that, their navy had attacked (unsuccessfully) the port of Debal in Sindh during the reign of Caliph Umar (d. 644 CE). But this invasion was repulsed and the Arab leader Mughairah was defeated and killed.<sup>326</sup> The Muslims occupied eastern Afghanistan, NWFP and Punjab in North West India more than 2 centuries after they captured Sindh.

**Page 445, para 1:** “1398-1448 Kabir lives”

**Comment:** Wrong date. Kabir is traditionally held to have died around 1518 CE, and therefore modern scholarship holds that he was born around 1450 CE. Tradition says that he lived for 120 years, which would still make his life span 1398-1518 CE.<sup>327</sup> In fact, the story of Kabir's persecution by Sikandar Lodi (reigned 1489-1517) is so well known that this error by Doniger is easily caught by anyone with even a cursory knowledge of medieval Indian history. Doniger's dates make it appear that Kabir died even before Sultan Sikandar Lodi was born! In other chapters too, Doniger has given wrong dates for several Bhakta saints.

**Page 445, para 1:** “1469 – 1539 Guru Nanak founds Sikhism in the Punjab”

**Comment:** The correct statement should have been – “Guru Nanak lives” to be consistent.

**Page 446, para 1:** “...Gandhi...was killed, apparently with those [Ram Rahim] on his lips\*...”

“\* The words are inscribed on a plaque near the place in Delhi where he was shot. There is much dispute as to whether he said “Ram Ram” or “Ram Rahim” when he died.”

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<sup>326</sup> Ram Gopal Misra (1983), *Indian Resistance to Early Muslim Invaders up to 1203 AD*, Anu Books (Meerut, India), p. 11

<sup>327</sup> David Lorenzen (1991), *Kabir Legends and Ananta Das's Kabir Parachai*, SUNY (New York), p. 18

**Comment:** The general belief is that he died with the words ‘Hey Ram’ and these are displayed on his Samadhi at Raj Ghat. Some scholars say that he said ‘Ram Ram’ instead. Doniger leaves out the ‘Hey Ram’ (the most commonly accepted last words of Mahatma Gandhi) and instead inserts ‘Ram Rahim’ – an entirely manufactured controversy created by a miniscule minority of agenda driven individuals.

**Page 447, para 1:** *“....though some Turkish or Arab rulers destroyed Hindu temples, breeding lasting resentment, the ordinary Muslims who worshipped in mosques and Sufi shrines were seldom a problem for Hindus, who had high regard for most Arab and Turkish traders, particularly horse traders.”*

**Comment:** It is quite an understatement to say that only ‘some’ Arab or Turkish rulers destroyed Hindu temples. Practically every Arab and Turkish ruler committed some or the other act of religious fanaticism directed against Hindus. The Hindus did respect Arabs and Turkish traders, but how often was the reverse true? Doniger does not address this question.

**Page 447, para 2:** *“There is irony in the fact that the stereotype of the Turk who destroys temples and idols, appropriates the temple lands of Brahmins, and eats beef became so clichéd, so generalized to the Terrible Other, that the Kashmir chronicle, in 1148 CE, describing a Hindu king who plundered temples and had excrement and wine poured over the statues of gods called him a Turk (Turuska).”*

**Comment:** There is no irony, and perhaps there was more than a grain of historical truth in that stereotype. Doniger makes this remark to suggest that not only the Turkish rulers, but also some Indian rulers destroyed Hindu temples.

As to how Harsha was perceived by Indians, the following remarks by an Indologist may be reproduced –

“Harsha or Harshadeva of Kashmir (r.1089-1111) has been called the "Nero of Kashmir", and this "because of his cruelty" (S.B. Bhattacharjee: Encyclopedia of Indian Events and Dates, Sterling Publ., Delhi 1995, p.A-20). He is described by Kalhana as having looted and desecrated most Hindu and Buddhist temples in Kashmir, partly through an office which he had created, viz. the "officer for despoiling god-temples". The general data on 11th-century Kashmir already militate against treating him as a typical Hindu king who did on purely Hindu grounds what Muslim kings also did, viz. to destroy

the places of worship of rival religions. For, Kashmir had already been occupied by Masud Ghaznavi, son of Mahmud, in 1034, and Turkish troops were a permanent presence as mercenaries to the king.

Harsha was a fellow-traveler: not yet a full convert to Islam (he still ate pork, as per *Rajatarangini* 7:1149), but quite adapted to the Islamic ways, for "he ever fostered with money the Turks, who were his centurions" (7:1149). There was nothing Hindu about his iconoclasm, which targeted Hindu temples, as if a Muslim king were to demolish mosques rather than temples. All temples in his kingdom except four (enumerated in 7:1096-1098, two of them Buddhist) were damaged. This behavior was so un-Hindu and so characteristically Islamic that Kalhana reports: "In the village, the town or in Srinagara there was not one temple which was not despoiled by the Turk king Harsha." (7:1095)<sup>328</sup>

Another historian remarks –

"In Harsha's case, statues of gods were defiled by 'naked mendicants whose noses, feet and hands had rotted away', and these were dragged along the streets 'with ropes around their ankles, with spittings instead of flowers' [*Rajatarangini* VII.1092-95]. There was hardly a temple in Kashmir whose images were not despoiled by this king, and reconverted into treasure. But in all likelihood, Harsha – who employed Turkish officers in his army – had followed the Muslim example, as the epithet applied to him, *Harsharajaturushka*, seems to indicate."<sup>329</sup>

It has been also claimed that Harsha defiled Hindu and Buddhist shrines under the influence of the *Ajivika* (a heretical atheist sect in India) ascetics but Doniger seems unaware of this interpretation.<sup>330</sup>

Andre Wink sharply contrasts solitary instances like the one emphasized by Doniger, from the systematic Islamist iconoclasm directed against the Hindus –

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<sup>328</sup> See

<http://koenraadelst.voiceofdharma.com/articles/ayodhya/harshakashmir.html>

<sup>329</sup> Andre Wink (1997), *Al-Hind*, Vol. II, Brill (London), p. 310-311

<sup>330</sup> See A L Basham, "*History and Doctrine of the Ajivikas*", Motilal Banarsidass Pvt Ltd., New Delhi, 2002 [1951, London], pp. 205-210

“Of course, just as in Christian Europe, and in Byzantium and the Islamic world, in India people can be seen to have engaged in acts of destruction, of buildings and statues, for purely utilitarian reasons, especially in times of economic hardship, or to enable themselves to erect new buildings, or when conquering the dominions of rivals, or in attempts to obliterate the architectural heritage of a previous dynasty (thus Hindus destroying mosques) ....But these remained incidental confiscations or random acts which were not back up by any iconoclastic motivation as such. The same can be said about the incidental confiscations of temple treasure or lands by Hindu kings, or the periodic ‘purifications’ of the Buddhist sangha, which primarily served financial or political purposes and should be distinguished from iconoclasm.”<sup>331</sup>

In summary, one cannot use this instance to ‘balance’ Islamic iconoclasm directed at Indian temples with ‘Hindu iconoclasm’. Doniger’s emphasis on the Hindu origins of Harsha is therefore inappropriate.

**Page 447, para 3:** “*Some Hindus assimilated the Turks by creating ingenious, and positive, Sanskrit glosses for Arabic words and names: Thus the Ghorids became ‘Gauri-kula’ (“family of fair people” or “family of the golden goddess [Parvati]”), sultans became Sura-tranas (“protectors of the gods”), and Muhammad (or Mahmud) became Maha-muda (“great joy”).*”

**Comment:** Doniger’s fanciful translations of Gauri-kula are not only somewhat ungrammatical, but also simply ridiculous. She refers to the Marxist historian B Chattopadhyaya’s book<sup>332</sup> as her source, but he too does not give such silly interpretations, and instead clarifies that ‘Gauri’ was the Indianized version of the name of the district ‘Ghaur’ or ‘Ghur’ from where Mahmud hailed.

Maybe Doniger does not mention that Muhammad became ‘Mahamada’ (‘great arrogance’) in the Bhavishya Purana (Pratisarga Khanda). The point is that Doniger’s book quotes data piece-meal to drive an agenda. Just as it would be foolish to suggest that Americans have assimilated Afghan or Taliban culture because the people of United States pronounce names from Afghanistan with an American accent, it is foolish to argue that Hindus assimilated Turks just because they represented them with Indianized versions of their names.

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<sup>331</sup> Andre Wink (1997), *Al-Hind*, Vol. II, Brill (London), p. 308

<sup>332</sup> Brajdulal Chattopadhyaya (1998), *Representing the Other – Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims*, Manohar (New Delhi)

**Page 447, para 3:** “An inscription, in Sanskrit and Arabic, from 1264 CE about the construction of a mosque, at Somnath (a place of great historical controversy, as well see), describes the mosque in Hindu terms, as a site of dharma (dharma-sthana), where people did puja in order to gain merit (punya karma). Most significantly, the inscription begins by using the same word to denote both Shiva and Allah, invoking (“Om! Namah!”) Shri Vishvanatha (“Lord of the Universe”), meaning both the Hindu god Shiva as Somanatha and “the divinity to whom those whose prophet (bodhaka) was Muhammad were attached (pratibaddha).”

**Comment:** Doniger takes this description of the inscription at Prabhas Patan from the Marxist historian Romila Thapar’s “*Somanatha: The Many Voices of History*” (OUP, 2004, Delhi). However, Thapar only cites the Sanskrit portion of this two part inscription, and completely ignores the Arabic part because it would have proven so damaging to her thesis.

The first 7 lines of the inscription as translated by Z A Desai read –  
 “1. Allāh the Exalted may assign this (reward) to one who builds a house in the path of Allāh... [This auspicious mosque was built].  
 2. on the twenty-seventh of the month of RamaDān, year [sixty-two].  
 3. and six hundred from migration of the Prophet (23rd July AD 1264), in the reign of the just Sultān and [the generous king].  
 4. Abu’l-Fakhr (lit., father of pride), Ruknu’d-Dunyā wa’d-Dīn (lit., pillar of State and Religion), Mu’izzu’l-Islām wa’l-Muslimīn (lit. source of glory for Islām and the Muslims), shadow of Allāh in [the lands],  
 5. one who is victorious against the enemies, (divinely) supported prince, Abi’n-Nusrat (lit., father of victory), Mahmūd, son of Ahmad, may Allāh perpetuate his...  
 6. and may his affair and prestige be high, in the city of Somnāt (i.e. Somnath), may God make it one of the cities of Islām and [banish?].  
 7. infidelity and idols...”<sup>333</sup>

Sita Ram Goel comments –

“The mosque was erected at Prabhas Patan which was situated in the kingdom of Gujarat and not at a place in the kingdom of Hormuz. But the builder went much farther as, after extolling the king of Hormuz as “the source of glory for Islām and the Muslims,” he prayed fervently that “may his affair and prestige be high in the city of Somnāt, may Allāh make it one of the cities of Islām, and [banish?]”

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<sup>333</sup>*Epigraphia Indica - Arabic and Persian Supplement*, 1961, pp. 11-12



infidelity and idols” from it. In other words, he was praying for and looking forward to another Islamic invasion of Gujarat.

Comparing the Sanskrit and Arabic versions of this inscription, the conclusion is unavoidable that the Muslim merchant from Hormuz had eschewed carefully from the Sanskrit version what he had included confidently in the Arabic text. He must have been sure in his mind that no Hindu from Prabhas Patan or elsewhere was likely to compare the two texts and that even if a Hindu noticed the difference between the two he was not likely to understand its meaning and purport. At the same time, he was sharing with his co-religionists in Gujarat a pious aspiration enjoined on all believers by the tenets of Islam.”<sup>334</sup>

So this is an example of the deceptive historiography that Doniger has reproduced from her agenda driven sources. Many other examples like the above bilingual inscription may be given showing that the hospitality and tolerance of Hindus was not always repaid in kind by the immigrants.<sup>335</sup>

**Page 447-448:** “*On the other hand, the Arabs and Turks usually did not think of the Hindus as Hindus; they thought of them as Vaishnavas, or Bengalis, or brilliant artists or airheads as the case might be.*”

**Comment:** Baseless remarks not backed by any significant historical evidence. Inhabitants of India were lumped into one category ‘Hindus’ and Muslim chronicles typically referred to all Hindu adversaries in pejorative terms such as ‘crow faced’<sup>336</sup> without regard to whether they were Bengalis or non-Bengalis etc.

**Page 448, para 2:** “*...Al-biruni (973 – 1048), who came to India, learned Sanskrit, translated Hindu texts, and wrote about the religion (sic: he regarded it as unified) of India.*”

**Comment:** Al-Beruni left one of the most insightful, sober and extensive accounts of the Hindu religion in North West India in the early

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<sup>334</sup> Sita Ram Goel (1998), *Hindu Temples – What Happened to Them*, Vol II, Voice of India (New Delhi), chapter III. The book is available online at <http://www.bharatvani.org/books/htemples2/index.htm>

<sup>335</sup> See online <http://www.bharatvani.org/books/htemples2/ch3.htm>

<sup>336</sup> Peter Jackson (1999), *The Delhi Sultanate*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), p. 289

11<sup>th</sup> century. It is not appropriate to simply dismiss his perception that Indian faith was unified. He certainly lived in India and studied Hinduism under knowledgeable Hindus for a much longer time than most Indologists from west do. It is interesting to note that she hardly quotes Al-Biruni when he describes the iconoclasm and fanaticism of his contemporary Mahmud Ghaznavi.

**Page 448, para 3:** *“Before 650, Arabs had made desultory raids by sea on the lower Sind, to protect the trade route carrying Arabian horses to India and Indian spices to Arabia.”*

**Comment:** That is again quite a distortion of historical evidence. The raids were also made as far as Thane (Maharashtra) and Bharuch (Gujarat) and their aggressive Jihadi nature is quite self-evident from Islamic chronicles (like Chachnama) themselves. These raids were not conducted to protect their trade routes as Doniger makes it appear. Throughout the book, Doniger seems to be writing an apologia for medieval Islamic invaders and vandals. Perhaps, she should write similar apologies for the Nazis too.

**Page 448, para 3:** *“By 650, Arabs had also reached the Indus River, and though they rarely crossed it, their ideas swam across.”*

**Comment:** See comments above. Doniger gives the reference of Keay’s book (p. 180) that the Arabs reached the Indus by 650. But Keay makes no such claim. Doniger also fails to enlighten the reader on which “ideas swam across.” Doniger often sacrifices historical accuracy for the sake of writing cutesy phrases. As the German Indologist Hans Bakker has said, Doniger books are like fast food items that generate a lot of sales and publicity but are devoid of scholarship and do not advance the cause of research!

**Page 448, para 3:** *“Then, in around 663, Arab forces crossed the Bolan pass (near Quetta in Pakistan) from Afghanistan into Sind. Peacefully, they traded horses for spices. Only later did the martial invasions come, first by Arabs and then by Turks (from many parts of Central Asia) and Mongols.”* [Emphasis added – reviewer].

**Comment:** Doniger states all these (wrong) facts to buttress her thesis that Islam entered the Indian subcontinent in a peaceful manner. Unfortunately, her statements, copied incorrectly from Keay’s book, are all gross distortions, contradicted by historical records. Prophet Muhammad died in 632 AD, and within 31 years of his death, the Arab

armies crossed the Bolan Pass, thousands of miles from Hijaz (the home of Islam's prophet). Does this sound very peaceful? Doniger makes it appear that Arabs merely traded peacefully with India from 663-711 CE, but this is not true.

The summary of attempted invasions of Arabs is as follows: The Arab invasion of Sindh started soon after their first two naval expeditions against Thana on the coast of Maharashtra and Broach on the coast of Gujarat, had been repulsed in the reign of Caliph Umar (AD 634-644). The expedition against Debal in Sindh met the same fate "The leader of the Arab army, Mughairah, was defeated and killed. Umar decided to send another army by land against Makran which was at that time a part of the kingdom of Sindh. But he was advised by the governor of Iraq that "he should think no more of Hind". The next Caliph, Usman (AD 646-656), followed the same advice and refrained from sending any expedition against Sindh, either by land or by sea. The fourth Caliph, Ali (AD 656-661), sent an expedition by land in AD 660. But the leader of this expedition and "those who were with him, saving a few, were slain in the land of Kikan in the year AH 42 (AD 662)". Muawiyah, the succeeding Caliph (AD 661-680), sent as many as six expeditions by land. All of them were repulsed with great slaughter except the last one which succeeded in occupying Makran in AD 680. For the next 28 years, the Arabs did not dare send another army against Sindh. The next expedition was dispatched to take Debal in AD 708. Its two successive commanders, Ubaidullah and Budail, were killed and the Arab army was routed. When Hajjaj, the governor of Iraq, asked the Caliph for permission to send another expedition, the Caliph wrote back: "This affair will be a source of great anxiety and so we must put it off, for every time an army goes, [vast] numbers of Mussalmans are killed. So think no more of such a design." Hajjaj spent the next four years in equipping an army more formidable than any which had so far been sent against Sindh. It is this army that invaded Sindh in 711-712 CE.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> These summaries are available even online (<http://dikgaj.wordpress.com/2008/08/31/how-islam-came-to-india-and-why-now-it-needs-to-go-from-india-11-economic-decline-under-islam-the-strange-case-of-the-horse/>), from which we have taken this account. But identical accounts are available in published scholar works. For example, Ram Gopal Misra (1983), *Indian Resistance to Early Muslim Invaders up to 1206 AD*, Anu Books (Meerut), pp. 11-15 or any other standard work on the history of this period and region. The Chachnama and chronicles of Baladhuri may also be consulted.

To conclude, there was nothing peaceful about the arrival of Arabs in N W India or in Sindh, pace Doniger and other negationists.

**Page 448-449:** *“In 713, Muhammad ibn Qasim invaded Sind, offering terms of surrender that included a promise to guarantee the safety of Hindu and Buddhist establishments and to allow Brahmin and Buddhist monks to collect alms and temples to receive donations. Hindus and Buddhists were allowed to govern themselves in matters of religion and law; Ibn Qasim did not regard non-Muslims as heathens who had to be subdued.”*

**Comment:** This is again a great distortion and seeks to convey the impression that the invasion of Sindh was a very benign affair. Here is a summary of the atrocities during and after that invasion<sup>338</sup>:

In Debal, when the Hindus opened the gates of their fortress and offered surrender, Qasim quipped that he had no orders from his master al-Hajjaj to spare them. For three days, the residents of the city were slaughtered. Brahmins and other Hindus were asked to convert to Islam and upon their refusal, all Hindu males above the age of 17 were killed whereas their wives and children were enslaved. About 700 ladies were dispatched to Iraq for sexual and other forms of slavery. The religious shrine at Debal was destroyed and replaced with a mosque.

In Aror, the capital of Sindh, Qasim massacred 6,000 fighting men who were found in the fort, and their followers and dependents, as well as their women and children were taken prisoners. Sixty thousand slaves, including 30 young ladies of royal blood, were sent to al-Hajjaj, along with the head of Dahar [the Hindu ruler]. The Chachnama notes that the ladies committed Jauhar (committed suicide by burning themselves) en mass.

At Multan, Qasim desecrated the Sun Temple by hanging a piece of beef around the icon, and looted its treasures. **According** to chronicler Al-Baladhuri, the children of killed Hindu soldiers and Brahmins numbering 6000 were enslaved. In Sika on the banks of river Ravi, several thousand children and wives and the local priests of the temple were enslaved. Temples were demolished also at the capital Aror and in Narun. The son (named Jai Singh) of the vanquished Hindu ruler was allowed to

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<sup>338</sup> K L Shrivastava (1980), *The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate: 1206-1526*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd (New Delhi), pp. 1-3

rule Brahmanabad after he converted to Islam. However, Jai Singh later apostatized and was then killed by Hakam.

After 724 (when bin Qasim was dead), Hakam worked vigorously for propagation of Islam. Hindus were subjected to unprecedented heavy rates and many new taxes were also imposed on the Hindu peasantry. Hindus had to entertain every Muslim traveler free for 3 days and nights. Around 871 CE, the Arab dominion split into two Muslim kingdoms centered around Multan and Mansurah respectively. The Arab settlers became possessors of vast tracts of agricultural land and employed Hindus as serfs for labor.

Historians opine that Muhammad bin Qasim employed local Hindus not out of his liberal views but because, *“without the co-operation of the Hindus it was difficult for the Islamic state to carry on the administration. So, out of sheer necessity, he had to appoint the Brahmanas as tax collectors.”*<sup>339</sup>

**Page 449, para 1:** *“He [Muhammad bin Qasim] kept his promises though he did impose the jaziya, a tax on male adults who would have been liable to military service if they had been Muslims; non-Muslims were excused this duty but were required instead to pay for their military protection.”*

**Comment:** Military protection of non-Muslims from whom? From non-Muslims? What if the non-Muslims did not want the Muslim rulers to protect them from non-Muslims?

It appears that an apologist for Islamism has written these sentences in Doniger’s book. Jaziya was a poll tax (like the ‘protection money’ extracted by mafia gangs from a helpless society in return of freedom from molestation by the same gang) demanded from non-Muslims because they are infidels living under a ‘Muslim state’. Sanctioned by the Koran, the tax (often as much as a month’s income every year) was meant to demonstrate that the infidels were inferior to Muslims. It was an instrument to humiliate them and disarm them, exclude them from administration and sometimes induce them to convert to Islam.<sup>340</sup>

Doniger does not ask if the Hindus had the option of wielding arms for the Arab state of Sindh and therefore exempt themselves from

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid, p. 134

<sup>340</sup> See Harsh Narain (1990), *Jizyah and the Spread of Islam*, Voice of India (New Delhi). Available online at <http://www.voiceofdharma.org/books/jtsi/index.htm>

Jaziya. Doniger's apologia also falsely assumes that each and every adult Muslim male in India was a member of the Arab army in Sindh. Throughout the Muslim rule in India, large sections of the Hindu society were forced to disarm themselves (so that they are not a threat to the Muslim rulers) and suffered economic hardships and pressures to convert to Islam as a result.

Even as we write, the Taliban are forcing Hindus and Sikhs in parts of Pakistan to pay astronomical amounts of money as Jaziya failing which they are either expelled or killed. Therefore, it is ethically and socially irresponsible of Doniger to peddle these kinds of apologies for this hated poll-tax meant to humiliate the 'infidels'.

Finally, the Chachnama gives this speech of the Brahmins to other Hindus when the latter were sent out to collect the Jaziya – *".....If we do not obey the Arabs we shall neither have property nor the means of living....At present we are not driven from our homes; but if you cannot endure the tribute which is fixed on you, nor submit to the heavy burden, then let us retire at a suitable opportunity to some other place of Hind or Sind, with all your families and children, where you may find your lives secure. Life is the greatest of all blessings. But if we can escape from this dreadful whirlpool, and can save our lives from the power of this army, our property and children will be safe."*<sup>341</sup>

This speech, even if dismissed as apocryphal by agenda driven historians, nevertheless shows how terrified Sindh's Hindus were of the Arabs, that the payment Jaziya was an act of submission by them, and that it was a large amount. It was not a mere act of 'exemption from military duties' as Doniger makes it out to be. There are numerous communities of Hindus all over northern India that trace their origin to Sindh or Multan, and who fled during these or later Muslim invasions.

**Page 449, para 1:** *"At the same time, in the wealthy Gujarati port of Bhadreshwar, the local Jaina rulers, eager to trade with the Arabs, had allowed the resident Ismaili merchants to build mosques in that area."*

**Comment:** Doniger mentions this fact to argue that the relations between Hindus and Muslims were very cordial when Arabs invaded Sind. Unfortunately, not all Muslim traders paid back the hospitality accorded to them in kind. The same Ismailis upon occupying

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<sup>341</sup> H M Elliot et al, *History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, Vol I, p. 184

Multan in the late 10<sup>th</sup> cent. CE immediately demolished the Sun Temple at Multan, slaughtering all the priests, and erecting a mosque at its site.<sup>342</sup>

**Page 449, para 2:** “....in 1018 he [Mahmud of Ghazni] sacked Mathura....and then Kanauj...Turkish communities were also established in the region of Varanasi and elsewhere. It was a boom time for immigration from Persia and Central Asia, and this greatly added to the cosmopolitanism of the subcontinent, since culture under what became the Ghaznavid Empire in India....was a “blend of Greek philosophy, Roman architecture, Hindu mathematics, and the Persian concept of the empire.”

**Comment:** Doniger paints a totally fake, benign picture of how the ‘immigrants’ from Central Asia and Persia settled down in India. She also conceals the fact that the invaders also sacked Varanasi and many other pilgrimage centers of Hindus, smashing and burning temples (breaking the idols to pieces and burying them under the stairs of mosques so that Muslims walked above them while going for their prayers), butchering cows, raping and enslaving Hindus and so on.

For instance, right after Mahmud Ghaznavi, Ahmad Nayaltagin raided Varanasi in 1033 and plundered it. Muhammad Ghauri invaded Varanasi later and is said to have destroyed 1000 temples. Numerous similar accounts of Islamic rulers invading Varanasi for humiliating Hindus and desecrating their shrines in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and in the later times exist as well.<sup>343</sup>

Some historians such as H M Elliot have argued that these immigrant communities provided the intelligence of India’s land and her people later needed by Turkish rulers for invading India.

**Page 450, para 1:**“In 1350, a century after Raziya’s death, the historian Isami objected to her blatant interracial liaison, remarking that a woman’s place was at her spinning wheel....The sexism they already had in India, thank you...”

**Comment:** The historian Abdul Malik Isami belonged to a family of Arab nobles who had migrated to India a century earlier. His work ‘Futuh-us-Salatin’ is in Persian and it can hardly represent the

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<sup>342</sup> Andre Wink (1997), *Al-Hind*, vol. II, Brill (London). P. 320

<sup>343</sup> H A Phadke (2005), *Essays on Indian Historiography*, Rawat Publications (Jaipur), p. 66

prevalent attitudes of Indians (who were more than 90% Hindus) in those days. To ridicule the sexism of 14<sup>th</sup> century Indians on the basis of his statements is unfair to Indians.

For that matter, Isami hated Hindus and even chided Muhammad bin Tughlaq (the then Sultan of Delhi) for being soft on Hindus<sup>344</sup> even though Tughlaq had occasionally indulged in bouts of temple destruction and slaughter of Brahmins. Will Doniger then say – “The hatred for Hindus they already had in India, thank you...”

The point is that Doniger takes every opportunity to berate Hindus and India in her book.

**Page 450, para 2:** *“Holy wars (jibads) flared up from time to time, more often politically motivated than religiously inspired....Ala-ud-din sacked and plundered Devagiri but then made peace, married a Maharashtra woman, prohibited the sale and consumption of alcohol, and left the kingdom and its religions otherwise intact.”*

**Comment:** Again, an example of negationist history writing. First, according to the Khalji ruler’s contemporary Amir Khusro, Ala-Ud-Din did destroy temples and raise pulpits and arches for mosques in Devagiri.<sup>345</sup>

Second, Doniger omits to mention historical facts and weaves her own fictitious account of the ruler. Whom Doniger just refers to as a ‘Maharashtra woman’ was actually the princess of Devagiri that the Khalji ruler got as a part of the ‘peace agreement’ with the ruler of Devagiri.<sup>346</sup> It was a common practice for victorious Muslim rulers to demand or receive infidel women for their harem as a condition of peace. It was conversely rare for Muslim rulers to give their daughters in marriage to Hindu rulers for obvious reasons. Surrendering a daughter to the victorious Muslim invader was a symbol of humiliation for the Hindu chief, and of accepting the superiority of the Muslim ruler to the Hindu ruler. Even medieval Rajput ballads claim that Pirorja, the daughter of the Khalji ruler, fell in

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<sup>344</sup> K L Srivastava (1980), *The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate 1206-1526*, Munshiram Manoharlal, Delhi, p. 236

<sup>345</sup> H M Elliot, *History of India as Told by its own Historians*, Vol III, p. 548

<sup>346</sup> Kishori Saran Lal (1990), *History of the Khaljis*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd. (New Delhi), p. 46



love with a Hindu chief but the Sultan refused the alliance on grounds that a 'Hindu and Turuk cannot marry.'<sup>347</sup>

Ala-ud-din is similarly said to have invaded other Hindu kingdoms to get their infidel princesses or queens for addition to his kingdom. There are several medieval kavyas on the Khalji ruler kidnapping or demanding queens or princesses of Hindu kingdoms with or without success. According to the later Rajput romance Chitai-Varta, the princess of Devagiri was already married and was kidnapped by Ala-ud-Din while she was worshipping at a Hindu temple. However, she refused to submit to the Sultan, and eventually was rescued by her husband.<sup>348</sup>

The Khalji ruler was the first Muslim king to invade Deccan and destroyed numerous temples and sacred trees during his campaigns (e.g., in Warangal), as did his general Malik Kafur in Dwarasamudra, Chidambaram and other places.<sup>349</sup>

Ala-ud-Din Khalji broke several other temples and massacred Hindus for apparently no political gain. According to the chronicler Badauni, he invaded Vidisha (in the present state of Madhya Pradesh in India) in 1292 and brought the icon worshipped by Hindus there, to be cast in front of the Badaun gate to be trampled upon by the Muslim worshippers there. In 1298 AD, he invaded Gujarat and destroyed the temple of Somnath that had been rebuilt by the Hindus. Hindus were slaughtered en masse and the Queen Kampala Devi was captured and forcibly added to the Khalji ruler's harem. Historian Barani also notes that the Khalji ruler regularly enslaved those (largely Hindu farmers) who defaulted on their revenue payments.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> Ramya Sreenivasan, "Alauddin Khalji Remembered, Conquest, Gender and Community in Medieval Rajput Narratives," pp. 275-296 in *Studies in History*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2002)

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> K L Shrivastava (1980), *The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd. (New Delhi), p. 104-107

<sup>350</sup> Scott Levi, "Hindus Beyond the Hindu Kush, Indians in the Central Asian Slave Trade", pp. 277-288 in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2002)

**Page 450-451:** "...*Firoz Shah Tughluq (1351 – 1388), desecrated the shrine of Jagannath at Puri, was said to have massacred infidels, and extended the jaziya to Brahmins....*"

**Comment:** It is quite an understatement that he 'was said to have massacred infidels.' In his campaign against Orissa itself, after he had desecrated the Jagannath Temple, his armies marched towards an island in the Lake Chilika region, where (according to the contemporary chronicle *Sirat-i-Firuz Shahi*) about 100,000 terrified Hindus had taken refuge after escaping from Jajnagar. Then, "...the auspicious stirrups [of horses in Tughlaq's army] were turned in that direction, and troops were so distributed on all sides that they might converge at a point and convert the island into a basin of blood by the massacred of the unbelievers with the sharp sword....". "Captive and married, women bearing only female ones, women with a few and many children, widows, bashful women, chaste ladies, women endowed with natural beauty were pressed as slaves, slave-maiden, maid servants, female singers, nurses and midwives, into service in the house of every soldier. The rest of the women were taken captives along with the elephants; women with babies and pregnant women were haltered, manacled, fettered and enchained and no vestige of the infidels was left except their blood." – so goes this chronicle.<sup>351</sup>

The temple at Puri was not the only one that he desecrated by. Medieval historian Ferishta records that the Sultan broke the Hindu icons at the famous temple of Jwalamukhi, mixed their fragments with the flesh of cows and hung them in nose bags around the necks of Brahmins. He sent the main idol as a trophy to the Muslim holy city of Medina. In addition, he confiscated 1500 Hindu manuscripts from the temples in that region and sent them to Delhi – some of them were translated into Persian. He also destroyed temples at Mulh, Salikpur and Kohana.<sup>352</sup> In one instance, a Brahmin, accused of inducing some Muslim women to convert to Hinduism, was burnt alive at the gate of his palace when he refused to convert to Islam.<sup>353</sup>

Concerning his extension of the Jaziya to Brahmins, the latter threatened to immolate themselves en masse, and the Sultan advised them to proceed with the threat. The crisis was averted when prominent Hindus of Delhi stepped forward to pay the poll-tax on the behalf of the

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<sup>351</sup> Harekrushna Mahtab, "Invasion of Orissa in 1360 A.D." in *Orissa Historical Research Journal*. Vol 1, no. 1 (1952), pp. 31-35

<sup>352</sup> K L Shrivastava (1980), *The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd (New Delhi), p. 84

<sup>353</sup> Ibid

Brahmins. In his autobiography, Firoz Shah mentions with glee that he induced countless Hindus to convert to Islam – the converts being no longer required to pay the Jaziya.<sup>354</sup>

**Page 451, para 1:** “*On the other hand, Firoz Shah redeemed a number of Hindu slaves as well as an African eunuch slaves....*”

**Comment:** Doniger makes this remark to ‘balance’ his bigotry against Hindus by his supposed compassion for Hindu slaves. But did Firoz Tughlaq really ‘redeem a number of Hindu slaves? She has amplified the misleading remark in Keay’s book who says that Feroz Tughlaq rescued several slaves from penury by employing them in royal factories called *Karkhanas*.<sup>355</sup> The fact however is that these Karkhanas were more like modern sweat shops and the workers were still slaves, not free men.<sup>356</sup> These slaves were forced to manufacture articles for consumption by the largely Muslim elite after being trained to do their jobs.

In fact, chroniclers of his reign note with glee that under this Sultan the number of slaves actually rose very high, ‘which was beyond description.’<sup>357</sup> The ruler owned 180,000 slaves of whom a mere 12,000 were these skilled artisans working in these *karkhanas*.<sup>358</sup> So much for Firoz Shah’s manumission of Hindu slaves!

**Page 451, para 2:** “*In general, the sultanate rulers did not attempt a mass conversion of Hindus, but many Hindus did convert to Islam during this period....*”

**Comment:** Again, a misleading statement designed to understate the coercion that Hindus faced during the Islamic rule of Sultans. A historian, after reviewing different sources and often conflicting opinions remarks –

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<sup>354</sup> Peter Jackson (1999), *The Delhi Sultanate – a Political and Military History*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), p. 286

<sup>355</sup> John Keay (2000), “*India a History*”, Atlantic Monthly Press (New York), p. 272

<sup>356</sup> K S Lal, “*Muslim Slave System in Medieval India*”, Aditya Prakashan (New Delhi), p. 96. The book is available online at <http://www.voiceofdharma.org/books/mssmi/>

<sup>357</sup> K L Shrivastava (1980), *The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd (New Delhi), p. 123

<sup>358</sup> Scott Levi, “Hindus Beyond the Hindu Kush, Indians in the Central Asian Slave Trade”, pp. 277-288 in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Series 3, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2002)

“In the zeal for converting the whole of India into Dar-ul-Islam, the Muslim rulers resorted to the forcible conversions of Hindus to Islam. The subjects of a vanquished territory and prisoners of war in the hands of Muslim conquerors were mostly converted to Islam. On their refusal to change their faith, they were coerced with the result that they found deliverance only in accepting Islam. The Muslim rulers also adopted economic measures, viz., the imposition of the Jizya and allurements to the Hindus by assigning them higher posts in the state administration, which won many converts to Islam. The converted Muslims were accorded honor as is evident from the respectable position enjoyed by Malik Kafur, Khusrau Khan, Khan-i-Jahan Maqbul, Harihara, Bukka and others.”<sup>359</sup>

**Page 451, para 3:** *“The Delhi Sultans levied the jizya, graduated according to income, with exemptions for people at both ends of the social spectrum, the poorest and ....the purest, the Brahmins. There is also evidence of the existence of a “Turkish” (Turuska) tax, which may have been a poll tax on Muslims in India, a Hindu equivalent of the Muslim jizya.”*

**Comment:** Doniger indulges in negationist scholarship again, downplaying the tyranny of imposition jaziya and falsely equating it to Turushka Danda and giving only one of the interpretations of this term by scholars. The other interpretation given by scholars is that it was an extra war levy on Hindu residents collected by Hindu rulers for raising money for battles against Turks.<sup>360</sup> Another interpretation is that it was a tribute that the Hindu rulers of Kannauj paid to the Muslim Turks. In any case, this tax is mentioned may be a couple of times, whereas the Jaziya was extracted from Hindus by dozens of rulers over several centuries. The Jaziya was not a light tax and estimates range from 10 – 25% of a middle class family’s income.

**Page 451, para 3:** *“Taxes under the Delhi Sultanate seem to have been motivated much more by the need for revenue than by religious sentiments.”*

**Comment:** If it was just a tax to augment revenues, then why did the Muslims also not pay the Jaziya? All rulers need revenue but why is it

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<sup>359</sup> K L Shrivastava (1980), *The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd (New Delhi), p. 229

<sup>360</sup> Vincent Smith (1904), *Early History of India*, Clarendon Press (London), p. 400, n. 1; see also Phadke, op. cit, p. 63

that the Delhi Sultanate reduced the predominantly Hindu peasantry to a state of penury, unlike most of the Hindu states before them?

**Page 451, para 3:** *“Some Hindus also responded to the presence of Islam by a series of measures designed to strengthen their own religion, such as enormous land grants to Brahmins, which meant more taxes to generate revenues that could be converted into those grants (exacerbating social oppression and caste discrimination), as well as endowing temples and providing social services on the local level (which mitigated that same oppression and discrimination).”*

**Comment:** Again, a distortion of historical data. First, grants by Hindus to temples were largely made in areas outside of Muslim control (or only under nominal Muslim control). Second, it is quite perverse for Doniger to suggest that Temples bred caste oppression. It appears that she just equates Hinduism to the stereotype of cow-curry-caste.

Finally, she tries to balance the baneful impact of Islam on Hindu institutions by highlighting caste-oppressions, apparently to suggest that destruction of temples was somewhat a good thing because it destroyed temples that fostered caste oppression in the first place.

A correct generalization about the Delhi Sultanate period in this matter would be this—

“Hindu educational institutions suffered at the hands of Muslim rulers. The Hindus were not allowed to establish institutions for higher learning....wherever possible, Hindu institutions functioned because of the interest taken by individual Hindu nobles or rich persons. There were no public schools where the Hindus could receive proper training in literature, art and sciences.”<sup>361</sup>

“The Muslim onslaughts on the Hindu ruling dynasties and the destruction of Hindu temples and seats of learning had almost extinguished the Hindu culture by destroying the sources which fed and nourished it. It is to be noted that the Hindu states of Mithila in the north and the Vijayanagara kingdom in the south preserved Hindu religion and culture.....The opinion of some scholars that the Islamic state had no means to subjugate the Hindus completely is quite untenable in view of the large scale slaughter of Hindus by Balban and Alauddin Khalji in the course of their military operations. In the period in which cultural life thrived on court patronage, such

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<sup>361</sup> K L Shrivastava (1980), *“The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate”*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd (New Delhi), p. 232

wars and destructive activities could hardly create conditions conducive to the cultural life of the Hindus.”<sup>362</sup>

**Page 451, para 4:** *“The Brahmins were in a bind: They wanted to keep the barbarians out, but they also had to assimilate and legitimize the foreign rulers in order to keep temporal support for themselves....an inscription from 1369 traces the descent of a sultan from the lineage of the Pandavas in the Mahabharata.”*

**Comment:** Again, a distortion of history. The Sultanate rulers did not particularly patronize the Brahmins. There are isolated examples, but these are just a few exceptions.

The inscription mentioned by Doniger belongs to Kashmir<sup>363</sup> from a period when the Muslim rule was barely 3 decades old. The then ruler of Kashmir, Shihab-ud-Din, was relatively tolerant of Hindus (although later Persian chronicles claim that he was a fanatical Muslim ruler) and Kashmir was still a predominantly Hindu region, culturally as well as demographically (with Sanskrit still the official language in most cases), explaining why the inscription was in the Sharada script and in Sanskrit. It was later during the 15<sup>th</sup> century when Hindus started experiencing extensive persecutions under the reign of Sikandar.

In other words, this one inscription from Kashmir cannot really be used to generalize the situation outside of Kashmir in the Delhi Sultanate (as Doniger seems to imply), which was under the oppressive reign of bigot ruler Firoz Shah Tughlaq in 1369.

**Page 454-455:** *“Nowadays the story of Hinduism as told by Hindu nationalists always includes a chapter on the Horrid Things Those Bad Muslims Did. Hindu nationalism has given prominence and importance to stories of victims and victimizers that otherwise would have been just drops in the ocean of vicious battles that have plagued the subcontinent, indeed the planet, for millennia....”*

**Comment:** Doniger unfairly characterizes anyone who would differ from her fairy tale accounts of medieval India as a ‘Hindu Nationalist’. However, a casual reader would note that by her yardstick, the numerous scholars we have cited to contradict her fabrications would also become Hindu nationalists. By Doniger’s yardstick, all the authors

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<sup>362</sup> Ibid, pp. 233-234

<sup>363</sup> B. K. Kaul Deambi (1982), *Corpus of Sarada Inscriptions of Kashmir* (Delhi), pp. 113-118

that I have cited, to contradict her hateful and fraudulent historiography blaming and reviling the Hindus in every possible way, would become Hindu Nationalists. In fact, it is apologists of Islam, Indian Marxists, Leftists and non-specialists who often distort the historical record the way Doniger has done in her book.

**Page 455, para 2:** *“Some Muslim rulers, like some Hindu rulers before them, destroyed Hindu temples. Desecration was not necessarily prompted by bigotry, though some rulers might well have been motivated (or have claimed to be motivated) by religious fanaticism, a hatred of idolatry or polytheism or any religion but Islam. Some, lured by the legendary wealth of temples, did it to get the plunder, and others went for the temples because as we saw in South India, the temples were the centers of political and economic power.”*

**Comment:** Doniger’s attempts to equate Islamic iconoclasm with ‘Hindu iconoclasm’ are derived from the writings of apologists of Islam (e.g., Richard Eaton) and Indian Marxists. A historian, criticizing these views, puts the historical record in its correct perspective –

“Apologists for Islam, as well as some Marxist scholars in India, have sometimes attempted to reduce Islamic iconoclasm in India to a gratuitous ‘lust for plunder’ on the part of the Muslims, unrelated in any direct way to the religion itself, while depicting Hindu temples as centers of political resistance which had to be suppressed. Concomitantly, instances have been described in the popular press of Hindu destruction of Buddhist and Jain places of worship, and the idea was promoted that archaeological evidence shows this to have happened on a large scale, and hence that Hindu kings could be placed on a par with the Muslim invaders. The fact is that evidence for such ‘Hindu iconoclasm’ is incidental, relating to mere destruction, and too vague to be convincing.”<sup>364</sup>

It needs to be pointed out again that Sultanate rulers typically did not destroy mosques of their Muslim rivals. For e.g., when Mahmud Ghauri vanquished the heretical Ismaili rulers of Multan, he left their mosque standing to decay but did not destroy it. [Contrast this with the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb destroying mosques in Golconda because he was a Sunni and these mosques belonged to the Shia community]. Perhaps, Ghauri recalled that the site represented the defeat of Hinduism because the Ismaili mosque was constructed after destroying a pre-existing Surya Temple in Multan.

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<sup>364</sup> Andre Wink (1997), *Al-Hind*, vol. II, Brill (London). pp. 309-310

**Page 455, para 2:** *“Piety and greed, so often paired, operated here too: Images of gods were made of solid gold, and the temples were also filled with treasures that Hindu rulers had already stolen from other Hindu temples and from Buddhist stupas.”*

**Comment:** Once again, Doniger distorts historical data to equate Islamic iconoclasm to supposed ‘Hindu iconoclasm’, although instances of the latter were several orders of magnitude fewer than those of former, and the motivations and net effects were different for the two cases.

It is perhaps pertinent to quote a scholar to put things in their proper perspective –

“The appropriations of sculpted images by medieval Indian [i.e., non-Muslim] rulers can be seen as political acts. These rulers often proudly and repeatedly proclaimed their expropriation of objects from other kings. Such ‘looting’ was a normal and public aspect of war, directed towards symbolic objects, a matter of ‘victory’, but theft....Commodities such as gold and silver and all regalia and images were reserved for the king, the center of a redistributive network involving expropriated objects. Here too, ‘the appropriation of Indian images recasts their significance without altering what they are and fundamentally represent. Intentional defilement or public mutilation of divine images is rarely mentioned in Hindu texts as a politically meaningful act.”<sup>365</sup>

**Page 455, para 2:** *“They [temples] could also be hostages. In parts of Sind in the tenth century, Arab families that ruled what was still a largely non-Muslim population would threaten to vandalize the city’s [Multan’s] most revered temple [dedicated to Surya] whenever “trouble stirred or invasion threatened.” Think “marauding nomads” rather than “fanatical Muslims.”*

**Comment:** The Arabs arrived and settled in Sindh in 712 AD (and soon thereafter in Multan by 713 CE) and to still think of them as ‘marauding nomads’ even in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (i.e., 200 years later) is quite fanciful.

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid, p. 309, citing R H Davis, “Indian Art Objects as Loot”, *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 52, No. 1 (1993), pp. 22-48



Once again, this is fraudulent historiography because the author omits to mention how the Muslim rulers of Multan frequently humiliated the Hindus –

“Muhammad-al-Qasim is reported to have hung a piece of cow’s flesh on the neck of the great budd statue at the Sun-temple of Multan, while he confiscated its wealth and made captives of its custodians. Later Muslim governors always threatened to break the idol or mutilate it when they were confronting the hostility of neighboring Hindu powers; until in the late tenth century the Ismailis finally did break it and killed its priests, erecting a mosque on its site.”<sup>366</sup>

**Page 455, para 3:** *“In 1026, he (Mahmud Ghaznavi) attacked the temple of Somanatha (Somnath), which held a famous Shiva linga; this much, at least, seems to be historical fact. Then comes the mythmaking...”*

**Comment:** Following the lead of Communist historian Romila Thapar’s ‘Somanatha, the Many Voices of History’<sup>367</sup>, Doniger too becomes a negationist and somehow tries to mitigate the religious bigotry and cruelty of this historical episode. Mythmaking or no mythmaking, it is clear that the Somanatha temple was destroyed repeatedly by Muslim rulers who considered it an act of Islamic piety.

Ghaznavi’s near contemporary notes that the idol was smashed to pieces and several pieces were buried in the mosque at Ghazni so that the faithful would tread over them when they answered to the call of their prayers.<sup>368</sup>

**Page 456, para 2:** *“...exquisite Jaina temples...between 950 and 1305 CE in Gujarat, most famously at Mount Abu...”*

**Comment:** Mount Abu is in Rajasthan, not in Gujarat. Doniger also gives wrong dates for the construction of these temples, confusing the dates of a dynasty of rulers with the period during which these temples were constructed.

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<sup>366</sup> Andre Wink (1997), *Al-Hind*, vol. II, Brill (London). P. 320

<sup>367</sup> For a review by historian Meenakshi Jain of this book by Thapar, see <http://www.bharatvani.org/indology/somnath.html>

<sup>368</sup> Edward Sachau, transl.: *Alberuni's India*, London 1910, vol.1, p.117, and vol.2, p.103

**Page 457, para 1:** *“It was the order of the day to destroy other people’s religious monuments and steal their treasures; the Muslims had no monopoly on that. The whole basis of Hindu kingship, beginning with the cattle raids of the Rig Veda, was the desire for land and plunder. In the sultanate period, an invading army was expected to loot the local temple,....”*

**Comment:** Doniger tries to absolve Islamic rulers of religious motives in their iconoclastic raids in a rather very fraudulent manner, and in effect, calls Hindus as fanatical and intolerant of other rulers’ faiths just as Islamic invaders were. Other historians however differ, and argue that Hinduism lacked the ideology of Iconoclasm, in contrast to the Abrahamic faiths.<sup>369</sup>

Doniger does not explain why the invading army was expected to loot the local temple but not the local mosque, and why numerous Muslim rulers (e.g., Aurangzeb) ordered looting and destruction of temples within their own dominions for no apparent reason other than religious piety. Or why the invading army not merely looted the temple, it desecrated the spot (through butchering cows), broke the idols and sent pieces of the same to be trodden by the feet of Muslims, burned Hindu sacred manuscripts, indulged in forcible conversions etc.

Her reference to Gavishthi, which she takes to mean the basis for Rigvedic kingship (p. 112 of her book) fails to take into account the current scholarship on this word.<sup>370</sup> In other words, her comparison is quite jejune and it is revisionist of her to suggest that Hindus were not liberal and tolerant in accepting religious diversity.

**Page 457, para 1:** *“....and when people told stories about invasions, they always mentioned such looting, whether the looting had happened or not. Certainly there was exaggeration.....Not surprisingly, these acts provoked some resistance, and the tall stories provoked both taller deeds and taller stories, such as the claim, made by contemporary Muslim sources, that a Hindu named Bartub killed 120,000 Muslims in Awadh in Uttar Pradesh in around 1220.”*

**Comment:** These remarks, meant to mitigate the record of Islamic iconoclasm, are clearly misleading. Doniger does not mention which Hindu chronicle glorifies slaughter of Muslims coupled with

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<sup>369</sup> Andre Wink, *Al-Hind*, Vol II, Brill (London), pp. 313-317

<sup>370</sup> Sadashiv Ambadas Dange, 1967, ‘Go-Ishti and Mehana from the Rgveda’, in *Nagpur University Journal*, pp. 78-108

destruction of their mosques, destruction of Koranic manuscripts, rape of Muslim women and enslavement of Muslims. In contrast, there is no dearth of Islamic chronicles which describe the horrors that Hindus were subjected to with much glee. Clearly, this indicates that in the medieval Islamic cultural milieu, these acts were considered pious and meritorious. The fact that these chronicles exaggerated these persecutions of Hindus further strengthens this argument.

The instance of Bartuh shows that Hindus resisted the invasions of Delhi Sultans in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and in the trans-Ganga region with all their might and therefore it is apparent that a large number of Muslims who tried to attack these regions were killed by the forces led by Bartuh. Other similar instances are not wanting – for instance, when Taimur resolved to defile the Ganga at Haridwar by slaughtering cows, his path was blocked (according to contemporary chronicles) by practically unarmed 200,000 Hindu peasants not worried for their lives and led by a handful of Rajputs, desperate in their attempt to prevent Timur from defiling their sacred river.

**Page 457, para 1:** “The difference is not merely that some Muslims may have had the additional invective of iconoclasm but that for the most part during this period the Turks had more power to destroy than Hindus to destroy Turks. But the will, including, in many quarters, goodwill, was there on both sides.”

**Comment:** This statement, meant to balance the large scale Islamic iconoclasm with the clearly much fewer instances of Hindu retaliation, is not supported by historical facts. Throughout the book, Doniger castigates and berates Hindus for imagined reasons, and apologizes for the persecutors of Hindus. Doniger’s words are as absurd as say, “The difference is not merely that some Nazis may have had the additional invective of anti-Semitism but that for most part during WWII the Nazis had more power to destroy than Jews to destroy Nazis.”

It is not true that the Hindus everywhere had less power to destroy Muslims at all times. What needs to be pointed out is that even when Hindus ruled parts of India (as in the Vijayanagara empire, Rajput kingdoms, Orissa, Assam, the Maratha Empire etc.) for several centuries after the establishment of Muslim rule over other parts of India, they (Hindu rulers) refrained from any large scale destruction of mosques, forcible conversions of Muslims, massacres of Muslims, imposition of additional taxes on Muslims, defilement of holy books of Islam, disarmament of Muslims, rapes of Muslim women etc. in their domains,

due to the tolerant and inclusive nature of Hinduism – a positive characteristic of Hinduism that Doniger will perhaps not permit. There is contrary evidence to counter the claim that goodwill prevailed at all times between Hindus and Muslims. For instance the often quoted statement of Al Biruni –

“The repugnance of the Hindus against foreigners increased more and more when the Muslims began to make their inroads into their country....Mahmud utterly ruined the prosperity of the country...Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the inveterate aversion towards all Muslims. This is the reason too, why Hindu sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country – conquered by us, and have fled to places which our hands cannot reach yet.”<sup>371</sup>

**Page 458, para 1:** *“In the culture at large, Hindus adopted a number of Muslim social customs. When the royal women of the Turks and the Rajputs first met, the Muslim women did not keep particularly rigidly to purdah; they joined in the drinking parties and literary salons.....It was after they had lived in India for a while and encountered the Rajput codes of modesty and honor that the women were more strictly concealed by the curtain of purdah and the zenana (harem) and at the same time also adopted some aspects of the Hindu caste system. Hindu women, in turn, adopted a modified version of the Muslim purdah. What a pity that each side took the worst of both the worlds; why not ditch both purdah and caste?”*

**Comment:** The examples given by Doniger to show that Hindus and Muslims borrowed the worst from each other does not seem to bear logic because her statements actually seem to suggest (falsely) that Hindus did not borrow anything bad from Muslims, whereas the Muslims borrowed caste as well as purdah from the Hindus!

In fact, her generalization only shows her prejudices against Hindus because historians who have looked at the historical data available have reached different conclusions. For instance, it is pointed out that we do not get any reference to purdah in the history of Rajputs prior to the Islamic conquests and there are several instances in history where Rajput women fought in battles as late as the 14<sup>th</sup> cent., and also participated with their men-folk in outdoor games. Moreover, there was no purdah among Hindu women in South India – the area least affected by Islamic rule.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Edward Sachau, Transl. of Albiruni's 'Kitabl-ul-Hind', Vol. I, pp. 21-22

<sup>372</sup> K L Shrivastava (1980), “*The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate*”, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd (New Delhi), pp. 191-192

Even if the Turkish invaders did not have caste, they had their own systems of social stratifications and differentiations along the lines of ethnic origins. And whereas the Hindu rulers did not accord a second class status to Muslims within their dominions, the Muslim rulers in general accorded a lower status to Hindus than Muslims in their rule. The Turkish looked down upon native Indian converts to Islam, and chroniclers like Barani did not mince words in considering these converts as wretches, and inferior to the true blooded Muslims from Central Asia and Arabia. Surely, this religious discrimination and racism was not due to Hindu influence!

As for Turkish royalty adopting Hindu customs, it is perhaps apt to quote:

“As early as Iltutmish’s reign, the sultans are soon found adapting practices that were distinctively Indian, for example riding elephants on ceremonial occasions, consulting astrologers and taking horoscopes in advance of important occasions such as enthronement, and so on. Cultural borrowings of this kind by Muslim rulers cannot be taken, of course, as sign of accommodation with the infidel; they represent merely an adaptation to Indian conditions...”<sup>373</sup>

**Page 458, para 3:** *“Women circulated like money (as is generally the case); many Muslims took Hindu wives. And when you add in the gardens and melons and fountains that the Mughals gave to India, not to mention the art and architecture, the picture of cultural exchange brightens considerably.”*

**Comment:** To say that Muslims taking Hindu women as wives represents some sort of cultural exchange is a distortion of historical testimony. Hardly any Muslims married their daughters to Hindu men (although exceptions are noted here and there). Victorious Muslim rulers during the Sultanate period often demanded the daughters of defeated Hindu kings as ‘wives’ for addition to their harem. Sometimes, even the widows of slain Hindu kings were added to the harem. The Sultans are even known to have distributed captured daughters of Hindus to their Muslim nobles as a part of the Id festival celebrations.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Peter Jackson (1999), *The Delhi Sultanate – A Political and Military History*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), p. 281

<sup>374</sup> K S Lal (1994), *“Muslim Slave System in Medieval India”*, Aditya Prakashan (New Delhi), pp. 155-164

Ironically, it was the sons of Muslim kings and their Hindu mothers who were most often the most bigoted Muslim rulers of their respective dynasties – e.g., Firoz Tughlaq (of the Tughlaq dynasty) and Sikandar Lodi (of the Lodi dynasty) were born of Hindu mothers. Perhaps, they became over-zealous due to their desire to prove to other Muslims that they were also true Muslims despite having Hindu mothers. The ‘cultural exchange’ did not seem to work in their cases!

To say that gardens and melons and fountains were sufficient to counteract the unprecedented crippling taxes that the Delhi Sultanate levied on the predominantly Hindu peasantry is quite perverse and reflects Doniger’s elitist mindset. Many of these gardens were royal property and it is uncertain of the masses (“the crow faced Hindus”) could ever enjoy them. For example, Feroz Shah Tughlaq laid 1200 gardens near Delhi to yield additional revenues for the state through the sale of fruit.<sup>375</sup> It stands to reason that the land from these gardens must have been usurped from Hindu peasants.

**Page 459, para 2:** *“In dramatic contrast with Buddhism, which was driven out of India by a combination of lack of support, persecution, and the destruction of religious monuments and monasteries (by Hindus as well as Muslims), Hinduism rallied and came back stronger than ever.”*

**Comment:** The claim that under the Delhi Sultanate, Hinduism came back stronger than ever, is simply false and a vain boast. Doniger gives just a few examples like a Sultan patronizing a particular temple. But the fact remains that these examples are what they are – exceptions.

Throughout the book, Doniger (despite her pretenses that hers is an alternative history narrating the voices of ‘women, low castes, dogs and horses’) presents Hindu as an elitist, exploitative, misogynist and violent tradition, implying that other traditions like Buddhism, were better. It is no surprise therefore, why she does not ponder at the cause of disappearance of Buddhism with the invasions of Muslims. A scholar says-

“The Turkish invasions proved fatal to the existence of Buddhism as an organized religion in the country of its origin...The Buddhist religion disappeared from North India because it had been almost

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<sup>375</sup> K L Shrivastava (1980), *The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd (New Delhi), pp. 162-163

exclusively concentrated in a few major monastic centers and these centers were destroyed by the Muslims. In so far as Buddhism survived the thirteenth century, outside the orbit of Islamic conquest, in Sri Lanka, Tibet, and in mainland Southeast Asia, it was as a religion with roots in the peasant societies of these areas.”<sup>376</sup>

It is not out of place to mention that Hindus permanently lost to Islam the countries now called Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan where the populations were converted to Islam and Hindus cleansed ethnically. The sadistic nature of Doniger’s remark can be understood with this fictitious example –

“Aditya, the local mafia lord, attacked a neighborhood and wrecked the mansion of Husain, a local rich merchant. Hussain lost everything, and his mansion was damaged beyond repair. He collected whatever he could, and moved out to another neighborhood that was free from Aditya’s depredations. There, Husain built a more modest home for his wife and children with whatever little resources he could salvage. We can therefore say that Husain rallied back and came back stronger than ever. In fact, Aditya’s destruction of the mansion was, in a perverse way, responsible for the creation of something new—Husain’s home in the adopted new neighborhood.”

**Page 459, para 2:** *“Though most Sultanate rulers condemned idolatry, they did not prevent Hindus from practicing Hinduism. A Hindu inscription of c. 1280 praises the security and bounty enjoyed under the rule of Sultan Balban.”*

**Comment:** Balban is known to have been particularly ruthless towards Hindus,<sup>377</sup> a fact confirmed from numerous chronicles, and smashed temple to ruins. Therefore a solitary and exceptional inscription (called the Palam Baoli inscription, dt. 1276 CE) cannot be used to overturn this generalization. The inscription is by a Pandit Yogisvara who worked for a local Hindu patron living in the reign of Balban. The inscription is full of hyperbole and claims that Balban ruled from Ghazni to Bengal and from the Himalayas to Rameshvaram (Setubandha)! – an impossibility because the Delhi Sultanate did not extend beyond the Narmada at that time. Clearly then, the inscription merely reproduces formulaic phrases from earlier period and cannot be taken as proof of

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<sup>376</sup> Andre Wink (1997), *Al-Hind*, vol II, Brill (London), p. 333

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, p. 91

Balban's benevolence towards the Hindu masses or of prosperity during his reign. Quite on the contrary, very close to Palam village, Balban is known to have killed and forcibly converted thousands of revolting Hindus hiding in the forests of the Mewat region. Some attribute the large Muslim Meo community in the Gurgaon region (in Haryana) to this episode of conversions.

This and a few other inscriptions are what they are – exceptional. In contrast, there are literally hundreds of inscriptions over mosques (built over demolished temples or with materials from these temples) and other sites standing as a testimony to Islamist fanaticism during the Sultanate period.

Doniger's generalizations about freedom of religion for Hindus during the Sultanate period should be tempered with statements made by historians –

“There is little information in general about the attitude of the sultans towards Hindu religious observance in general...”<sup>378</sup>

“The Delhi Sultan was able to promote Hindu servitors as he did, or patronize Hindu religious establishments when it suited him, precisely because India contained no rival imperium like Byzantium or the states of Catholic Europe.”<sup>379</sup>

In general, the Delhi Sultanate was a Muslim State, and Muslims were its Staatsvolk.<sup>380</sup>

**Page 459, para 2:** “*Another Delhi Sultan, ruling in Kashmir from 1355 to 1373, rebuked his Brahmin minister for having suggested that they melt down Hindu and Buddhist images in his kingdom to get cash.*”

**Comment:** The Islamic kingdom of Kashmir did not come under Delhi's rule before Akbar's times 2 centuries later. So which 'Delhi Sultan' of Kashmir is Doniger referring to? Doniger gives the reference of a paper by Richard Eaton,<sup>381</sup> who makes it clear that the Kashmiri Sultan Shihab-ud-Din is being referred to here. However, Eaton too has not

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<sup>378</sup> Peter Jackson (1999), *The Delhi Sultanate – a Political and Military History*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), p. 287

<sup>379</sup> Ibid, p. 294

<sup>380</sup> Ibid, p. 278

<sup>381</sup> Richard Eaton, “Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States”, pp, 283-319 in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11:3 (2000)



considered all the sources while reproducing the translation of Jonaraja's Rajatarangini verses 434-436 from an old edition, which refer to an evil minister named Udayashri of Shihab-ud-Din as the source of this suggestion. A recent edition of this text<sup>382</sup> states that all Persian histories describe this Udayashri as a Muslim. In fact, Muslim chronicles such as Baharistan Shahi (1586-1614 A. D.) Haidar Malik's Tariki Kashmir (1618 A. D.), Peer Hassan's Tarikhi Kashmir (1885 A. D. actually describe this ruler as an iconoclast. Therefore, nothing much can be read in Jonaraja's account which is contradicted by many others. In other accounts, Udayashri was the brother of the Kashmir king's Hindu wife Lakshmi and therefore both may indeed have converted to Islam.

In any case, this is an exceptional case and cannot balance the hundreds of Muslim Ulemas and Sufis exhorting Muslim rulers to smash Hindu temples, collect the Jizya, kidnap Hindu women, convert Hindus, burn their scriptures, kill cows and humiliate them in other ways.

**Page 459, para 3:** *"In Bengal in 1418, a Hindu actually became Sultan, Raja Ganesb. His son, converting to Islam, ruled under his father's direction until 1431."*

**Comment:** Doniger makes this remark to emphasize that all was well with Hinduism during the 14-15<sup>th</sup> centuries. A correct way to look at this exceptional situation in Bengali is this—

"....during the long period of six hundred years of Muslim rule only one Hindu king – Ganesa – ascended the throne of Gauda and Muslims of Bengal invited the Muslim Sultan of Jaunpur to dethrone this Kafir. Ganesa was dethroned and his son could retain the throne only on being converted to Islam. The very possibility of a Hindu ascending the throne perturbed the Muslim Sultans. The nearly contemporary book, Chaitanya-mangala by Jayananda, describes the inhuman brutalities perpetrated in Navadvip under the orders of the Sultan on the circulation of a prophecy that a Brahmin will be the king of Navadvip."<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Raghunath Singh (1972), *Jonarajakerta Rajatarangini*, Chaukhamba Sanskrit Series (Varanasi), p. 265 (fn)

<sup>383</sup> R. C. Majumdar, *History of Mediaeval Bengal*, G. Bharadwaj and Co. 1973, p. 247

Rules have exceptions, but these exceptions must not be treated as pervasive rules. Incidentally, the person who invited the Sultan of Jaunpur was a Sufi of Bengal.<sup>384</sup>

**Page 459, para 3:** “He was succeeded by an Arab Muslim, Ala-ud-din Husain (r. 1493 – 1519), who revered the Vaishnava saint Chaitanya, in return for which the Hindus regarded the sultan as an incarnation of Lord Krishna. On the other hand, during a war, the same Ala-ud-din Husain destroyed a number of temples, particularly in Orissa.”

**Comment:** A blatant distortion. Hussain did not patronize Chaitanya although he appointed several Brahmins to official posts. According to a contemporary source, the ‘Chaitanya Charitamrita’, when he asked Sanatana (a disciple of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu) to accompany him on the Orissa expedition, the latter refused saying “you are going to desecrate Hindu temples and break images of Hindu gods; I cannot accompany you”. The furious king thereupon imprisoned Sanatana who however managed to escape by bribing the prison guards. Both brothers (Sanatana and Rupa Goswami) thereafter renounced the world and went to Vrindaban, where they wrote treatises on Gaudiya Vaishnavism.<sup>385</sup>

According to the same source, when Chaitanya visited a locality near the residence of the Sultan, his followers (including eminent Hindu officials of Sultan Husain) begged him to depart as soon as possible and not trust the entreaties of the Sultan to visit him because he was a sworn enemy of Hindus. As a result, the Vaishnava saint slipped out without visiting the Sultan, and spent barely 1 year of his last 20 years of life in Bengal, living instead in the Hindu kingdom of Orissa.<sup>386</sup> Several contemporary Vaishnava sources give examples of violence against Hindus during his reign, whereas a Portuguese source narrates that numerous Hindus converted to Islam to gain favor with the Sultan<sup>387</sup> – a far cry from what Doniger says.

Similar interpretations sugar-coating Husain’s fanatical acts have been made by other scholars but they have scarcely addressed all the

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid, pp. 247-248

<sup>385</sup> R. C. Majumdar, *History of Mediaeval Bengal*, G. Bharadwaj and Co. 1973, p. 53

<sup>386</sup> Ibid, p. 56, 251; Also Sambidananda Das (2007), *The History and Literature of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas*, Sree Gaudiya Math (Chennai), pp. 329-331

<sup>387</sup> Ibid, p. 56

arguments of historian R C Majumdar.<sup>388</sup> Their own data in fact supports Majumdar's conclusions with regard to this Sultan. The Sultan of Bengal therefore never provided patronage to Chaitanya.

There was a solitary poet (Parameswara, patronized by Husain Shah or his courtiers) in whose verse Husain was likened as an incarnation of Krishna, but it cannot taken to be representative of what all Hindus thought of him.<sup>389</sup> Methodologically, it is inconsistent of Doniger to regard Brahmins as non-representatives of Hinduism, but take a servitor Brahmin's hyperbolic inscription as representing what Hindus thought of the Sultan.

**Page 459, para 4:** *"The Tibetan Buddhist historian Taranath, writing in the thirteenth century, was critical of the Nath yogis for following Shiva rather than Buddha and for saying "They were not even opposed to the Turuskas [Turks]."*

**Comment:** Doniger does not consider the possibility that criticism of Islam in the Delhi Sultanate invited death punishment, which is why the Nath Yogis held their breath. Or, the tolerance of Nath Yogis for Turuskas may be seen as representing their universalistic and tolerant attitude. It does not imply that the Turuskas were tolerant and liberal towards the Hindus.

**Page 460, para 2:** *"Khwaja Muin-ud-din (or Moin-al-din) Chishti is said to have brought to India the Chishti Sufi order; he came to Delhi late in the twelfth century and settled in Pushkar in Ajmer, a place of Hindu pilgrimage."*

**Comment:** Doniger makes it appear that the settling of the Sufi represented some sort of a fusion between Hinduism and Islam because he chose to settle in a place of Hindu pilgrimage. Even though many Hindus today visit his shrine in Ajmer today, historical details give clear evidence of his bigotry against the Hindus. Doniger of course omits all these details of his life.

This Sufi demonstrated a deep-seated hatred toward Hindu religion and its practices. On his arrival near the Anasagar Lake at Ajmer, he saw many Hindu temples and promised to raze them to the ground with the help of Allah and His Prophet. After settling down there,

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<sup>388</sup> Jagadish Narayan Sarkar and Sir Jadunath Sarkar (1985), *Hindu-Muslim Relations in Bengal (Medieval Period)*, Idarah-I Adabiyat-i-Delhi (New Delhi), pp. 27-31.

<sup>389</sup> R. C Majumdar, op. cit. p. 251

Khwaja's followers used to bring every day a cow (sacred to Hindus) near a famous temple, where the king and Hindus prayed, slaughter it and cook kebab from its meat- clearly to show his contempt toward Hinduism. In order to 'prove the majesty of Islam', he is said to have dried the two holy lakes of Anasagar and Pansela (holy to Hindus) by the heat of his spiritual power.' Chisti also came to India with his disciples to fight Jihad against the infidels and participated in the treacherous holy war of Sultan Muhammad Ghauri in which the kind and chivalrous Hindu King Prithviraj Chauhan was defeated in Ajmer. In his Jihadi zeal, Chisti ascribed the credit for the victory to himself, saying, "We have seized Pithaura (Prithviraj) alive and handed him over to the army of Islam."<sup>390</sup>

It is also stated that his tomb occupies the site of the temple of Shadi Dev usurped by the followers of the Sufi and that Khwaja Chishti himself had at least one Hindu woman captured to marry her forcibly.<sup>391</sup> So much for the tolerance of Khwaja Chishti!

**Page 460, para 3:** *"Early Indian Sufism proclaimed that Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and Hindus all were striving toward the same goal and that the outward observances that kept them apart were false. This idea was then incorporated into Hinduism as a major strand of the bhakti movement, which was growing in both power and complexity in this period."*

**Comment:** First, it is a pious myth that early Sufism proclaimed the unity of all religions, so where does the question of it being incorporated into the Bhakti tradition come? For example the greatest Indian Sufi, Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya promised hell-fire to Hindus and said –

"The unbelievers at the time of death will experience punishment. At that moment, they will profess belief (Islam) but it will not be reckoned to them as belief because it will not be faith in the Unseen... the faith of (an) unbeliever at death remains unacceptable." He declared that 'On the day of Resurrection when unbelievers will face punishment and affliction, they will embrace

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<sup>390</sup> S A A Rizvi (1978), *A History of Sufism in India*, Vol I, Munshiram Manoharlal (New Delhi), pp. 116-117

<sup>391</sup> P.M. Currie, *The Shrine and Cult of Muin al-Din Chishti of Ajmer*, OUP, 1989, *in passim*

faith but faith will not benefit them... They will also go to Hell, despite the fact that they will go there as believers.”<sup>392</sup>

He also participated in holy wars against Hindus and considered it a religious duty to do so.<sup>393</sup> On the other hand (pace Doniger), the idea that all religions lead to the same Truth is present in the Hindu tradition right from the time of Rigveda I.164.46 – “Truth is One but the Poets describe it in many ways.”

**Page 461, para 2:** “*The use of Hindu temple techniques [for construction of mosques commissioned by Delhi Sultans] not only gave employment to Hindu artisans but was also much easier on Hindus than the use of the actual stones from Hindu temples to build the mosques.*”

**Comment:** Doniger makes it appear that the Sultans did a favor on Hindu artisans by employing them but fails to mention one minor detail – that **these Hindu artisans had been doubtless enslaved by the Delhi Sultans**<sup>394</sup> and were therefore forced to work on these official mosques, forts, madrasas etc.<sup>395</sup>

Several successive Sultans enslaved Hindu artisans and exported them to Central Asia for profitable sale. To absolve the Sultans because they employed enslaved Hindu artisans (and were benevolent towards a few Hindu architects) is like condoning Hitler for the Jewish Holocaust just because the Nazi Army employed about 100,000 mischlinge (soldiers with ¼ to ½ Jewish ancestry).<sup>396</sup>

It is also perhaps pertinent to quote this generalization of employment of Hindus by Delhi Sultans –

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<sup>392</sup> Fawait al-Faud, Translated by Bruce B. Lawrence, Paulist Press (New York), pp. 161-167

<sup>393</sup> K A Nizami (1991) *The Life and Times of Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya*, New Delhi, p. 232

<sup>394</sup> Peter Jackson (1999), *The Delhi Sultanate – a Political and Military History*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), p. 279

<sup>395</sup> K S Lal (1994), “*Muslim Slave System in Medieval India*”, Aditya Prakashan (New Delhi), pp. 83-89

<sup>396</sup> Bryan Mark Rigg (2002), *Hitler's Jewish Soldiers*, University Press of Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas)

“The Hindus were generally not trusted by the Muslim rulers and therefore, they were not appointed to responsible posts in the state. They held only junior and insignificant offices where their services were needed most. They were mainly recruited as clerks and tax-collectors in the revenue department as they were familiar with the local condition and population. It was in the interest of the Islamic state to utilize their services in the smooth running of the revenue departments. It may be pointed out that Hindus occupied only minor posts in the military department, for instance, as ordinary soldiers, porters and for performing other menial works in the army. According to Islamic tradition and usage, a Zimmi was not to be relied upon. Upon the circumstances, it was rare cases that any Hindu could be appointed as commander, general or superintendent in the army. While making such appointments, the Sultans were guided solely by personal and political considerations, which hardly influenced their general policy of the recruitment of the Hindus.”<sup>397</sup>

Exceptions such as the employment of Medini Rao exist, but these are isolated exceptions.

**Page 462, para 3:** *“Scholars believe that Kabir probably married and indeed had a son named Kamal, but the Sadhus of the Kabir Panth insist that Kabir was celibate, just as they are.”*

**Comment:** Inaccurate statement. Kabir is believed to have two children – a son named Kamal and a daughter named Kamali. Not all, but most Sadhus believe that he was celibate,<sup>398</sup> or that his children were born through un-natural means.<sup>399</sup>

**Page 466, para 2:** *“Inscriptions, historical narratives, and architectural remains suggest that the concept of Rama as the ideal king, and Ayodhya as the site of the Ramayana legend, came alive in central and North India in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, but only during the Vijayanagar Empire did the cult of Rama become significant at the level of an imperial order.”*

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<sup>397</sup> K L Shrivastava (1980), *“The Position of Hindus under the Delhi Sultanate”*, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd (New Delhi), p.229

<sup>398</sup> David Lorenzen (1991), *Kabir Legends and Ananta Das’s Kabir Parachai*, SUNY (New York), p.18

<sup>399</sup> F.E.Keay (1996), *Kabir and his Followers*, Sri Satguru Publications (New Delhi), p. 35

*“...but the figure of Rama was not the object of veneration, the actual installed icon, until the sudden emergence of a number of temples at this time. Now Rama and Hanuman became the focus of important sects in northern India....”*

**Comment:** These claims are based on the research of Sheldon Pollock and have been contested correctly by the Marxist historian B Chattopadhyaya who argues that, the state Deity of Vijayanagara was Virupaksha.<sup>400</sup>

Second, the concept of Rama as an idea king and Ayodhya as the site of the Ramayana is attested in Sanskrit literature much before the 12-14<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, Adi Shankaracharya makes a remark in his Shariraka Bhashya to explain a subtle point of Vedanta – ‘Just as the Lord of the Universe is referred to as the ruler of Ayodhya....’ showing the association of Ayodhya with Rama.

The Gupta Kings were also worshippers of Rama as were some Gahadavala rulers after them. Some of these rulers may have even moved their capital to Ayodhya, in part because of its associations with the rule of Rama.

Finally, temples of Rama as a Deity are found in India from centuries predating the establishment of the Vijayanagara empire. The fact that Hanuman temples were constructed in the environs of Hampi had obviously to do with the fact that the capital Hampi is said to be the site of the Ramanya kingdom of Kishkindha where Hanuman hailed from.

Doniger makes it appear that Rama worship somehow spread in N India due to the Muslim rule. But this correlation does not imply causation. The S Indian saint Ramananda is credited with popularizing the same (so nothing to do with Vijayanagara) and its widespread adoption in North Indian Hindu sects also has a lot to do with the composition of the Ramcharitmanas by Tulsidas.

**Page 467, para 2:** *“In 1565, at the battle of Talikota, a confederation of Muslim sultans routed the forces of Vijayanagar and the Nayakas. The usual sacking and slaughter, treasure hunting and pillage of building materials ensued, but without bigotry; the temples were the least damaged of the buildings and were often left intact.”*

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<sup>400</sup> Brajdhulal Chattopadhyaya (1998), *“Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims”*, Manohar (Delhi), pp. 103 sqq. It must be admitted however that following his Marxist political agendas, Chattopadhyaya overstates his case.

**Comment:** Doniger makes this statement to suggest that Bahmani Sultans were tolerant to Hindus and did not therefore desecrate the Hindu shrines of Vijayanagara. But this again contradicted by credible historical references (and anyone can visit the site of Hampi to witness the wanton destruction of Hindu religious structures). For example, in his classical account, Sewell says –

“The third day saw the beginning of the end. The victorious Mussulmans had halted on the field of battle for rest and refreshment, but now they had reached the capital, and from that time forward for a space of five months Vijayanagar knew no rest. The enemy had come to destroy, and they carried out their object relentlessly. They slaughtered the people without mercy, broke down the temples and palaces; and wreaked such savage vengeance on the abode of the kings, that, with the exception of a few great stone-built temples and walls, nothing now remains but a heap of ruins to mark the spot where once the stately buildings stood. They demolished the statues, and even succeeded in breaking the limbs of the huge Narasimha monolith. Nothing seemed to escape them. They broke up the pavilions standing on the huge platform from which the kings used to watch the festivals, and overthrew all the carved work. They lit huge fires in the magnificently decorated buildings forming the temple of Vitthalasvami near the river, and smashed its exquisite stone sculptures. With fire and sword, with crowbars and axes, they carried on day after day their work of destruction.”<sup>401</sup>

Another good history text says –

“The arrival of the main Mussalman army on the sixth day sealed the fate of Vijayanagar and its citizens.....Day after day the slaughter of civilians went unchecked till blood ran into rivers. Then the victors turned to despoil the palaces and desecrate the pagodas. With hammer and hatchet, they went from place to place, knocking, breaking and smashing all works of art and all objects of worship. The house of victory, the pillars of Vitthala temple, the limbs of Ugra Narasimha and the belly of the elephant god Ganesh – all suffered from their pitiless hands. Carvings and sculptures over which workmen had spent decades and kings their wealth were reduced to bits...”<sup>402</sup>

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401 Robert Sewell (1900), *A Forgotten Empire: Vijayanagar - A Contribution to the History of India*, S Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd (London), pp. 333-334

402 M H Rama Sharma (1978), *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, Popular Prakashan (Bombay), p. 222



**Page 467, para 3:**“Sent out to pacify the Cholas, the Nayaks double crossed the Vijayanagar king, just as the founding Vijanagarans had double-crossed the Delhi sultans. What goes around comes around.”

**Comment:** This is quite a travesty of truth. To explain the context, let us see what Doniger says earlier – “*The story goes that the brothers [Haribara I and Bukka] had been captured by the army of the Delhi Sultan and hauled up to Delhi, where they converted to Islam and accepted the Sultan as their overlord. The Delhi Sultan then sent them back to pacify the region. Upon their return south, they promptly shed their allegiance to the sultans, blocked Muslim southward expansion, and were reinstated as Hindus...*”(p. 465)”

Is this double crossing? Consider a situation in which an American Jew is captured by the Taliban, is forcibly made to renounce Judaism and convert to Islam. After a while, he becomes a trusted member of the Taliban and is sent out to bomb New York. But upon reaching New York, he promptly renounces Islam, converts to Judaism again and helps the FBI fight Taliban. Would this be considered an instance of ‘double-crossing’, or of the triumph of patriotism and justice over terrorism and religious bigotry?

An American author Daveed Gartenstein-Ross has recently written a memoir called ‘*My Year inside Radical Islam: A Memoir*’ (2007) where he narrates his journey from Judaism into radical Islam, and back to Christianity-Judaism, ending as a helper of US intelligence agencies. In fact, whereas the Harihara-Bukka brothers converted to Islam under duress, Daveed did so on his own accord before realizing his errors and abandoning radical Islam. Would it be appropriate to call this author a ‘double-crosser’?

When Muhammad bin Tughlaq invaded south India, he smashed several temples (replacing them with mosques), massacred Hindus and did several other atrocities against Hindus.<sup>403</sup> In one of these campaigns, he captured the fort of Kumata (the chief Ramanatha died in the battle and all the ladies committed Jauhar), and all the residents of the fort, including Harihara and Bukka were captured, taken to Delhi and converted to

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<sup>403</sup> See for example, Krishna Kumari Myeni, “Attacks on Hindu Temples – Some Historical Insights,” pp. 217-129 in *Rethinking Indian Culture – Challenges and Responses*, ed. by H C Das and Abhiram Biswal, Institute of Oriental and Orissan Studies, Cuttack (Orissa), 2001

Islam. Subsequently, the adverse turn of events in that area forced Tughlaq to depend on the two converted brothers, who belonged to the erstwhile nobility of that region. He made them administer oaths of loyalty and sent them South to curb the revolts and rule the region under his name. However, when the brothers reached their native region, an influential Hindu monk Vidyaranya inspired them to return to their ancestral faith. Further, there was an uprising of Hindus in the region and Harihara and Bukka attained the role of leaders of Hindus and established Hindu rule there.<sup>404</sup> Sewell too gives similar accounts.<sup>405</sup>

Doniger's equation of the Harihara and Bukka brothers to the treacherous Nayaks is not apt also because the kingdom of Vijayanagara saw three different dynasties one after the other and the defeated king of Vijayanagara in 1565 did not belong to the same family as these brothers. Therefore, it is crude to say that "what goes around comes around" unless Doniger just wants to hate the great Hindu sovereigns anyway.

**Page 467, para 4:** *"The Vijayanagar kings used their plunder and tribute for elaborate royal rituals, academic patronage, and trophy temples. The plunder of Hindu temples made possible the building not merely of superb mosques but, indirectly, of superb Hindu temples. Just as Hindu temples had vied, in competitive funding, with Buddhist stupas in South India, so under the sultanate, Muslim and Hindu kings competed in architectural monumentalism, the Muslims inclining toward forts and cities (as well as mosques), the Hindus toward temples, temple complexes and temple cities (as well as palaces). However different the styles may have been, the two sets of rulers shared the grandiosity; they egged each other on..."*

**Comment:** It is quite perverse to suggest a totally false symmetry between the religious policies of Vijayanagara kings on one hand who were generally tolerant towards their Muslim subjects and even constructed mosques for them. Emperor Krishna Deva Raya, the greatest king of Vijayanagara, also had a copy of the Koran placed next to his throne so that his Muslim visitors did not hesitate to bow in his presence. To suggest that the destruction of Hindu temples was somehow instrumental in the construction of newer temples is quite perverse. It is like suggesting that the rape of a woman is somehow beneficial because it leads to the birth of a baby.

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<sup>404</sup> M H Rama Sharma (1978), *The History of the Vijayanagar Empire*, Popular Prakashan (Bombay), p. 24, n. 4

<sup>405</sup> Robert Sewell (1900), *A Forgotten Empire: Vijayanagar - A Contribution to the History of India*, S Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd (London), pp 29-30

There is no evidence that Hindu kings indulged in competitive architectural feats with Muslim rulers. Except in areas outside Muslim rule (or under nominal Muslim rule) where temple construction was a continuation of earlier activities, large temples virtually ceased to get constructed in a major portion of the Indian subcontinent after Muslim rulers became masters. In any case, Doniger has provided no quantitative data to support her perverse and absurd claims. The Hindu rulers were merely expressing their religiosity (and that of their predominantly Hindu populations) by constructing Hindu and Jain temples, whereas the Muslim rulers often constructed their mosques in territories with more than 90% non-Muslim populations. Doniger forgets to mention that the Sultanate rulers also spent millions on their tombs and mausoleums, an entirely wasteful activity.

**Page 468, para 2:** *“There was a break in the building of Hindu temples during each new Muslim invasion, with few new commissions and the loss of some temples that the Muslims destroyed, but then were there followed an even greater expansion of art in all fields...”*

**Comment:** The Hindus lost just ‘some’ temples? Doniger fraudulently makes it appear that Islamic iconoclasm caused a flowering of Hindu art and architecture.

A more accurate picture is given by a historian in these words –

“The seventh to eighteenth centuries have also generated an enormous mass of literary evidence of Islamic iconoclasm in the area from Transoxania and Afghanistan to Tamil Nadu and Islam, the whole of which is littered with ruins of temples and monasteries...What happened in historical times in areas like Sinkiang, Transoxiana, Sistan, and Afghanistan – which converted almost entirely to Islam and eradicated all vestiges of Hinduism and Buddhism –, happened still recently in Pakistan and Bangla Desh, where many temples were destroyed by Muslims as recently as 1989, and still continuing, in Kashmir.”<sup>406</sup>

Doniger does not present any quantitative data to prove that the expansion of art in all fields post Muslim invasions was greater than the expansion of art pre-Invasion. The fact is that most art and architecture from pre Islamic period in the India subcontinent north of the Narmada

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<sup>406</sup> Andre Wink (1997), *Al-Hind*, vol. II, Brill (London). P. 323

is lost as a result of Islamic iconoclasm and we have no basis to accept Doniger's generalization. There are a few inscriptions attesting to construction or repairs of Hindu temples during the Sultanate, but these are vastly outnumbered by the numbers of temples destroyed during the rule of Delhi Sultans. The fact is that except for a few isolated clusters (e.g., Khajuraho temples, Kangra valley, Salt Range), hardly any notable temples preceding the rule of Delhi Sultans survive in the entire Plains of Indus and Ganges.

In fact, Islamic invasions definitely hindered the construction of new temples and the following generalization seems accurate –

“In the thirteenth century and afterwards, large temples continued to be built, but not with the same frequency. In the temples that were built after 1200 AD, as for example at Ranakpur, the emphasis shifted from carving to the articulation of grand spaces. In North India this resulted, after 1200, in a significant dearth of well-carved sculptures. The temples that survived the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are now abandoned and stand as hollow shells in secluded spots, but some of the greatest temple complexes of the North India obviously survived the Muslim invasions intact. This was the case with about twenty-five of the approximately eighty temples at Khajuraho, built by the Candellas. These, however, appear to have occupied a site which had already been abandoned before the Muslims penetrated the area.

After the thirteenth century, then, the building of monumental temples became more and more a feature of the South of India, the area which for many centuries longer remained beyond the frontier of Islamic expansion....”<sup>407</sup>

“It was only in South India that the building of large temple complexes remained embedded in a Hindu polity and continued to be organically linked to the other institutions of kingship and social organization in a variety of complex ways. Hindu temples in South India show a relatively unbroken, linear development, from the earliest rock-cut temples of the Pallavas in the seventh century to the great Cola structures of the eleventh century, and then to the sprawling urban temple ensembles, with their gopurams or ‘gates’, of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Vijayanagara and Nayaka dynasties. This tradition did not decline before the seventeenth century, under the impact of Muslims and Europeans. In North India, by contrast, the Muslim invasions, apart from destroying many temples, interrupted the evolution of Hindu temple architecture. If temples continued to be built in the Northern style (as developed by

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid, pp. 323-324

the Candellas or the Solankis), it was on a much reduced scale.....Ranakpur in Rajasthan, built around 1439, were equipped with holes in the ground leading to cellars where the images could be hidden from the Muslim iconoclasts. We know of underground Jain temples which were built for the protection of images in Mughal times, and it is likely that these existed in our period as well, or that underground portions were beginning to be added to temples, with narrow passages as their entrance.”<sup>408</sup>

“Nowhere in the North did the Hindu temple building tradition perpetuate itself without hindrance. Even in the East, in Orissa, the climax of the Hindu architectural tradition was clearly reached with the thirteenth-century Surya temple at Konarka, after which stylistic decline set in, imitative of earlier forms, but less flamboyant and without the same quality of surface decoration as for instance can be seen in the Jagannath temple at Puri.”<sup>409</sup>

“The Muslims razed many of the Jain temples to the ground, destroyed Jain libraries, and allegedly killed unknown numbers of followers. Later Jain temples of the area are copies of the earlier ones of Abu and Sangner, but of inferior quality, and showing influence of Muslim architecture.”<sup>410</sup>

**Page 468, para 2:** *“Indeed, the leveling of the sacred monuments at Mathura and Kananj coincided precisely with the construction of other great dynastic temple complexes. It is a rather backhanded compliment to the Muslims to say that because they tore down so many temples, they paved the way for the Hindus to invent their greatest architecture, but it is also true.....the pillage made possible the patronage.”*

**Comment:** This is a blatant distortion of historical facts to suit political agendas. With a few exceptions, large temples were constructed only in areas outside of Muslim control or only nominally under Muslim control. This explains why hardly any large Hindu temple was constructed from Peshawar to Calcutta from 1200-1700 CE to replace the hundreds that were destroyed.

A historian summarizes this situation aptly –

“But, without the independent Hindu king, the intimate connection of kingship, temple building and Hindu religious worship was lost in the areas which were conquered. If the temples were not destroyed, patronage dried up, and few great temples were built in North India

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid, pp. 324-325

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, pp. 326-327

<sup>410</sup> Ibid, p. 354

after the thirteenth century.....Most importantly perhaps, Islamic iconoclasm – a religious phenomenon of the frontier – undermined the potential power of the icons as communal symbols, as expressions of the communal power of the peasantry. For the veneration of icons and relics was a collective experience of a mass of believers, exciting powerful emotions, while the power exhibited by icons, through miracles, like that of relics, was overwhelmingly public.”<sup>411</sup>

Doniger seems to imply that Islamic invasions somehow acted as a catalyst in the construction of new Hindu temples. But in fact, construction of monumental temples was the already the norm all over India *before* these invasions – “By the time the Turks arrived, the building of monumental temples in stone for congregational worship and theistic cults had become a characteristic feature of kingdoms throughout al-Hind.”<sup>412</sup> The invasions in fact caused a total stoppage in the construction of large temples in the areas under the Sultanate rule.

Doniger also seems to imply that somehow the royally patronized temples did not cater to the need of Hindu masses and throughout, her refrain is that the money needed for construction of these temples led to the exploitation of Hindus. This is a gross distortion.

Finally, Doniger also forgets that it is believed that not only Hindu royalty, but wealthy people from throughout India contributed to the construction of these temples. Records to this effect still survive for the Konarka temple.<sup>413</sup>

**Page 468, para 2:** *“In a similarly perverse way, the withdrawal of royal patronage from the temples and Brahmin colleges may have encouraged the spread of new, more popular forms of Hinduism such as Bhakti. The dynamic and regenerative quality of Hinduism was never more evident than in these first centuries of the Muslim presence.”*

**Comment:** Again, a blatant distortion of the historical record. The Bhakti movement in medieval India was a continuation of the trends initiated in pre-Islamic south India (Alvars, Nayanars, Jnaneshwara, Jayadeva etc). If Doniger’s speculation is true, that the growth of Bhakti movement in different parts of India should coincide with the advance of

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<sup>411</sup> Andre Wink (1997), *Al-Hind*, Vol II, Brill (London), p. 403

<sup>412</sup> Ibid, p. 295

<sup>413</sup> Ibid, p. 298

the Islamic political frontier in India. In other words, we should see a profusion of Bhaktas in Muslim ruled areas, and a relative absence of Bhaktas in Hindu ruled areas. But, nothing can be further from the truth.

First, numerous Bhaktas actually originated or lived outside of Muslim controlled areas (or areas only under nominal Muslim control) – Mirabai, Jnaneshwara, Kshetranya, Shankara Deva, Jana Bai, Jayadeva etc.

Second, numerous Bhaktas were also actively persecuted by Muslims. E.g., Purandara Dasa, Kabir, Nanak, Namadeva, Sanatana and Rupa Goswami.

Third, many Bhakta saints were scholars of Sanskritic traditions (that per Doniger's paradigm, were supported by Hindu royalty) and wrote in Sanskrit (e.g., Vallabhacharya) and even the works of several Bhaktas (e.g. Tulsidasa) in vernacular Indian languages are interspersed by Sanskrit verses.

Fourth, many of the Saints were associated with temples that were constructed under patronage of Hindu kings (and other wealthy Hindus) in Pre-Islamic times – e.g., the Shri Vaishnava saints and the Shrirangam temple, The Vithoba temple of Pandharpur and the Maharashtrian Saints. Therefore, it is wrong to dissociate Bhakta Saints from monumental temples.

Fifth, many saints from peninsular India and other parts of India outside of Muslim rule (or nominally under it) were instrumental in the spread of the Bhakti movement in North India – areas under the Muslim rule. Examples include Namadeva, Vallabhacharya, Ramananda.

Finally, withdrawal of state patronage proved a death knell to numerous Hindu traditions, leading to the disappearance of several Vedic schools, numerous texts of Darshanas, loss of several original Puranas and so on. Therefore it is perverse indeed to suggest that the Muslim rule benefited Hindus by fostering the growth of the Bhakti movement in Hindu society.

**Page 468-469:** *“Mosques also provided a valuable contrast with temples within the landscape of India....The mosque, whose serene calligraphic and geometric contrasts with the perpetual motion of the figures depicted on the temple, makes a stand against the chaos of India, creating enforced vacuums that India cannot rush into with all its monkeys and peoples and colors and the smells of the bazaar and, at the same time, providing a flattering frame to offset that very chaos.”*

**Comment:** Doniger's comment is quite racist and orientalist. It is simply unbelievable that even in this age, a scholar can essentialize the Hindu Main St. of Sultanate India as "monkeys and peoples, colors and smells, and chaos" – just a variant of the cow, caste and curry stereotype of India and Hindus.

Doniger makes it appear that the large scale displacement of temples by mosques was some kind of an architectural blessing on India. It is pertinent to ask if she has similar views on ongoing destruction of Hindu temples by Islamists in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and in Kashmir (India). Doniger's racist remarks against the Hindus are a paraphrase of what the novelist E M Forster, without attribution.

**Page 470, para 3:** *"Muslim social customs, unrestricted by caste, influenced him deeply, and the Virashaivas' rejection of the Brahmin imaginary may be beholden to the influence of Muslim missionaries who were active on India's west coast just when the Virashaiva doctrine developed there."*

**Comment:** It appears that according to Doniger, Hindus cannot reform themselves internally and must wait from an impulse from non-Hindus! No credible scholar of Hinduism attributes Virashaiva egalitarianism to Islam.<sup>414</sup> It is perhaps better to trace it to the teachings of pre-existing Tamil Shaiva saints (or even to the Naths or Kalamukhas—especially the latter who were active in that region before Basava) closer home if at all one wants to argue that Basavanna could not have developed it on his own.

Doniger forgets that Basavanna is associated with Basavakalyan town (then called 'Kalyana') in Bidar - the most interior (away from the coast-line) district of Karnataka! To suggest that Muslim missionaries on the west coast would have been the inspirational source of Virashaiva doctrines is simply inadmissible and unscholarly. During his time (1106-1167 CE), there was no significant presence of Muslims in that region, and Islamic rule had not even penetrated much beyond modern Pakistan into India. There was simply no Muslim society in Bidar to influence Basavanna (1106-1147 CE), which was ruled by the Hindu dynasty called

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<sup>414</sup> For a summary of different views on the origin of Virashaivas, see Julia Leslie, "Understanding Basava – History, Hagiography and a Modern Kannada Drama", pp. 228-261 in *BSOAS* vol. 61, No. 2 (1998). Parts of this paper are marred by a reliance on Leftist-Marxist authors such as Romila Thapar and the playwright Girish Karnad.



Western Chalukyas. Even apologists of Islam do not claim that Muslims had a presence in Bidar or that they influenced Basava.<sup>415</sup>

**Page 470, para 4:** “*Where does this violence come from? We may trace it back to the Tamil saints of the Periya Purana, or to the wild followers of Shiva as Virabhadra in Andhra....*”

**Comment:** Doniger credits Islam with the egalitarianism of the Virashaiva movement, but when it comes to their violent overtones, she blames Hinduism! This shows her prejudice against Hindus. Marxist historians these days try to attribute the good characteristics of Virashaivas to Muslim influence. Then why not also attribute violence to Islamic influence? It seems quite inconsistent to blame Hinduism only for all the negative influences and credit only Islam for all the positives in the Virashaiva tradition.

**Concluding Remarks:** In this chapter, which is rampant with factual errors, Doniger (and her students who helped her?) has indulged in large scale fabrications, cherry picking of data, fraudulent interpretations and agenda driven white-washing. The dominant trend in the chapter appears to be to promote hatred against Hindus, and to label her critics as Hindu Nationalists to stymie all debate and criticism of her fictitious historiography. It also appears that Doniger wants to ingratiate herself with the powerful lobby of Marxist-Communist historians in India by peddling their distortions of medieval Indian history by excessively referring to their agenda driven publications.

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<sup>415</sup> See for instance the following work which surveys the advent of Islam to South India but makes no claim similar to Doniger's: Richard M Eaton (1978), *The Sufis of Bijapur*, Princeton University Press (New Jersey).

**18. Review of the Chapter 18, “*Philosophical Fueds in South India and Kashmir 800 to 1300 CE*” by Vishal Agawal**

**General Comments: Wendy Doniger’s Life Philosophy of Sex and Violence**

Doniger admits at the beginning of the chapter that, “*I am no philosopher*” (p. 504) and her ignorance really shows in this chapter. She cannot get even elementary facts about a single school of Hindu philosophy straight. She tries to wiggle out of this situation by claiming that, “*So I will treat with philosophy only when it gets out of the hands of the philosophers and into the hands of the people who tell stories about the philosophers and incorporate philosophical theories into their myths,*” (ibid.). This literary alibi gives her justification to cherry-pick some sordid (?) stories out of the 100s of inspiring narratives from the biographies of Hindu theologians and philosophers. Even for these, she manages to kink the straightforward narratives to make them appear kinky. But it is all in her mind, as we shall show with an example in this review. If her book was really about women, low-caste Hindus, dogs, horses etc., she would have found many other inspiring stories from the lives of these great Hindus. But instead, she selects stories on the basis of how much sensation and sleaze she can create.

And as usual, she manages to get the dates incorrect in this chapter too. It is surprising that although many of the schools that she discusses have their origin in the pre-Christian era, she has positioned this chapter in the book after chapter 16 on Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526 CE), and after the chapter 17 that deals with later Puranas! She sees Islamic and Christian influence on Hinduism where none really exists or cannot be demonstrated. Even benign Saints of Hindus are depicted as violence and sexual orgy prone individuals. If this is Doniger’s ‘love’ for the culture of Hindus, then what would classify as her hatred? She constantly harps about supposed Christian influence on the works of Vedantic Acharyas but does not explain why none of them has mentioned Christians or Christianity in their copious works.

When it comes to describing Vedanta, she reduces Vedanta to Advaita Vedanta per se.<sup>416</sup> One wonders why she has selected only Kashmir and South India for her examples. The reason might be that she is not familiar with the flourishing of Nyaya-Vaisheshika or Mimamsa traditions and their scholars in N India in that period. In fact, several early Advaita Vedanta philosophers also flourished in North India before the Delhi Sultanate gave a death knell much of Hindu creativity in that region. If Wendy had considered these narratives (e.g. traditional details of the life of Vachaspati Mishra and his wife Bhamati, and the tradition that he named his magnum opus on Vedanta after her), her book would have been enriched considerably and would have lived up to her claim that it is about women and low castes.

A few examples of aforementioned errors in this chapter are listed below with comment.

**Page 504, para 3; Page 505, para 5:** *“...since one of the main arrows in the quiver of renunciation is the argument that the material world is not merely a deathtrap, but an unreal deathtrap.”*  
*“Vedanta...reads the Upanishads through the lens of unity of the self (atman) and the cosmic principle (Brahman)....*

**Comment:** This is just one of the interpretations of Vedanta. The non-Advaita Vedanta schools do not uphold this interpretation. Therefore Doniger’s comments are misleading.

**Page 505, para 5:** *“....different branches of Vedanta tend to relegate the phenomenal world to the status of an epistemological error (avidya), a psychological imposition (adhyaya), or a metaphysical illusion (maya).”*

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<sup>416</sup> Ironically, Doniger’s interpretations of Vedanta can be used to do a Wendy on Wendy. One could argue, using Vedantic terms, that by falsely eroticizing all aspects of Hindu culture (‘avidya’), she is really super-imposing (‘adhyasa’) Hindu culture on her own her own predilections (‘vasanas’). Doniger tries to clothe her sleazy interpretations by providing dozens of references. But in reality, all these references are just an illusion (Maya) and the truth (Satya) that we all see (as ‘Sakshi’) is that the Empress (Duratma) has no clothes. Or to say it directly without any pseudo-Vedantic claptrap, the long divorced Doniger is plugging the gaps in her life by living her sexual fantasies through these pornographic misinterpretations of Hindu culture.

**Comment:** It is not ‘adhyaya’, but ‘adhyasa’. Again, Doniger has wrongly equated Vedanta to Advaita Vedanta. The ‘different’ branches (almost 10 schools besides the Advaita Vedanta) do not relegate the status of this world to Avidya, Adhyasa or Maya.

**Page 504, para 4:** “*Mimamsa...began with Jaimini...*”

**Comment:** Wrong. The earliest available systematized work available is the Mimamsa Sutra of Jaimini but the system as such existed before him, as evidenced from the specific views of predecessors cited by Jaimini. Scholars of Mimamsa therefore hold that the school did not really begin with Jaimini but much earlier, and the older works on Mimamsa are lost.<sup>417</sup>

**Page 505, para 1:** “*Vaisheshika .....according to which all material objects are made of atoms of the nine elements: the four material elements – earth, water, fire, and air – plus five more abstract elements – space, time, ether, mind and soul.*”

**Comment:** Wrong. According to this school, only the four material elements are made of atoms, the mind is ‘atomic’ in size, and the other four are all pervading (and not composed of atoms).

**Page 505, para 3:** “*Patanjali’s Yoga.....emphasized exercises of the mind and the body...*”

**Comment:** This is quite a caricature of Patanjali’s Yoga philosophy and overlooks the numerous other topics that are dealt with in the text – epistemology, ethical precepts, Karma, nature of the Universe etc. In fact, there is hardly any discussion in Patanjali’s Yoga on exercises of the body (asanas), which is emphasized in another branch of Yoga called Hathayoga.

**Page 505, para 4:** “*Samkhya.....were first formally codified by Ishvarakrishna...*”

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<sup>417</sup> See Appendix (‘Critical Bibliography’) in Ganganatha Jha (1942), *The Purva Mimamsa in its Sources*, Banaras Hindu University (Banaras).

**Comment:** Wrong. Ishvarakrishna's Samkhyakarikas are actually one of the last available treatises on Samkhya. All the earlier treatises by Panchashikha, Varshaganya, Vindhyavasin etc., are now lost.<sup>418</sup>

**Page 506, para 1:** *"Shankara, from Kerala, was a Shaiva exponent of pure non-dualism..."*

**Comment:** Wrong. It is believed that Shankaracharya was more of a Vaishnava.<sup>419</sup> In any case, he and most of his early followers do not privilege one Hindu Deity over another and it is not possible to bracket them as Shaivites or Vaishnavities or Shaktas.

The followers of Shankaracharya today are Smartas (worshipping all five Deities including Shiva) or Shaivites (worshipping Shiva) or Vaishnavas (worshipping Vishnu) etc.

**Page 507, para 2:** *"He [Shankaracharya] is said to have started a reform movement, proposing a moral agenda that could compete with the noble eightfold path of the Buddhists..."*

**Comment:** Wrong. Doniger misinterprets her source.<sup>420</sup> Shankaracharya did not propose a new moral agenda to compete with the eightfold path of Buddhism. He was the pre-eminent exponent of the Advaita interpretation of Vedanta philosophy. This is another example of how Doniger relies on non-specialist literature and then misinterprets it further.

**Page 507, para 2:** *"[Shankaracharya's] philosophy... may have been buoyed up by the need to respond to the monotheist philosophies of Islam..."*

**Comment:** A ridiculous claim. Doniger sees Islamic influences and impulses on Hinduism at the drop of a pin, and without any consideration of historical evidence or chronology.

Monistic interpretations of Vedanta had existed for a while before Shankaracharya expounded this viewpoint. One can see the Brahmasiddhi

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<sup>418</sup> Pulinbihari Chakravarti (1975), *Origin and Development of the Samkhya System of Thought*, Oriental Books Reprint Corporation (New Delhi)

<sup>419</sup> Wilhelm Halbfass (1995), *Philology and Confrontation*, State University of New York (Albany, NY), pp. 33-39

<sup>420</sup> John Keay (2000), *India a History*, Atlantic Monthly Press (New York), p. 194

of his senior contemporary Mandana Mishra (who hailed from Bihar, away from influence of Islam and Christianity at that time). His teacher's teacher Gaudapadacharya (also a north Indian) wrote the Karikas preaching a similar doctrine.

Although Shankaracharya is provisionally believed to have lived from 788-820 CE, this date is merely provisional and scholars believe that a more accurate estimate of his date is 650-700 CE.<sup>421</sup> But either way, even if he died in 820 CE, the presence of Islam in South India was restricted to a few trader communities on the western coast and they were simply too few to have motivated Shankaracharya to evolve a system of philosophy to respond to them. The only part of India under Muslim occupation by 820 CE was Sindh and lower Punjab.

Shankaracharya nowhere mentions Muslims or Christians, nor do his disciples or their disciples in their copious writings. Even rival schools of Advaita Vedanta do not allege that Shankaracharya was motivated to respond to Islamic monotheism. Doniger's claim is therefore just another example of her habit of reckless Freudian free association and a desperate attempt to credit (indirectly) Islam with developments in Hinduism.

**Page 507, para 3:** *"But Shankara took the idea of formal monastic orders and institutions from Buddhism and reworked it for Hinduism, an action that stirred up some Brahmins like a saffron flag waved in front of a bull. Ramanuja called Shankara a 'crypto-Buddhist'..."*

**Comment:** Normally, a red flag is waved in front of the bull. Doniger knows very well that the saffron flag is a sacred symbol of Hinduism, and it is quite juvenile of her therefore to use it in such a flippant, teasing manner. Ramanuja called the Advaitins as crypto-Buddhists not because of their monastic institutions, but because of the similarity of their philosophy to the Yogachara forms of Buddhism (Shribhashya on Vedantasutra 2.2.27). Doniger's remark is therefore misleading.

In any case, Doniger's contention that Shankaracharya took the idea of formal monastic institutions from Buddhism is completely ahistorical. These orders and institutions emerged in Shaivite communities several generations after Shankaracharya and in the course of a few

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<sup>421</sup> Govind Chandra Pande (1994), *Life and Thought of Sankaracarya*, Motilal Banarsidass (New Delhi), p. 52

centuries, they gravitated towards the tradition of Advaita Vedanta. They really had nothing to do with Shankaracharya as such.<sup>422</sup>

**Page 508, para 2:** *“The hagiographies of Shankara arise at a time when.....Buddhists and Muslims, and Christians in Kerala (Shankara’s home territory), are gaining ground. And so, just as the human avatars were in part a response to the human dimension of Buddhism in an earlier age, Shankara, someone who was, like the Buddha (and Muhammad and Jesus), a human founder of a religion, was the answer now.”*

**Comment:** Wrong. First, Buddhism definitely wasn’t gaining ground in Kerala when the hagiographies of Shankaracharya were written (where does Doniger get this idea?). Shankaracharya nowhere mentions Christians in his writings and at best, they lived in small settlements in coastal Kerala and did not make any converts amongst local Hindus. Likewise, the Muslim merchants residing on the Malabar coast are also not known to have made any significant number of converts on the western coast of India. We do not even possess all of the biographies purportedly written on him.<sup>423</sup> Therefore, Doniger’s comments are a desperate attempt to insert other religions’ role into internal developments in Hinduism (and indirectly credit Islam and Christianity for these developments in Hinduism).

Moreover, Shankaracharya is not considered the founder of any religion, or even of Advaita Vedanta as such. The followers of Shankaracharya trace the lineage of their tradition directly to Veda Vyasa, and Shankaracharya is considered its pre-eminent exponent. There is no hint in Advaita tradition that Shankaracharya was their answer to Muhammad and Jesus. Doniger’s speculations are in the realm of fantasy.

**Page 509, paras 1-2:** Doniger narrates the story of Shankaracharya, Mandana Mishra and the latter’s wife in the following way: *“The Mimamsa philosopher named Mandana Misra had a wife, Bharati, who challenged Shankara to a debate about the art of love, about which he was woefully ignorant, since he had always been chaste, a renouncer. Stymied by a question about sex, he asked for time out and took on the body, but not the soul, of a king who had a large harem, to the relief both of the exhausted king, and of the unsatisfied women.”*

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<sup>422</sup> Matthew Clark (2006), *The Dasanami-Samnyasis*, Brill (Leiden), p. 177

<sup>423</sup> Jonathan Bader (2000), *Conquest of the Four Quarters*, Aditya Prakashan (New Delhi)

*After a month of pleasant research and fieldwork, Shankara returned to his philosophical body and won the argument. Both Bharati and her husband then became nondualists.....the harem women who clearly prefer Shankara to the king in the bed.”*

**Comment:** Doniger perversely twists the relatively straightforward narrative to make it appear kinky. She makes it appear that Shankaracharya and the King Amruka indulged in a sexual orgy, and took turns in having sex with the King’s wives. But Doniger’s attempt at being Indology’s Official Pornographer is a non-starter.

All the sources that she cites (Madhaviya Shankaradigvijaya, Anandagiri’s Shankaradigvijaya, and Ravichandra’s commentary on Amarushatakam) clearly state that Shankaracharya merely transferred his own soul into the corpse of the dead king through his yogic powers. So where is the question of an ‘exhausted king’ or providing ‘relief’ to the king?

It is Doniger’s own fantasy that the queens preferred Shankara to the king in bed.

**Page 509, para 2:** *“This double superiority – for it appears that, like Shiva, this Shankara stored up impressive erotic powers during his years of chastity – rather than the inherent power (or relevance) of non-dualism, is apparently what persuades both the philosopher and his wife.”*

**Comment:** Again, a complete distortion. Ravichandra’s commentary on Amarushataka does not talk about Shankara’s debate with Bharati. Madhava’s Shankaradigvijaya merely states that Saraswati praised Shankaracharya for taking the trouble to learn the Kamashastra at her request and accepted defeat. Whereas, Anandagiri’s Digvijaya says that Shankaracharya addressed all her questions on Kamashastra and she accepted defeat as a result of his knowledge of the subject. It is Doniger’s own fantasy that Shankara’s ‘erotic powers’ persuaded Bharati. Moreover, Mandana Misra had accepted defeat and had become an ascetic even before Bharati challenged Shankara to a debate. Therefore, Doniger is completely wrong and perverse in stating that Mandana too was persuaded only by Shankaracharya’s ‘erotic powers’.

Doniger claims that her book intends to show that women and low castes too made notable contributions to Hinduism (p. 1). If her intentions were honest, she would not have given her own sleazy interpretations to these episodes in Shankaracharya’s hagiographies. Instead, she could have noted for instance, that Madhava’s Shankara-



Digvijaya shows Ubhaya-Bharati as a profound scholar of the Vedas whose knowledge amazed even the gods and Sages when she started debating with Shankaracharya. Or Doniger could have pointed to the episode in which Lord Shiva appeared in front of Shankara as a Chandala accompanied by the 4 Vedas (which assumed the form of 4 dogs of the Chandala) – triggering his composition titled Maneeshapanchakam. Or she could have described his very human relationships with his primary disciples – stories which are used even today to instill good values in students in Hindu schools. But the only thing Doniger is interested is sex, sleaze, rape, booze, drugs. if she cannot find them, she imagines them.

**Page 510, para 3:** *“There are also stories of Ramanuja’s actions against Muslims, as when he went to Delhi to help recover a lost image of Ranganatha: he found the image, cried, “Beloved son!” and the image jumped into his arms.”*

**Comment:** This example perhaps takes the cake in its historical distortions and political propaganda by the author. Doniger alleges that Ramanujacharya took ‘actions against the Muslims’ which is in tune with her constant attempt in the book to depict Hindus as a community prone to rape, sleaze, booze and violence.

But what is the actual story in Shri Vaishnava literature? The story goes that the image had been taken by a Muslim ruler to Delhi and the ruler’s daughter took a fancy to it. When Ramanuja approached the image and addressed it, the image walked up to the Saint. The Saint walked towards the south day and night, and was assisted in carrying the image by outcastes all the way to the temple in South India. For their assistance, the Saint, breaking all conventions of his age, granted the right to Chandalas to enter the temple for worship a few days every year. The Princess was heart-broken as she loved the image, and died outside the temple. Ramanuja and his followers were impressed by her pious devotion despite being a Muslim, and therefore, her image too is worshipped by the Shri Vaishnavas to this day in a few temples.<sup>424</sup> Far from an ‘action against the Muslims’ (is it even proper to blame Indian Muslims for what Turkish invader did?), it was a desperate attempt by a brave Saint to retrieve the icon – the object of devotion of his community. The story shows how the Saint overcame the barriers of caste in Hinduism and gave unprecedented (in those times) rights of worship to Chandalas. Moreover, the Hindu

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<sup>424</sup> Swami Ramakrishnananda (1986), *Life of Sri Ramanuja*, Sri Ramakrishna Math (Madras), pp. 221-226

community overlooked barriers of religion and deified the Muslim princess.

Doniger says that she is not a historian, and this is another instance where her ignorance becomes rather comical. Ramanujacharya is said to have died in 1137 CE, whereas the Delhi Sultanate was founded in 1206 CE. It took at least another century for Delhi Sultans to penetrate the southern parts of the Indian peninsula. Even if we accept that the traditional date of Ramanujacharya (1017 – 1137 CE) is incorrect and that he lived a few decades later, it is almost impossible for a critical historian to accept this tale (written perhaps several centuries after the Saint) at its face value.<sup>425</sup> But that is what Doniger does, and then accuses him of taking action against Muslims!

Again, if Doniger were really interested in highlighting the role of women and low castes in Hinduism, she would have focused on other inspiring episodes from Ramanujacharya's life, instead of distorting his biographies to project him as being violent towards Muslims. E.g., she could have narrated how he disobeyed his Guru Goshthipurna and revealed the Moksha granting mantra to all, or how he had another Guru of a lower caste and forsook his own wife when she insulted that Guru's wife on account of their lower caste. Or, how he gave specific duties to Shudras in the Shrirangam temple, an act that was again unprecedented for his times. But it appears that Doniger's purpose in writing this book is to indulge in the propaganda that Hindus are horrid, sexual, violent creatures who must have been inspired by Muslims and Christians to develop desirable things in their own religion.

**Page 511, paras 2-3:** Doniger quotes narratives from extremely sectarian Dvaita texts such as 'Madhvavijaya' that disparage Shankaracharya, whose followers are accused of being tyrannical people who burn monasteries, killing of women and children, kill cattle etc.

**Comment:** It is interesting to note that everywhere Doniger is keen to speculate upon influences of Islam and Christianity on Hinduism but does not consider the possibility that the (imaginary) description of Shankaracharya's followers was taken from the observation of the real actions of Muslim invaders in Deccan! The point is that Doniger is very inconsistent in speculating the sources of Hindu traditions. If the tradition is desirable, she attributes it to the influence of Islam or Christianity. And

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<sup>425</sup> Ibid, p. 247

if it is undesirable, she blames other Hindu sects as the source. The book has many similar examples that make it appear that the author hates Hindus and Hinduism.

**Page 513, para 2:** *“The quarrels of these great South Indian philosophers had repercussions throughout India, particularly in far-off Kashmir. “*

**Comment:** The statement would have some context if Doniger had first explained what exactly the philosophies of these three philosophers were. This is something she does not do with any justice in her book. In any case, her claim that these three philosophers caused philosophical ferment in Kashmir is ahistorical and completely wrong. Soon after Madhvacharya passed away in 1317, Kashmir passed under Muslim rule and no further debates on Vedanta between Hindu philosophers were possible in Kashmir.

**Page 515, para 3:** *“Both Cats and Monkeys value Bhakti, but less than they value prapatti (“surrender”), an idea that may owe something to the Muslim idea of surrender (which is what Islam means).”*

**Comment:** Once again, Doniger credits Islam with supposed innovations in Hindu philosophy. Her methodology reminds one of the Libyan dictator’s claim that Shakespeare was an Arab because the name (according to him) is just an anglicized version of Shaikh Zubeir.<sup>426</sup>

It is quite ahistorical and ridiculous to assume that Prapatti could owe to the Islamic doctrine of surrender. One can trace the idea to pre-Islamic Hindu scriptures and traditions and the Shri Vaishnava emphasis on Prapatti is definitely an internal Hindu development of these earlier Hindu teachings.<sup>427</sup>

Doniger’s statement that both schools value Prapatti above Bhakti is somewhat misleading and inaccurate. The Vadakalai insist on equal validity of both Bhakti and Prapatti even though they may prefer the latter due to the ease, universality and immediacy of Prapatti.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> <http://blogs.palmbeachpost.com/cerabino/tag/muammar-gaddafi/>

<sup>427</sup> P N Srinivasachari (1946), *The Philosophy of Visishtadvaita*, The Adyar Library (Adyar), pp. 382 sqq

<sup>428</sup> Ibid, p. 535

**Page 517, para 2:** Doniger summarizes the ‘sarparajju drishtanta’ (snake and rope metaphor) of Advaita Vedanta in the following manner – “When you realize that the snake is not a snake but a rope, you go on to realize that there is not even a rope at all.”

**Comment:** The statement is grossly inaccurate and Doniger seems to have sacrificed philosophical principle at the altar of literary cutism. Advaita Vedanta predicates Maya (rope) predicated on the underlying reality of Brahman (snake). The underlying reality is not non-existent. In fact, it is the only reality that exists.

**Page 518, para 1:** “But other traditions developed in Kashmir in this period not in spite of but because of the foreign presences there. The school of the Muslim philosopher Ibn ‘Arabi (1165-1240), who argued that all that is not a part of divine reality is illusion, is said to have had a major influence on Hindu philosophy at this time....”

**Comment:** Doniger does not provide any reference for her assertion that al-Arabi’s doctrines had an influence on Kashmiri Hindu philosophy.

**Page 518, para 2:** “....Kashmir is close to the Central Asian strongholds of Buddhism....and a number of Muslim (Turkish and Arabic) cultures with highly developed storytelling traditions that rivaled those of an ancient India. Eventually a brand of idealist philosophy that was already a mix of Buddhism and Hinduism married a brand of storytelling that was already a mix of Hinduism and Islam, enlivened by a dash of Abhinavagupta’s writings on the artistic transformation of emotions. It was here, therefore, and at this time [12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> cent. CE] that the great Indian traditions of storytelling and illusion blossomed in the text of the great Ocean of Story (Katha-sarit-sagara) and, above all, in the Yoga-vasishtha...”

**Comment:** A completely incorrect generalization by Doniger, and another attempt to suggest that anything interesting and good in Hinduism must necessarily develop as a result of external impulses.

First, Doniger completely ignores that the Katha-sarit-sagara of Somadeva is actually a retelling of Gunadhya’s Brihatkatha supposedly written around 150 CE (or earlier) in the Paisachi language.<sup>429</sup> Therefore, it is ahistorical to attribute the blossoming of Kathasaritsagar to Central

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<sup>429</sup> S N Prasad (1977), *Studies in Gunadhya*, Chaukhamba Orientalia (Varanasi)

Asian Buddhist or Muslim influences! For that matter, there are similar renderings of the Brhatkatha from pre-Islamic (and pre-Muhammad) times – the Jaina Vasudevahimdi, the Tamil Perunkatai and the Brhatkathashlokasamgraha from Nepal!

Second, Doniger places the Yoga Vashishta in the 12-13<sup>th</sup> cent., showing her ignorance of the current state of scholarship on this text. It is now known that Yoga Vashishta is a recast of an older Kashmirian text named Mokshopaya, whose date of composition has been fixed fairly securely as c. 950 CE.<sup>430</sup> The Hindus of Kashmir were still separated from Muslim Arabs and Turks by the Shahiya Hindu kingdom at this time. This date is therefore too early to speculate any influences of Arabic or Muslim Turkish cultures of Central Asia, and is also before the lifespan of Abhinavagupta. Indeed, there is no evidence that Yoga-Vashishta has borrowed from these sources, and Doniger's speculations are quite baseless.

Finally, what is so specifically non-Hindu about story telling traditions? Hindus have vast compendiums of sacred narratives (Itihasa-Purana) and there is no need to speculate Islamic influences in the writing of Kathasaritsagar or Yogavashishta in the absence of positive evidence to this effect.

**Page 519, para 1:** *"....the final advice that Krishna gives to Arjuna in the Gita.....: Continue to act, though with a newly transformed understanding of the unreality of actions and therefore without the desire for the fruits of actions."*

**Comment:** Wrong. Although Krishna does give this teaching to Arjuna, his 'final advice' is different. See Gita 18.66 where Krishna asks Arjuna to abandon all Dharmas and seek refuge in Him.

**Postscript on the Chapter:** The chapter focuses on many non-illuminating details from hagiographies from the Vedantic Acharyas selected by Doniger from a mass of incidents that would have served a better purpose. Clearly, Doniger seems to follow the editorial policy of American gossip-tabloids like *The National Enquirer*, and has a penchant for sensationalism and sleaze. I have not referred to some of these incidents cited by Doniger in this chapter (e.g., the extract from Madhvavijaya) in my chapter review. For the sake of brevity, I am also

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<sup>430</sup> Jurgen Hanneder (2005), *The Mokshopaya, Yogavashishta and Related Texts*, Shaker Verlag (Aachen), p. 14

leaving out her jejune comments on the Yoga Vashishtha stories that she has summarized in the book, as well as numerous other errors.

Also, for a book that claims to give an 'alternative' picture of Hinduism, it is surprising that she has virtually left out the non-dominant schools of Vedanta, like those of Nimbarka, Vallabha and Vijnanabhikshu. So what is truly alternative about her book?

## 19. Review of Chapter 19, “*Dialog and Tolerance Under the Mughals*” by Vishal Agarwal

**General Comments on the Chapter:** The chapter is written in a very amateurish manner. Doniger’s main references are overview books on Indian history such as the one by John Keay, and she has reproduced errors already found in her sources. Though the title of the chapter implies that the Mughal rulers were tolerant towards Hindus, the data presented by her makes it clear to even a casual reader that the reverse was actually the case. In other words, she does a good job at demonstrating that the Mughal Emperors, with the honorable and partial exception of Akbar, held Hindus and Hinduism in utter contempt and disdain and also indulged in considerable religious persecution of Hindus. Doniger tries to counter this obvious conclusion by culling piece-meal data from the works of agenda driven authors, such as the communist historian Harbans Mukhia (who even advocated a ban on archaeological digs in India recently after a Jaina Saraswati idol was unearthed from Fatehpur Sikri, because it shattered the Indian Communist historians’ cherished claim that Akbar was uniformly tolerant towards Hindus and Jains)<sup>431</sup> and Richard Eaton, an apologist for Islamic iconoclasm in medieval India.

Further, the chapter is replete with dozens of factual errors, and of course with questionable interpretations of historical data. As usual, Doniger focuses on horses, dogs, drugs, booze and sex in this chapter too. Lastly, several paragraphs are written in very hurried and careless English and are therefore either misleading or undecipherable. Below, the reviewer lists just a few of the errors found in this chapter of the book. If we have not cited references to point out the sources of our corrections, it is because these facts are too well known to students of medieval Indian history. Doniger has acknowledged the help of her students Manan Ahmed and Rajeev Kinra in writing this chapter. Perhaps they can help her with these corrections, and also learn good history in the process.

With that, let us look at a few problematic statements in this chapter.

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<sup>431</sup> Mukhia, Harbans. “Demolishing temples wasn’t Medieval India’s only language”, *The HindustanTimes*, New Delhi, March 19, 2000. In this article, Mukhia makes the bizarre allegation that the demolition of the Jaina site might have been instigated by Hindus!

**Page 527, para 1:** “1530-1556 Humayun reigns”

**Comment:** Wrong. Humayun reigned from 1530-1540 AD and was deposed by Sher Shah Suri. He fled his kingdom and lived in Iran for several years before returning to recapture his throne in 1555. Humayun then died in 1556.

**Page 528, para 2:** “*But the Mughals also made spectacular contributions to the civilization of the world in general and Hinduism in particular.*”

**Comment:** Throughout the chapter, the author has failed to demonstrate what contributions were made by the Mughals to Hinduism. The mere fact that they got some Hindu scriptures translated into Persian or that some Hindu saints lived in the same period as the 300 years of Mughal rule does not constitute sufficient proof of their ‘spectacular contributions’ to Hinduism.

**Page 528, para 3:** “*Like the Arabs of the Delhi Sultanate, the Turks who became the Mughals...*”

**Comment:** Wrong. Individuals of several dynasties ruled as Delhi Sultans. Most of them were Turkic and Afghans and it is incorrect to term them as ‘Arabs’. The Arabs ruled kingdoms elsewhere, in southern and western Pakistan.

**Page 531, para 2:** “*In 1556, as keen on astronomy as on astrology, Humayun tripped going down the stone stairs from his makeshift observatory in Delhi...*”

**Comment:** Misleading text. The building called ‘Sher Mandal’ was actually constructed by Emperor Sher Shah Suri and was used more as a library by Humayun. He was walking down the stairs from his library with books in his hands before his death.

**Page 532, para 2:** “*But he [Akbar] moved the capital back to Delhi in 1586, in part because of Fatehpur Sikri’s inadequate...*”

**Comment:** Wrong. Akbar moved his capital from Sikri to Lahore in 1585, not to Delhi. After Lahore, he moved the capital to Agra, which is where he died.



**Page 535, para 3:** “In 1605, a few weeks before Akbar’s death, Prince Salim.....had Abu’l Fazl murdered and had the head sent back to him (Salim).....Akbar was understandably infuriated and saddened; a few weeks later, he died in Agra.”

**Comment:** Wrong. Abu’l Fazl was murdered at the behest of Prince Salim in 1602, whereas Akbar died in 1605 – surely much more than ‘a few weeks later’.

**Page 535, paras 4-5:** Jehangir’s policy towards Hindus

**Comment:** Wendy omits the important details on what the Emperor stated in his autobiography about the reasons for having had Guru Arjan murdered. In his autobiography, Jehangir also refers to Hinduism as “a worthless religion”. A summary of his treatment of non-Muslims may be given as follows –

“He kept the Muslim organization of the state intact. Generally he continued the tolerant policy of his father and did not differentiate between Muslims and non-Muslims in public services and did not restrict public celebration of religious festivals and fairs. But the Sikh Guru Arjan was tortured to death. The Jains were persecuted. At times, Jahangir acted as the protector of Islam rather than the king of non-Muslims. Thus as compared to Akbar’s reign, the outlook had changed in Jahangir’s times.”<sup>432</sup>

**Page 536, para 2:** “But Shab Jahan was still open to the culture of Hinduism....When he [Shah Jahan] built the great Jami Masjid, the Friday Mosque, in Delhi, he included a rather miscellaneous arcade made of disparate columns from twenty-seven demolished Hindu temples. Despite the alleged aniconic nature of Islam, the pillars are still graced with figures, some of Hindu gods, a few of them still with their heads on.”

**Comment:** It was a common practice of Muslim rulers in India to demolish Hindu temples and then use the fragments (including pillars with defaced icons of Hindu Deities) as trophies by incorporating these fragments in the construction of mosques and other Islamic structures. These acts do not represent their tolerance towards Hinduism. If Muslim rulers had truly appreciated Hindu art, they would have gotten new pillars

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<sup>432</sup> Jadunath Sarkar (1984), *Mughal Polity*, Idarah-I Adabiyat-I Delhi (New Delhi), p. 406

carved with Hindu motifs for their mosques rather than demolish pre-existing and functioning temples to procure them.

Moreover, Doniger seems to have confused the Mughal built Jama Masjid with the Jami Masjid (also called 'Quwwat al Islam' mosque) in Mehrauli started in 1193 CE by Qutbuddin Aibak after destroying 27 Jain temples there. It is another matter that natives of Delhi alleged that Shah Jahan destroyed 3 pre-existing Hindu temples in old Delhi to make way for his mosque.

**Page 536, para 3:** *"Shah Jahan also built the Shalimar Gardens in Kashmir..."*

**Comment:** Wrong. These gardens were constructed by Emperor Jehangir for his queen Nur Jahan. Shah Jahan added to these gardens, and constructed another garden with the same name in Lahore.

**Page 536, para 3:** *"...Mumtaz [Mahal, whose tomb is the Taj Mahal], died in bearing him their thirteenth child..."*

**Comment:** Wrong. She died during her 14<sup>th</sup> childbirth.

**Page 537, para 3:** *"When Aurangzeb sacked Hyderabad in 1687, he stabled his horses in the Shi'ite mosques as a deliberate insult to what he regarded as the city's heretics. Thus began twenty years of discrimination against Shi'ites, Hindus and Sikhs."*

**Comment:** Misleading comment. Aurangzeb had started persecuting Hindus and other non-Muslims several decades earlier, even before he became the Emperor in 1658 and when he was the Governor of Deccan under his father's reign. He demolished several temples and persecuted Hindus and Sikhs, including getting Guru Tegh Bahadur murdered in 1675 AD. These historical facts are too well known to be repeated here.

**Page 537, para 4:** *"Many Muslims converted to Sikhism, so infuriating Aurangzeb that he condemned Tegh Bahadur for blasphemy and executed him."*

**Comment:** Very misleading remark, at variance with both the traditional Hindu-Sikh narratives as well as the official Moghul narratives. The former clearly state that the Guru took cudgels on behalf of Kashmiri Hindus who were being forced to convert to Islam at the orders of

Aurangzeb. He was arrested and the Emperor gave the Guru the choice of death or conversion to Islam. The Guru chose the latter.

**Page 537-538:** *“In 1708, Govind Singh was assassinated while attending the emperor Aurangzeb.”*

**Comment:** Wrong. Emperor Aurangzeb died in 1707, and the assassination occurred during the reign of his successor Emperor Bahadur Shah I. It is an insult to suggest that the Guru was ‘attending’ on the Moghul emperor.

**Page 538, para 2:** *“In 1679, he reimposed the Jizya on all castes....and the tax on Hindu pilgrims that Akbar had lifted.”*

**Comment:** Misleading statement. The part on Jaziya is correct, but the pilgrimage taxes paid by Hindus were in effect as late as the reign of Shah Jehan, who abolished them at the request of his liberal son Dara Shikoh and the Hindu ascetic Kavindracharya Saraswati.

**Page 538, para 3:** *“He [Aurangzeb] also renamed the cave city of Ellora Aurangabad.”*

**Comment:** Ellora is 19 miles away from Aurangabad and two places are quite distinct. Aurangzeb had renamed another town named Fatehnagar as Aurangabad in 1653.

**Page 538, para 4:** *“He destroyed few old temples, generally only those that had political or ideological power.”*

**Comment:** A blatantly false statement. There were very few ancient temples left by the time of Aurangzeb because most of the old temples had already been destroyed in northern India and Pakistan by preceding Muslim rulers. The number of temples destroyed by Aurangzeb perhaps runs into 4 figures. Doniger has relied on agenda driven Indian communist historians such as Harbans Mukhia to make such a ridiculous claim.

He did attack notable old Hindu temples like the temple at Pandharpur. If he did not destroy many Hindu temples in South India, it

was because he did not want to incite the Hindus as suppressing a revolt by Hindus there would have been very difficult.<sup>433</sup>

**Page 539, paras 1-2:** *“Aurangzeb lived to ninety and died in bed, alone. When Jahandah Shah took the throne, he immediately reversed all of Aurangzeb’s policies that had curbed the pleasures of the flesh.”*

**Comment:** Aurangzeb was succeeded by Bahadur Shah I who ruled from 1707-1712, and not by Jahandah (sic!) Shah. The latter’s correct name is Jahandar Shah (Doniger has copied the wrong spelling from John Keay’s book) and he ruled only for 11 months.

**Page 545, para 2:** *“In 1647, when he [Shivaji] was just seventeen years old....”*

**Comment:** There is a controversy on his date of birth. Sometimes, 1627 is stated to be his year of birth. Doniger should have stated this ‘alternative’ version too!

**Page 546, para 1:** *“There is evidence of fewer than 200 conversions under Aurangzeb.”*

**Comment:** Quite a travesty of truth. What would constitute proof for Doniger? We cannot expect conversion certificates to survive from the 16-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Single instances, such as forcible conversions in Kashmir during Aurangzeb’s reign would have led to literally thousands of Hindus forsaking their faith under duress.

**Page 546, para 3:** *“In the fifteenth century the Brahmins thought that there was already a need for conversions back to Hinduism; they overhauled ancient ceremonies designed to reinstate Hindus....”*

**Comment:** Doniger’s source again is the communist historian Harbans Mukhia. It is difficult to understand why Doniger brings in the 15<sup>th</sup> century here when Mughal rule started in India at the end of the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. in 1526). Clearly, these changes in Hinduism had nothing to do with Mughals. In fact, Hindus were reconverting their brethren converted forcibly to Islam several centuries earlier.

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<sup>433</sup> Sarkar, p. 428

**Pages 548-550:** These pages of the book have a description of supposed religious fusion of Islam and Hinduism during the Moghul Empire.

**Comment:** The description is quite questionable and exaggerated, following the line of India's communist historians. The examples given are largely from the elitist stratum of the society or are exceptional.

**Pages 549, para 2:** *“Urdu (“camp”), a hybrid dialect that Akbar developed in the military encampments...”*

**Comment:** Wrong statement. Urdu developed several centuries earlier.

**Page 549, para 3:** *“Thanks to Akbar and Dara, Sanskrit became an important literary language in the Muslim world.”*

**Comment:** Doniger apparently relies on a book by Ann Marie Schimmel. The statement is quite an exaggeration. Where in the Muslim world did Sanskrit become an important literary language? Arabia? Egypt? Morocco? Persian Empire? Ottoman Empire?

**Page 550, para 2:** *“Since there were no Rama temples in Ayodhya until the sixteenth or seventeenth century, there is some irony in the strong possibility that Babur, whose mosque was to become such a cause célèbre, may have sponsored the first Rama temples in Ayodhya, built when he built the ill-fated Babri Mosque.”*

**Comment:** This is a meaningless, if not a pervert statement. Doniger not only misrepresents Hans Baker's book on Ayodhya but does not also ask a logical question – “Why is it that none of the ancient and revered Hindu pilgrimage centers in northern Indian, including Varanasi, Mathura, Ayodhya, Haridwar etc., have no ancient temple predating 300 years of so?” The answer should be obvious (that they were destroyed by Islamic invaders) in light of extensive historical records and archaeological evidence to this effect. But some great scholars have other ethereal, and agenda driven theoretical explanations that have no empirical basis. Read our review of chapter 24 for more information on Doniger's view on the Babri mosque.

**Page 550, para 4:** *“As always, the common people of India picked up the tab.....As there was no free temple, there was certainly no free mosque.”*

**Comment:** A false parity. Mosques were often constructed by demolishing pre-existing sites, unlike temples that were constructed on virgin land. Temples served the religious needs of the masses of the country. In contrast, mosques were often an expression of the political victory of the small Muslim minority (or of Muslim rulers) over the Hindu masses of India. Temples were supported by land grants made by the rulers, so that that the government actually lost the revenues of the lands granted. Mosques were built through crippling taxes collected or looted from the largely Hindu peasantry.

**Postscript:** The above are just a few of the errors that litter this chapter of the book. Some of the errors pointed by us above can be a matter of interpretation, but most are plain errors of fact. The chapter covers a period of almost 200 years (from 1526 – 1713 AD) and to attribute all natural developments within the Hindu society to Moghuls is insulting to the intelligence of the Hindu community. Toeing the official ‘secularist’ line of history writing followed by India’s communist historians, Doniger exaggerates the supposed contributions of Moghuls and of Islam to Hinduism. She glorifies Akbar in a rather ahistorical fashion not asking the most elementary of all questions – “When Akbar fashioned the vast Moghul empire during his 49 year reign, were his conquests of a peaceful nature or were they preceded by terrible violence and bloodshed in the invaded territories of India?”

For all her pretenses that her book is about the under-privileged sections of Hindus whose voices are not heard, Doniger too forgets them (i.e., the Hindus) completely in this chapter, and instead glorifies their feudal and imperial lords. It is just the very last (and short) paragraph of the chapter that highlights the plights of the masses, but even this paragraph closes by drawing a false parity between the construction of temples earlier and royal mosques during the Moghul rule.

## 20. Review of the Chapter 20, “*Hinduism under the Mughals 1500 – 1700 CE*”

**General Comments:** Practically all of Doniger’s bibliographic references are several degrees removed from the original sources (whether historical chronicles or religious writings of that period). The chapter is full of exaggerations, crediting the Mughal rulers for the survival or efflorescence of some forms of Hinduism from 1500-1700 CE. No counter theses are considered, and the choice of Saints is also highly idiosyncratic. In fact, most of the Saints discussed in this chapter were beyond the sphere of influence of Mughals. In effect, she has torn these Saints from the larger canvas of the Bhakti movement, and has projected them as having been under some kind of tutelage under the Mughals. As with many other chapters, this one too wastes several pages on horses and on Muslim ladies in royal harems. Her students (Rajeev Kinra and Manan Ahmed) whom she mentions for helping her with this chapter have not been able to correct the errors of their teacher’s work. The review below gives a few examples of the flaws in this chapter.

**Page 550, Title:** Chapter Title – “*Hinduism under the Mughals 1500-1700 CE*”

**Comment:** The periodization of 1500-1700 as the ‘Mughal Rule’ is somewhat problematic. The Mughal rule started in India in 1526 and was restricted to parts of northern India during the reigns of Babar and Humayun (who did not even rule India from 1540-1556, having fled towards Iran). It was the third Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) during whose reign the Mughal rule extended over most of non-Peninsular India. Even granting some latitude to Doniger, the inclusion of most of the Saints in this chapter under the ‘Mughal Rule’ is questionable, as discussed below.

**Page 550:** 1486-1533 *Chaitanya lives*

**Comment:** Chaitanya’s life overlaps with Mughal rule for just the last 7 years (1526-1533) and during this entire period, Bengal, where the saint was born, was not under the Mughal political rule. In fact, Chaitanya lived much of his active life in Orissa, which remained a Hindu kingdom in his times, outside the control of the Muslim Sultans ruling Bengal. In other words, he was completely out of the Mughal sphere of influence and lived mainly in Orissa under the patronage of Gajapati Hindu dynasty ruler Prataparudra Deva.

**Page 550:** 1498-1597 *Meerabai lives*

**Comment:** Wrong dates. On page 568, Doniger dates Mirabai between 1450 – 1525 CE! In fact, the latter too is wrong. The commonly accepted dates for her lifetime are 1498-1547 C.E.

**Page 550:** “1622-1673 *Kshetrappa lives*”

**Comment:** Aurangzeb (1658-1707) captured the coastal Telugu region (the home of Kshetrappa) towards the last decades of his reign CE. Therefore, Kshetrappa lived outside of the Moghul sphere of influence his entire life. It is therefore inaccurate to include this Saint under the Moghul rule. Doniger has herself stated in the chapter that the Saint lived under the Hindu Nayaka rulers.

**Page 550:** Wendy opens the chapter with the following quote –  
“*It is a simple fact that contemporary Hinduism as a living practice would not be what it is if it were not for the devotional practices initiated under the Mughal rule.*  
*Amitava Ghosh (1956 -)*”

**Comment:** Contrary to what Doniger implies, the production of digests in fact shows that Hindus genuinely saw a real threat to their heritage and culture from Islamic aggression and were forced to compile these secondary works.

In fact, as another scholar Sheldon Pollock notes,<sup>434</sup> the decline of Sanskrit literature at least coincides temporally and spatially with the advance of Islamic rule in various parts of India. Pollock of course dismisses any correlation between the march of Islam and extinction of creativity in the field of Sanskrit literature (and he of course brands those who hold such opinions as ‘Hindu Nationalists’) but this is the most parsimonious explanation of the ‘death of Sanskrit’.

In fact, in an earlier publication, Pollock has himself seen the correlation between the production of non-original Dharmanibandhas and the advance of Muslim –

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<sup>434</sup> Sheldon Pollock, “The Death of Sanskrit”, pp. 392- 426 in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 43, issue 2



“...for the first time since the development of the dharmasastras that way of life confronted, in the Central Asian Turks, something radically different, a resolutely un-assimilating social and religious formation? The fact that the production of dharmanibandha discourse, ..., almost perfectly follows the path of advance of the Sultanate from the Doab to Devagiri to the Deccan suggests, on the one hand, that totalizing conceptions of society became possible only by juxtaposition with alternative lifeworlds, and on the other, that they became necessary only at the ‘moment when the total form of the society was for the first time believed, by the privileged theorists of society, to be threatened.’”<sup>435</sup>

Likewise, the growth in the literary activity in various regional languages of India did not have much to do directly with Mughal Emperors. Their own official languages were largely non-Indian languages like Persian.

Only Persian poets were patronized by Akbar. Badauni puts their number at 168. Akbar was also the first Indo-Islamic king of north India to formally declare Persian as the sole language of administration (in 1582). Ghulam Husain Tabatabai records,

“Earlier in India, the government accounts were written in Hindi according to the Hindu rule. Raja Todar Mal acquired new regulations (zawabit) from the clerks (nawisindagan) of Iran, and the government offices then were reorganized as they were there in Wilayat.”

Iranian clerks were recruited in large numbers and remained in “noticeable control” of accounts in the Mughal Empire. Akbar modified the prevailing curriculum in the madarasas with a view to popularizing Persian language and culture among the Hindus. In his reign a large number of Hindus availed of madarsa education to acquire proficiency in Persian which was the means of obtaining government service. Attempts were also made to cleanse Persian of Indian usages, words, phrases, and ideas.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Sheldon Pollock; “Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj”, in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993)

<sup>436</sup> For details see Muzaffar Alam, “The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics”, *Modern Asian Studies* 32, 2, 1998

**Page 550, para 2:** *“But on a more positive vein, Hindu kings in medieval India arranged large-scale public debates.”*

**Comment:** The statement is misleading and implies that Hindu kings in ancient India did not arrange large-scale public debates. One just needs to look at the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad to read about the debates in Janaka’s palace and so on. Doniger has herself referred to these debates in the chapter on the Upanishads.

**Page 551, para 1:** *“Mughal policies that encouraged trade and pilgrimage (in part because several of the Mughals collected taxes on pilgrims) benefited the sacred Vaishnava sites of Ayodhya and Vrindavan.”*

**Comment:** Doniger’s suggestion that the pilgrimage taxes levied on Hindus somehow promoted the sacred sites of Ayodhya and Vrindavan ignores the simple fact that the money collected by Moghuls were not used to develop these sites. If anything, there appears to be an inverse relation between the levy of pilgrimage taxes and the growth (or decline) of Vaishnava pilgrimage centers.

Akbar abolished the pilgrimage tax in 1563 and it is after this year that Vrindavan temples started getting constructed! No new temples were constructed during the reign of Shah Jehan who revived this tax. In fact, crippled by these taxes, a delegation of Hindus led by Kavindracharya Saraswati petitioned Shah Jehan successfully, who rescinded this tax under the influence of his favorite pro-Hindu Prince Dara Shikoh. The news of the abolition of this tax caused a great rejoicing amongst Hindus and a festschrift (‘Kavindrachandrodaya’ – the work still exists today) for Kavindracharya was compiled by all the leading teachers and Saints of the Hindus of the day. This was quite ironical if pilgrimage taxes had benefited Ayodhya and Vrindavan!

But before long, Shah Jehan’s son Aurangzeb revived the pilgrimage tax and also started destroying Hindu temples in his long reign from 1658-1707. Aurangzeb issued orders to destroy the temples at Ayodhya<sup>437</sup> (including the famous Treta ke Thakur and Swargadwara temples). In Mathura, the twin city of Vrindavan, he destroyed the Krishna Janmasthan temple, forcing the Hindus to stealthily remove the sacred Icons of Lord Krishna of other prominent temples in Mathura and

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<sup>437</sup> Sri Ram Sharma (1962), *The Religious Policy of Mughal Emperors*, Asia Publishing House (Bombay), p. 138

establish them safely in the Hindu kingdom of Mewar and Jaipur. He destroyed numerous other temples in the Mathura-Vrindavan area including those constructed just a few generations earlier. Mathura was renamed as 'Islamabad'. The icons of practically all the major temples in Vrindavan established by the influence of Rupa Goswamin and his contemporaries were transferred to safe Rajput Hindu territories in Rajasthan due to actual or anticipated attacks on these temples at the orders of Aurangzeb.

And yet, the devotion of Hindus towards their holy sites did not cease, despite their desecration and destruction by the Mughals (and not due to their encouragement!). A European traveler notes that even after Aurangzeb destroyed the temples at Ayodhya and Hardwar, Hindus continued to visit them in multitudes and offered alms at these sites.<sup>438</sup> Sometime after 1700 (or in 1705), Aurangzeb appointed hatchet men to dig up the foundations and destroy the stone temples in Maharashtra, including the famous shrine of Pandharpur. Aurangzeb also tried to destroy the icon of the famous Jagannath temple in Puri at least twice but without success because the local Hindus paid heavy bribes to the local government official. Nevertheless, the doors of the temple remained closed till his death in 1707.<sup>439</sup>

Not surprisingly therefore, a historian remarks that due to the flight of Vaishnavas from Vrindavan with their icons during the reign of Aurangzeb, "Mewar thus became the center of Vaishnavism in India....Thanks to Aurangzeb's religious zeal, Udaipur State became a new Brindaban to the devotees of the Bhakti cult."<sup>440</sup>

In short, Doniger's blanket statements are historically untenable. A more accurate way to summarize the situation would be this –

"Vrindavan and Mathura lay desolate during the reign of Babar and Humayun. During the reign of Akbar, the followers of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were inspired to rediscover and revive the sacred geography of Vrindavan. They were assisted by Man Singh, the devotedly Hindu nephew of his wife Hira Kunwar (popularly known today as Jodhabai) and a land grant from Akbar to construct the temple. Akbar also abolished pilgrimage taxes. Patronage was

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Hermann Kulke, *Jagannatha under Muslim Rule in Kings and Cults, State formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia*, (Manohar, New Delhi), 1993, p.46

<sup>440</sup> Sharma (1962), p. 134

continued during the reign of Jehangir but Shah Jehan reinstated the pilgrimage taxes, only to abolish them later. Numerous temples in Varanasi, Allahabad, Kashmir and Gujarat etc., were destroyed during Shah Jehan's reign. This was followed by a long 49 year reign of Aurangzeb who desecrated and destroyed numerous temples all over India, including in Vrindavan and Ayodhya. This led to a flight of Vaishnava scholars from Vrindavan to Rajasthan, who fled with the sacred icons of the surviving temples of the region."

**Page 551, para 1:** "*Devotional Vaishnavism flourished under the Mughals in the sixteenth century in ways that are foundational for subsequent Hinduism.*"

**Comment:** A basic and fundamental rule of statistics is that a positive correlation does not imply cause and effect relationship.

How would Doniger explain the fact that Sikhism flourished under the Mughal rule even though several Mughal Emperors tried to persecute the Sikh Gurus (Babur, Jehangir, Aurangzeb, Farrukh-Siyar etc.)? Or how would she explain why Shavism and Shakta Hinduism did not flourish under the Mughals? Is it because the Mughal persecuted Shaiva and Shakta Hindus, or is it because the growth of devotional traditions of Vaishnava Hindus had nothing much to do with the attitude of Moghuls towards them?

Therefore, to suggest that Vaishnavism flourished under 16<sup>th</sup> century Moghuls is misleading because it suggests some sort of a cause and effect relationship between Moghul patronage and the growth of Vaishnavism.

As a counter to Doniger's claim, it can be pointed out that none of these dozens of Vaishnava Saints of medieval India lived in the same space or time as the Moghuls (or were arguably outside of Moghul influence) – Mirabai, Namadeva, Jayadeva, Purandaradasa, Chaitanya, Bhadrachala Ramadas, Kanakadasa, Jnaneshwar, Narsi Mehta, Annamacharya, Jana Bai, Shankar Dev, Poontanam, Narayana Bhattadiri, Samartha Ramadas, Vallabhacharya, Prativadi Bhayankara, Eknath, Chandidas etc.

If all these Saints could have flourished outside of Mughal rule, then it is incorrect to attribute the growth of Vaishnavism during the Mughal rule to the Moghals.

Tulsidas was patronized by not Akbar, but by his devotedly Hindu noble Raja Man Singh. In his Dohavali, Tulsidas laments that in the Kaliyuga, the '*Yavans*' (a category that would have included Akbar)

have become the rulers of this earth. Surdas supposedly met Akbar but the Emperor is not conclusively known to have patronized the saint.<sup>441</sup> Some Hindu nobles and a few others patronized the Vrindavan Goswamis.

But, after the relatively peaceful interlude (for Hindus) of 100 years covering the reigns of Akbar, Jehangir and (portions of) Shah Jehan, it was back to square one for Hindus – destruction of temples, Jaziya (poll-tax on infidels), discrimination for administrative posts, forcible conversions etc. And even these three Emperors periodically oppressed the Hindus for religious reasons.

**Page 552, para 1:** *“Though the Mughals picked up some aspects of caste, by and large they ignored it....”*

**Comment:** Caste was apparently replaced in the Moghul rule by racism and religious discrimination!

Doniger should have also pointed out that a majority of nobility in the reign of the Great Moghuls comprised of non-Indian, imported Muslims from Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Arabia. Indeed, it was only for a brief period of seven years under the Sayyid brothers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that Indian Muslims were able to break the monopoly of Foreign Muslims in the top echelons of power.

And even amongst Indians, the Moghuls pretty much edged out Hindus. After recalling Man Singh from the governorship of Bengal, Jahangir did not appoint any Rajput as subedar. Shah Jahan appointed only two Rajputs as governors from a total of 152 such appointments made by him. A study of 172 appointments to the post of faujdars made by Shah Jahan reveals that the Rajput share was a paltry 4. Similarly, only 14 of 86 appointees to the post of qiladars examined by scholars, were

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<sup>441</sup> It is perhaps not out of place to mention that Saint Vallabhacharya, said to be the Guru of Surdas, was born prematurely when his mother (in a state of advanced pregnancy) was rushing out of Varanasi to flee an attack to the holy city of Hindus by Muslims, and was mistakenly abandoned as a still-born infant. A miracle from Lord Krishna is said to have saved the infant's life, telling the parents in a dream that He had Himself animated the infant's body that they should go back to the site where they had left the infant. The parents were overjoyed to discover that the child that they had lovingly abandoned as dead was alive.

Rajputs. The position of Rajputs declined further under Aurangzeb. In 1671 Jaswant Singh was appointed to the low post of thanedar of Jamrud, while Ram Singh of Amber was dispatched to the east. Both were made to languish in these outposts for considerable periods. Aurangzeb also began to clamp down on promotions of Rajputs early in his reign.<sup>442</sup>

**Page 552, para 2:** *“Tulsidas, who composed his poem at a pilgrimage center that had been attacked by Muslims, said that even the Muslims would be saved by Rama’s name (rather reminiscent of earlier claims that this or that pilgrimage spot would save even Pariahs).”*

**Comment:** A more apt comparison is the following verse of Bhagavata Purana which is line with the Hindu belief that the grace of Lord Vishnu can deliver even the greatest sinner on this earth –

“Hunas, Kiratas, Pulindas, Andhras, Aabhiras, Kanka, Yavanas, Khasas and other despised and sinful tribes become purified by merely seeking refuge with His devotees – to that Lord Vishnu I offer my respects.” **Bhagavata Purana 2.4.18**

The addition of Turushkas and other Mlecchas to this list was just a natural extension.

**Page 552, para 2:** *“The Brahmins of Varanasi, where this text [Ramcharitmanas] was composed...”*

**Comment:** The claim that the Ramacharitmanas was composed in Varanasi is contradicted by traditional Hindu as well as by modern scholarship (including the very Indological works cited by Doniger!).

According to Hindu tradition, Tulsidas initially started composing his work in Sanskrit verse in Varanasi, but the previous day’s compositions would disappear every night. Lord Shiva then recommended to the Saint that he should instead go to Ayodhya and compose the work there in the ‘people’s language’. Therefore, Tulsidas

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<sup>442</sup> See Firdos Anwar, *Nobility under the Mughals (1628-1658)* Manohar (New Delhi), 2001; and Afzal Husain, *The Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir. A study of Family Groups*, Manohar (New Delhi), 1999

went to live in Ayodhya and composed the work there in 2 years, 7 months and 26 days. Thereafter, he moved back to Varanasi.<sup>443</sup> Even Lutgendorf, whose work<sup>444</sup> is relied upon by Doniger, cites<sup>445</sup> the following verse of the Ramcaritmanas to support the tradition—

“On Tuesday, the ninth of the gentle month in the city of Avadh, these acts are revealed. Ramcaritmanas I.34.5”

Lutgendorf then speculates that as the Ramcaritmanas is a long work, Tulsidas must have taken several years to complete it and the invocation to Varanasi at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> book is taken to mean that Tulsidas had shifted his residence to Varanasi by then. He does not refer to Hindu tradition in this regard. [It may be noted that more than 2/3 of the Ramacharitmanas is contained in its first 3 of the 7 books].

**Page 552, para 3:** “Some Brahmins also objected to Tulsidas’ challenges to caste.”

**Comment:** Unfounded statement.

**Page 552-553:** ““Although by and large Tulsidas toes the Brahmin party line and upholds caste, there are also moments of compassion for Pariahs and tribals, such as this story about a Pariah, told, significantly, through the masking device of an animal [crow]..... This story [from Ramcharitmanas 7.53] stands in marked contrast with Rama’s treatment of a crow in Valmiki’s Ramayana in which he regards the crow as an enemy and blinds him.”

**Comment:** A false comparison and a false analysis and conclusion. The context here is that Doniger is trying to contrast Tulsidas’ empathy for low-caste Hindus with Valmiki’s supposed antipathy for them in order to push her thesis that under the Moghul rule “...some Hindus followed up their [Mughals’] lead and loosened up [in matters of caste].” (p. 552). In doing so, she has also grossly exaggerated the connection between saintly Tulsidas and the Moghul courts – “Tulsidas....one of the main architects of North Indian Vaishnavism, was close to several movers and shakers

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<sup>443</sup> This version is prefixed to numerous editions of the Ramacharitmanas, including those by the Geeta Press (Gorakhpur).

<sup>444</sup> Philip Lutgendorf (1991), *The Life of a Text – Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas*, University of California Press

<sup>445</sup> Ibid, p. 8

at the Mughal court, including Man Singh.” (p. 552) to perhaps suggest an influence of the Mughals on Tulsidas.

The Saint however never sought the company and patronage of Emperors (and never got it). In fact, Tulsidas characterizes the Moghul rule as the reign of ‘Yavans’ in Kaliyuga in his Dohavali. To attribute Tulsidas’ rejection or downplaying of caste to Mughal influence is quite disingenuous and ignores the role of pre-Moghul Hindu social reformers like Ramanujacharya (11-12<sup>th</sup> century) and Ramananda (14<sup>th</sup> cent.).

Doniger states that the crow is a representative of the untouchables, and Tulsi’s version of the story shows his compassion for these Hindus. When we examine the two stories however, it is clear that the two crows (one in Tulsi’s work and the other in Valmiki’s work) have nothing in common and are unrelated, despite Doniger’s failed attempts at Freudian free association. The crow referred to in Ramcharitmanas 7.53 is Kak Bhushundi, who is credited with the authorship of another Sanskrit version of the Ramayana (the Bhushundi Ramayana). The crow in Valmiki’s Ramayana was Jayanta, the son of Indra, who was blinded by Rama because the crow pecked at and injured Sita. It is simply incredible to see casteism in these stories the way Doniger does.

**Page 553, para 3:** Doniger then tries to portray Tulsidas as less misogynist than Valmiki by contrasting their treatment of Sita’s fire-ordeal episode – “[In Ramacharitmanas 3.23-24; 6.107-108] *Sita enters the fire at the ordeal and “both the shadow and form and the stigma of public shame” are consumed in the blazing fire. Thus the Vedantic concept of illusion allows Tulsidas to argue that Rama never intended or needed to test Sita (since he knew she wasn’t in Ravana’s house at all but goaded the shadow Sita into undertaking the fire ordeal merely in order to get her into the fire so that he could bring the real Sita back from the fire.*”

**Comment:** It would be relevant to bring in the concept of illusion if Tulsidas is accepted as a follower of Advaita Vedanta (or of similar schools) which he is not.

In fact, rather than bringing the concept of illusion in this context, Doniger could have fallen back on her favorite divine mare Saranyu who created her shadow Chhaya to live with her husband Surya!

A better explanation for this innovation in the retellings of this episode is that it strengthens the doctrine that the Divine couple Rama and Sita are perfect, omnipotent and omniscient. In both the verses, the



Ramcaritmanas uses the word *‘pratibimba’* (reflection or likeness) and not *‘Maya’* (illusion).

**Page 533, para 2:** *“The authors of the regional equine epics were either ignorant of the Puranic bias against mares (which is unlikely) or chose to ignore it in favor of an imported Arabic pre-mare tradition, a narrative pattern of considerable detail repeated in many different stories.”*

**Comment:** It appears more likely that the supposed Puranic bias against mares is merely a figment of the author’s imagination.

**Page 566-568:** Doniger devotes 2 pages to a discussion on the elite Muslim women in Mughal harems, and Muslim women in other dynasties.

**Comment:** What does this digression have to do with the history of Hindus? This is just one of the dozens of useless digressions in the book that unnecessarily and greatly increase its bulk.

**Page 571 onwards:** Section title: “Kshetravya’s Courtesans in Andhra”

**Comment:** Doniger herself states that he lived under the Nayaka rulers. Therefore, his inclusion in a chapter titled ‘Hinduism Under the Mughals’ is rather problematic. The section abounds in cute phrases (which do not mean much in essence), often taken from the writings of her close professional colleagues (David Shulman, Narayana Rao, A K Ramanujan). The one main reason this section was included (whereas dozens of other Saints were excluded) seems to be that it gives Doniger just another opportunity to talk about her favorite topics – rape, sex, adultery.

Her commentary on the one composition of his that she quotes is quite bizarre. In this hymn, the devotee (in the voice of a courtesan) has a violent sexual encounter with the lover (God). Doniger then claims that *“god has raped the worshipper,”* (p. 572) and then proceeds on another bout of Freudian free association. Doniger of course likes to use the word ‘rape’ wherever she can, because her book is all about sex, rape, sleaze, booze, drugs through her muses of ‘women, horses, dogs, low castes.’ What she conveniently forgets is that Kshetravya’s poems abound in such erotic imagery of passionate love of the courtesan and her lover. To suggest that the verse indicates the ‘rape’ of the worshipper by god is to overlook his poetry as a whole which abounds in metaphors, some of

which could even be interpreted by Doniger as an instance of “devotee raping god”.

## **Critique of Amitav Ghosh’s views on Mughal Patronage to Hinduism**

Amitav Ghosh’s views are found outline (at <http://www.littlemag.com/2000/amitav2.htm>) in the leftist magazine “The Little Magazine” and we quote them below in order to critique them—

*“In any event, it is beyond dispute that Babur’s descendants presided over a virtually unprecedented efflorescence in Hindu religious activity. Hinduism as we know it today - especially the Hinduism of north India - was essentially shaped under Mogul rule, often with the active participation and support of the rulers and their officials and feudatories. The Ramcharitmanas, for example, the version of the Ramayana that was to be canonised as the central text of north Indian devotional practice, was composed in Akbar’s reign by the great saint-poet Tulsidas. The early years of Mogul rule also coincided with a great renaissance in the theology of Krishna. It was in this period that Rupa Goswami and other disciples of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu rediscovered and mapped out the sacred geography of the Krishna legend.*

*Brajbhumi - the region that is most sacred to Krishna bhakti - lies between Agra and Delhi, the two principal centers of Mogul power in the 16th century. The road connecting these two imperial cities runs right past the sacred sites of Braj. It is self-evident that if the Moguls had wished to persecute Vaishnavites they could easily have done so. But far from suppressing the burgeoning activity in this area, Akbar and his nobles actively supported it. The Hindu generals and officials of his court built several of the most important temples in this area, with Akbar’s encouragement. Akbar was personally responsible for sustaining some of these temples: he granted land and revenue in perpetuity to no less than 35 of them.*

*Hinduism would scarcely be recognizable today if Vaishnavism had been actively suppressed in the 16th century: other devotional forms may have taken its place, but we cannot know what those would have been. It is a simple fact that contemporary Hinduism as a living practice would not be what it is if it were not for the devotional practices initiated under Mogul rule. The sad irony of*

*the assault on the Babri mosque is that the Hindu fanatics who attacked it destroyed a symbol of the very accommodations that made their own beliefs possible.”*

These views are problematic from several perspectives. Tulsidas was patronized not by Emperor Akbar (the saint does not even mention him, and instead refers to the rule of ‘yavan’ or barbarians in India in his Dohavali) but the devotedly religious Hindu noble Man Singh who worked for Akbar.

The same Man Singh, a trusted commander of Akbar, and a nephew of his wife now commonly known as Jodhabai, was responsible for patronizing the Goswamis of the spiritual lineage of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.

It is somewhat misleading to say that Rupa Goswami and other disciples of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu mapped out and rediscovered the sacred geography during the Moghul rule. First, this enterprise was the inspiration of Chaitanya, and the Moghuls had nothing to do with it. And chronologically speaking, Rupa Goswami lived in Vrindavan before Akbar’s patronage started, and he died before the grants of Akbar. The only Goswami out of the six who survived by the time the temples of Vrindavan were constructed was Jiva Goswami. Ghosh makes much of imperial grants to Vaishnava temples during the reign of Akbar, ignoring that these very temples were then demolished in dozens during the reigns of his successors like Aurangzeb barely in less than a 100 years after their construction. The temples of Vrindavan built by the inspiration of Rupa Goswami and other disciples of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were attacked and destroyed (partially or fully) by Aurangzeb and their sacred Icons were taken to Jaipur, Karoli and other safe sites in Rajasthan under Hindu Rajput control (see <http://www.mydivineplanet.com/city.asp?city=Vrindavana> ).

The reasons why Rupa Goswami etc went to Vrindavan were different from what Ghosh implies, who conceals the fact that they were fleeing Islamic religious persecution elsewhere. When Husain Shah, the ruler of Bengal, asked Sanatana to accompany him on the Orissa expedition, the latter refused saying “you are going to desecrate Hindu temples and break images of Hindu gods; I cannot accompany you”. The furious king thereupon imprisoned Sanatana who however managed to escape by bribing the prison guards. Both brothers (Sanatana and Rupa Goswami) thereafter renounced the world and went to Vrindaban, where

they wrote treatises on Gaudiya Vaishnavism. [See R. C. Majumdar, *History of Mediaeval Bengal*, G. Bharadwaj and Co. 1973].

It was not the lure of Akbar's grants but the inspiration of their Guru Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to reclaim Vrindavan from continued desolation, and religious persecution back home in Bengal that motivated them to make Brindavan their home.

Jehangir, the son of Akbar, destroyed the Varaha Vaishnava temple in Rajasthan, even while largely continuing the more tolerant policies of his father. But his son Shah Jehan revived the crippling pilgrimage tax on Hindu pilgrims visiting Vrindavan, Mathura, Ayodhya and other holy Vaishnava centers (and destroyed more than 80 temples in Varanasi) but rescinded it later. However, Aurangzeb reinstated this tax with a vengeance and ordered large scale destruction of temples in Mathura, Vrindavan, Ayodhya (and even in southern India). The hard fact is that hardly any temples preceding the 17<sup>th</sup> century survive today in the Hindu centers in Gangetic plains. The revival of Mathura and Varanasi as religious places of Hindus perhaps owes more to the Marathas than to the Moghuls preceding them.

To cite exceptional instances where Aurangzeb's Hindu nobles patronized a few Hindu temples and make much of them is like exonerating Hitler because he was a vegetarian and could not see animals suffer pain. In short, the flowering of some aspects of Vaishnavism during the rule of Mughals was not due to their patronage, but largely in spite of them and despite their periodic persecutions. The number of Hindu temples destroyed from 1500-1700 and replaced by mosques number in hundreds [See the online resource <http://www.voiceofdharma.org/books/htemples1/ch10.htm#4a> ].

The cause and effect relationship between Mughal rule and efflorescence of Hindu Vaishnavism that Amitav Ghosh suggests simply does not exist to any significant degree. Not only did dozens of Vaishnava saints thrive outside the regions and periods of the Mughal influence, it is an insult to the intelligence and vitality of Hindus to suggest that Moghul emperors were an impetus to the development of some lasting Hindu traditions that continue to this day.

## 21. Review of the Chapter 22, “*Suttee and Reform in the Twilight of the Raj 1800 – 1947*” by Vishal Agarwal

### General Comments: Stereotyping the Hindus

Doniger might have as well titled her book –‘*The Hindus, a Stereotypical History*’. With the exception of a few sections, the entire chapter deals with three or four topics – Caste, Untouchability, Cows and Sati. Even the reformist Hindu movements are discussed only within these paradigms. Hindus and their scriptures are projected as misogynist and violent.

Doniger has claimed at the beginning of her book that it is about women, low castes and animals. But it appears that Hindu women interest her in this chapter only when they commit ‘Suttee’ (note the colonial spelling). She has nothing to say about Hindu reformist movements that she cannot stereotype to indict Hinduism, like the organization founded by Narayana Guru to uplift the scheduled caste Hindus of Kerala.

Many a time, she seems to bear active animosity towards Hindus, trivializing their deaths, and exaggerating the role of individuals and groups that are critical of Hinduism in her opinion.

The entire period of 1800-1947 can hardly be considered as the ‘twilight of the Raj’ and so the title of the chapter is awkward. Elementary facts that can be verified easily are jumbled up. A few examples are given below.

**Page 616, para 2:** “.....based on a reading of both the main commentary on Manu (by Mitakshara) and Dayabhaga law (the Bengal marriage code).”

**Comment:** The Mitakshara is the name of a commentary by Vijnaneshvara on the Yajñavalkya Smṛiti, and not on the Manu Smṛiti. Moreover, the Dayabhaga law is not the ‘Bengal Marriage Code’ but a code of inheritance written by Jimutvahana that was applied as law by the British in Bengal.<sup>446</sup>

**Page 616, para 3:** “After Roy’s death in 1833, Debendranath Tagore became leader of the Brahmo Samaj....”

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<sup>446</sup><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/D%C4%81yabh%C4%81ga>

**Comment:** Misleading statement. Debendranath Tagore merged his Tattvabodhini Sabha with Ram Mohan Roy's Brahmo Sabha in 1843 (not in 1833, when he would have been just 16 years old!) to form the Brahmo Samaj.

**Page 619, Para 2:** “....Others before Rammohun Roy, including Akbar and Jabangir, had tried to curtail Suttee.....”

**Comment:** Doniger fails to mention that even before the Moghuls, several Dharmashastra commentators like Medhatithi (author of an old commentary on Manusmriti) criticized this practice.

**Page 622, para 4:** “Dayanand Sarasvati (1824-1883) was trained as a yogi but steadily lost faith in yoga.”

**Comment:** Swami Dayanand Sarasvati lost faith in Hathayoga practices but he remained an ardent practitioner of Patanjali's Ashtangayoga till the very end. In fact, his direct disciple Swami Lakshmanananda wrote the work 'Dhyana-Yoga-Prakasha' which is still in circulation within Arya Samaj circles.

**Page 623, para 2:** “The first agitation over cow slaughter in the Raj took place in a Sikh state of the Punjab...”

**Comment:** It is not clear what Doniger is trying to state here. Even before the Raj, Sikhs had agitated against cow slaughter in the Punjab and killed Muslims for slaughtering cows, as early as 1790s. The Namdhari Sikhs lead a violent revolt again partly for the same reason in 1869 and 1872. A decade later, Hindus in large parts of India, partly led by the Arya Samaj members, tried to get cow-slaughter banned by the British government.<sup>447</sup> For that matter, as early as the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a massive riot in Varanasi when Muslims slaughtered a cow and threw it into the Ganga.

Doniger's treatment of the entire issue is utterly confused and misleading. She almost restricts the role of the Arya Samaj within the contexts of the anti-cow slaughter movement.

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<sup>447</sup> Peter Bobb. The Challenge of Gau Mata – British Policy and Religious Change in India, 1880-1916. *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol 20, No. 2 (1986): 285-319

She completely ignores the facts that the Arya Samaj

1. Argued for the rights of women to study the Vedas and perform religious ceremonies.
2. Opposed child-marriage
3. Advocated education of women and opened colleges and schools for them
4. A section of the Arya Samaj after the death of the Swami advocated widow remarriage.

Perversely, she dwells on Hindu aversion towards cow-slaughter and uses this as an alibi to reiterate her thesis of 'violent Hindus and Muslim victims' on this page.

**Page 624, para 3:** "...*Indian Nationalists, under the banner of the Congress Party, succeeded, after decades of often violent Indian protests.....*"

**Comment:** It is extremely sinister and dishonest on the part of Doniger to characterize the Indian freedom struggle led by the Indian National Congress as 'often violent Indian protests.' If anything, the Indian independence movement was characterized by its non-violent character, especially after Mahatma Gandhi took charge. But Doniger is hell-bent on portraying Hindus as violent and over-sexed beasts in her book despite feigning love for Hinduism.

**Page 625, para 2:** "...*Gandhi.....developed the idea of what he called satyagraha --- "holding firmly on to truth..."*"

**Comment:** Doniger has wrongly split satyāgraha as 'satya + graha' whereas the correct way to split the compound is 'satya + āgraha'. Even Wikipedia webpages can clarify to her the correct way to split this word.<sup>448</sup>

**Page 627, para 2:** "...*the Vedic reverence for violence flowered in the slaughters that followed Partition.*"

**Comment:** Another attempt by Doniger to project the Hindus as over-sexed violent people. It defies my understanding as to how the Vedas can be called scriptures that 'reverence violence', and how the

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<sup>448</sup><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satyagraha>

partition violence (perpetrated by not just Hindus but even more so by the Sikhs and Muslims) can be linked to the Vedas.

Doniger's innuendo towards Hindus is in line with her earlier comment to a newspaper that the Bhagavad Gita is a dishonest book because it indulges in war-mongering.

**Page 633, para 4:** "...the 1980 Mandal Commission...reserved nearly half of all government and educational places for the underprivileged castes (whom they called the Scheduled Castes)..."

**Comment:** The Mandal Commission reserved jobs *not* for the Scheduled Castes but for a wholly different category called the 'Other Backward Castes' (OBCs).

**Page 633-634:** "*Some Brahmins burned themselves to death in protest over the Mandal recommendations.....*"

**Comment:** What proof does Doniger have that only Brahmins committed suicide to protest the Mandal Commission? In fact, the first student to have died was Surinder Singh Chauhan, whose name suggests that he could be a Rajput (but definitely not a Brahmana). Around 150 people self-immolated themselves in protest in 1990 but Doniger thinks that there were just 'some'. Perhaps Hindu lives are cheap for her.

**Page 634, para 1:** Doniger quotes Gary Tartakov approvingly – "*It was evil enough that such racializing degradation was claimed by caste Hindus; it was worse than that is what the members of the Schedule Castes and Tribes accepted themselves to be, **if they remained Hindus.***" (emphasis in the original).

**Comment:** From her approving quotation from Tartakov, and emphasis in the text, it is quite clear that Doniger wants all Harijans and Tribals to convert out of Hinduism to other faiths. So much for her understanding of and love for Hinduism! Unfortunately for her, 90% of the Harijans and Tribals are quite secure within their Hindu identity and return their faith as 'Hinduism' to the census officers decade after decade.

**Page 634-635:** "*In 1956 five million Dalits, led by Ambedkar, converted to Buddhism.*"



**Comment:** Incorrect. Not 5 million, but a little less than half a million (400,000) converted to Buddhism in 1956 led by Ambedkar.<sup>449</sup>

**Page 635, para 2:** “....2006....Dalits again began to convert in large numbers. As a result, the Hindu Nationalist Party reclassified Buddhism and Jainism as branches of the Hindu religion, to prevent the mass conversions of Dalits from eroding the political fabric.....”

**Comment:** Incorrect. The anti-conversion laws were meant to track the conversions from Dharmic traditions (Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism) to Abrahamic faiths and not from Hinduism to Buddhism!

Doniger has totally distorted this feature of the laws passed, and also seems to convey falsely that Dalits convert to Jainism (which they do not) or that the Buddhists and Jains were ‘reclassified’ as members of branches of the Hindu religion. In reality, the Article 25 of the Indian Constitution itself states that all references to ‘Hindu’ shall include members of the Sikh, Buddhist and Jain religions.

Doniger makes it appear that these laws to control conversion were passed only by ‘Hindu Nationalists’, whereas in reality, the Congress govt. of the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh also passed a similar law in the same year.

**Page 635, para 2:** “In separate rallies not connected to the conversion ceremonies, thousands of Dalits attempted to burn the new laws....”

**Comment:** Doniger seems to imply that Dalits as a whole were against the laws passed. In reality, there was only a murmur of protests. The most sustained protests in fact came from the Christian community for obvious reasons, which Doniger conceals from the readers of her book.

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<sup>449</sup><http://www.jaibhiminternational.org/thegreatmassconversion>

## 22. Review of the Chapter 23, “*Hindus in America 1900-*” by Vishal Agarwal

**General Comments:** In the entire book, there is practically no description of Hindus outside of India – In Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, East Africa, Singapore, Malaysia, Fiji, South Africa etc. There is really no meaningful discussion of how Hinduism influenced the cultures of many regions outside the Indian subcontinent in the last 2000 years. For a book that claims to side with women and the lower castes, one misses her views on the exploitative ways in which the colonial masters took several hundred thousand Hindus (and other Indians) to Trinidad, Surinam, Guyana and many other countries. There is nothing in the book on the recent immigration of Indians to Western European countries, or to Canada in the last more than 100 years.

Instead, Doniger focuses entirely on the Indian *American* minority. Even in their case, she omits to mention the discrimination that they had to endure for several decades before the immigration and other laws became more equitable. It would have been interesting to read her take on the fact how Indians were first classified as Caucasians and then as non-Caucasians in 1923 to prevent them from becoming naturalized citizens because only white immigrants could become naturalized US citizens according to a law from 1790. Or how the immigration act of 1924 effectively stopped immigration from non-European countries till 1965, when immigration reforms caused the miniscule 15000 member Indian community to swell to the current 2.5 million strong today.

Overall, the chapter is free of errors in contrast to other chapters, and makes an interesting reading. Here and there, one does get the impression that Doniger perhaps spends too much time on pornographic websites, from her frequent references to them. Missing in this chapter are more meaningful topics like the influence of Mahatma Gandhi on Martin Luther King; or the development of American *sampradayas* of Hinduism like the Shaiva Siddhanta Church.

Funnily, Doniger gives a very cursory treatment to Neo-Hindu movements in the last two centuries, and treats the Ramakrishna Mission in its chapter on Hindu Americans, of all the places. Missing in this chapter also are any substantial discussions on the influence of Ayurveda, belief in rebirth, Hindu values of pluralism etc., on the American mainstream. But then, many alternative publications are available that elaborate on these topics.

Despite the positive results of excavations in 2003 by archaeologists who were ordered to this task by the law courts in India, it is strange that Doniger still believes that no temple was demolished and replaced by a mosque at the Ramjanmabhoomi site (p. 645). The much awaited judgment of the Indian courts has now conclusively established in September 2010 that a temple indeed preceded the mosque, and that many of the so called historians and archaeologists who denied so and who are relied upon by Doniger were motivated more by political agendas rather than by historical facts.<sup>450</sup>

Not surprisingly, Doniger largely ignores the intense criticism that the scholarship of American Indologists like herself, Jeffrey Kripal and Paul Courtright has drawn from the Hindu American community. And in fact, wherever she does refer to books like *Invading the Sacred* (fn. on page 650) or articles like 'Wendy's Children' (fn on p. 652) that expose her faulty scholarship, she does not provide the complete bibliographic reference, making it a bit more tedious for the average American reader to track these publications. Now that does not appear very honest!

She also alleges somewhat inaccurately that Indian American scholars like Vasudha Narayanan and A K Ramanujan have been attacked by the followers of 'Hindutva'. The intent is to brand all critics of Wendy's brand of scholarship (or that of her friends) as 'Hindu Nationalists'. In this category of criticized (?) scholars, she also places the film-maker Meera Nair, who was in fact justifiably criticized for alleged plagiarism of her movie's story plot, and for projecting an obsessively negative image of Hindus in her films. And of course, she defends Romila Thapar, without revealing her Marxist credentials.

To cap it all, Doniger closes the chapter with a justification of why Americans and non-Hindus like herself should write on Hinduism because "*I believe that the wild misconceptions that most Americans have of Hinduism need to be countered precisely by making Americans aware of the richness and human depth of Hindu texts and practices, and an American interlocutor is often the best person to build that bridge.*" (p. 653).

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<sup>450</sup><http://www.telegraphindia.com/1101015/images/15edittop5.jpg>  
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/How-Allahabad-HC-exposed-experts-espousing-Masjid-cause/articleshow/6716643.cms>

Thanks but no thanks. With friends like Doniger, we Hindus need no enemies. Doniger's writings, including the present book, tend to portray the Hindus as a community of pervert, violence prone, over-sexed and misogynist individuals oppressing women, animals and lower castes. Her love for the Hindu heritage is like a 'bear-hug' to Hindus. After all, even MS Encarta found her entry on Hinduism as prejudiced and replaced it with a new article by Professor Arvind Sharma. And it is perhaps not without reason that a White Supremacist website lauds her.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>451</sup><http://www.stormfront.org/forum/showthread.php?t=690954>

## 23. Review of the Chapter 24, “*The Past in the Present*” by Vishal Agarwal

### General Comment: The Past in the Present, or the Present in the Past?

Unseasoned historians can indulge in many fallacies in their works. One of them is Presentism,<sup>452</sup> in which the present situation is back-projected in time to recreate historical events without actually focusing at the historical evidence. For example, looking at the current greatness of the United States, it would be Presentism to infer wrongly that the United States was also the most powerful nation in the past. Doniger’s book, and particularly this chapter, is a classic example of this type of flawed historiography. This chapter also lays bare her political agendas. Consequently, the comments on this chapter are also somewhat political in nature but that was really unavoidable.

Doniger is at pains to argue (in chapters 1 and 2) of the book that there was nothing called Hinduism in the past, and that it is a modern construct. However, the same Doniger then uses modern terms like ‘Dalit’ to back-project these identities into the past. But why does she do that? The simple answer is that it is politically incorrect to acknowledge the antiquity of Hinduism today, and politically correct to imagine a pan-Indian Dalit community that were always oppressed and suppressed by the upper caste. The irony of this type of chicanery becomes evident when we realize that Krishna (a Yadava) would have been an OBC (Shudra) and Shiva (a Kirāta) would have been a Scheduled Tribe member of the Hindu society. Unfortunately, in her pulp-history, Doniger does not show much acumen in understanding these nuances.

In the name of providing an ‘alternative account of Hinduism’, Doniger often focusses on the most rare and bizarre versions. This focus is not a reflection of her love for the Hindus, or the love for the oppressed. Rather, it reflects her prejudice against the Hindus. If a Hindu American were to be bombarded with sections of this chapter day after day by a WASP American colleague, the former would have a good case to go to the HR and file a complaint for harassment. But in Doniger’s paramparā, the ‘Cow-Caste-Sati-Curry’ (and now ‘Dalit- oppressed

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<sup>452</sup> David Hackett Fischer (1970), *Historians’ Fallacies*, Harper Perennial (New York), pp. 135 - 140

women – murdered Tribals’) paradigms are still the standard view of Hinduism. India is a country of 1.3 billion people. There will always be an outlier. To focus on the outliers obsessively and project it as the norm is not good scholarship. Similar outliers exist in the American society too. But, in the name of writing ‘An Alternative History of Americans’, it would be a travesty of scholarship if the author were to focus on cannibalism, polygamy, bombing of abortion clinics, incest with one’s mother etc. These instances are just what they are – aberrations. However, Doniger has a penchant for sleaze and sensationalism, and this book was just perfect for her to vent her repressed desires. There is considerable cut and paste in this chapter from Indian newspaper reports like “man marries a dog,” and so on. Yes, these things happen in India, but to what extent do they happen? Anyone can make a collage of items cut and paste from newspapers and books in this way. And an obsessive focus on them constitutes stereotyping, which is what Doniger indulges in with regard to the Hindus. With these general comments, let us look at a few problematic statements in her book.

**Page 655, para 1:** *“Women and Dalits gain new powers but are still in many cases shackled to ancient, repressive forms, just as Hinduism in the contemporary period simultaneously reaches out to a new inclusiveness and new possibilities of equality for those who were oppressed in the past, while Hindu nationalists grow in their power to oppose that very inclusiveness.”*

**Comment:** For all their pretensions about encouraging social and gender equality, the fact remains that the Leftist parties in India are heavily dominated by Brahmins, whereas it was the so called Hindu Nationalist Party, the BJP that was first to elect a Harijan as its chief. Interestingly, for all the pretensions of affirmative actions, in their own educational bastions like the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, leftist intellectuals oppose reservations for low-caste Hindus.<sup>453</sup>

Coming to historians (because that is what Doniger’s pretends to be in the book), one would expect that the proponents of Marxist historiography would be down-to-earth individuals from humble backgrounds, simple in their outlook, and austere in their lifestyle for all their professed ‘concern’ about the underprivileged sections of the Indian society. The truth is just the opposite. Most of them come from elite backgrounds, whereas, their hate-objects, the ‘Hindu Nationalist

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<sup>453</sup>“Donnish Hauteur?” by Anuradha Raman, in *Outlook India* (issue dt 25 January 2010), < <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?263782>>

historians' largely came from humble backgrounds. As archaeologist Dilip Chakrabarti remarks:

"It might also be worthwhile to mention here that the class background of the 'nationalist' historians was mostly humble, although most of them. Like R. C. Majumdar of Dhaka, rose to high position mainly by virtue of their individual efforts and brilliance. Majumdar in fact, records in his autobiography that in his childhood his mother had to go out on many occasions to 'borrow' rice from the neighbours. Naturally, Majumdar's perception of history of the land would be different from that of the scions of the powerful and established houses of post-Independence India and their hangers-on."<sup>454</sup>

**Page 657, para 3:** *"....members of the Hindu right have argued, in contradiction of abundant historical evidence to the contrary, that the ancient Indians never ate beef until the Muslims brought this custom to India; they have persecuted Hindus who have defended the historical record on this point"*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>D. N. Jha, the author of *The Myth of the Holy Cow*, which marshaled abundant proof that Hindus did eat beef in the ancient period, was so violently attacked, physically as well as in the press, that he had to have a police escort twenty-four hours a day for several years after his book was published in India.

**Comment:** The claim that D N Jha was attacked violently is a myth and is pure propaganda. The fact remains that he and all other Marxist historians who have spent their entire careers spewing venom at the Hindus are alive and well. In fact, it is Jha who alone with K M Shrimali resorted to shameless goondaism at an International Archaeological Congress in New Delhi where, to the horror of foreign participants, the two snatched microphones from Indian archaeologists and created chaos.

**Page 662, para 3:** *"Placing the Ramayana in its historical contexts demonstrates that it is a work of fiction, created by human authors who lived at various places,...."*

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<sup>454</sup> Dilip Chakrabarti (1997); *Colonial Indology – Sociopolitics of the Ancient Indian Past*; Munshiram Manoharlal (New Delhi); p. 13

**Comment:** Doniger gives very amateurish reasons for rejecting the historicity of the Ramayana, whereas competent archaeologists<sup>455</sup> and historians<sup>456</sup> have demonstrated that it has a solid historical core.

**Page 664, para 1:** “In 1989, as a response to the growing agitation over Ayodhya, a group of historians at the Center for Historical Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) released a pamphlet entitled *The Political Abuse of History: Babri-Masjid Rama-Janma-Bhumi Dispute*. The pamphlet marked the direct intervention of historians in the debate over Ayodhya and was eventually published as an edited volume.<sup>34</sup> The essays all argue that the case for a Rama temple under the mosque is based on myth rather than history.”

<sup>34</sup> Gopal (ed.), *Anatomy of a Confrontation*

**Comment:** Doniger conveniently ignores that all the political historians who authored the pamphlet were actually Marxists themselves abusing history for their political purposes. The most hard-hitting rebuttal of their pamphlet was actually by a Muslim historian A R Khan.<sup>457</sup>

Doniger refers to a book written by Marxists and Islamists on the so called non-existence of a temple underneath the mosque, but understandably ignores books written by other historians and, most importantly, by archaeologists<sup>458</sup> that disprove the non-temple theory.

The archaeologists repeatedly argued<sup>459</sup> that excavations are needed to find the truth, but these Marxist historians opposed these appeals for obvious reasons. On 6<sup>th</sup> December 1992, when the mosque

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<sup>455</sup> B B Lal (2007); *Rama – His Historicity, Mandir and Setu*, Aryan Books International (New Delhi)

<sup>456</sup> G P Singh (2008); *Historicity of Rama and Krsna – Literary, Historical, Archaeological and Scientific Perspectives*, D K Printworld (New Delhi)

<sup>457</sup> A R Khan, “In the Name of History”, *Indian Express*, issues dt. 25 Feb 1990 and 1 Apr 1990. Reproduced in pages 84-100 of Koenraad Elst (1991); *History versus Casuistry*, Voice of India (New Delhi)

<sup>458</sup> Harsh Narain (1993), *The Ayodhya Temple-Mosque Dispute, a Focus on Muslim Sources*, Penman Publishers (New Delhi)

E. Chandran (1990); *Bookhive’s Ram Janmabhoomi*, Cosmos Beehive (P) Ltd. (New Delhi)

Koenraad Elst (1991); *History versus Casuistry*, Voice of India (New Delhi)

<sup>459</sup> B B Lal, “Why Excavations are Necessary”, in *India Today*, issue dt. 24 March 2003



was demolished, numerous artefacts from a pre-existing temple that had been demolished before the construction of the mosque were indeed actually discovered, including a tell-tale inscription whose authenticity was established by competent archaeologists.<sup>460</sup> The Marxist historians tried their best to declare these artefacts as fake, but were answered by the scientifically minded archaeologists. Finally, as a part of the litigation, the courts ordered observations under a video camera. The archaeological report, authored by 4 Muslim, and 16 non-Muslim (the spade work itself was carried out by a mix of Hindu and Muslim laborers) proved that a temple did exist underneath the Mosque.<sup>461</sup> In their judgment in September 2010, the courts followed the professional advice of the archaeologists, much to the chagrin of the Marxist historians.

Interestingly, the courts also recorded the testimony of these Marxists. During the proceedings, the historians, under oath, admitted that much of their newspaper articles, pamphlets etc, were based on hearsay, and on blatant lies and propaganda! Many of the even admitted that they had not even visited the site in Ayodhya, although that did not prevent them from waxing eloquent on the 'saffronization of Indian archaeology'.<sup>462</sup> It is worthwhile reproducing some of this testimony to highlight the academic dishonesty and moral laxity of the historians supported by Doniger:

"To the court's astonishment, some who had written signed articles and issued pamphlets, found themselves withering under scrutiny and the judge said they were displaying an "ostrich-like attitude" to facts.

He also pointed out how the independent witnesses were all connected — one had done a PhD under the other, another had contributed an article to a book penned by a witness.

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<sup>460</sup> K V Ramesh, "Ayodhya Visnu-Hari Temple Inscription", in *Puratattva*, volume 33 (2002-2003), pages 98-103

<sup>461</sup> B R Mani and Hari Manji (with contributions from 18 others); 2003; *Ayodhya:2002-03, Excavations at the Disputed Site*, Archaeological Survey of India (New Delhi). For understandable reasons, the Govt. of India prevented the circulation of this work. However, the Library of Congress at Washington DC (USA) has a copy that I consulted in July 2004. Otherwise, the following more accessible summary (with color photographs of the artefacts unearthed during this supervised excavation) may be consulted: A K Sharma (2011); *Ayodhya Case: Archaeological Evidences*; B R Publishing Corporation (Delhi)

<sup>462</sup> R Vaidyanathan, "Babri demolition: How HC verdict discredited 'eminent' historians", First Post India, issue dated 6<sup>th</sup> December 2012. Available online at <http://www.firstpost.com/india/babri-demolition-how-hc-verdict-discredited-eminent-historians-547549.html> <checked on 11th March 2014>

Some instances underlined by the judge are: Suvira Jaiswal deposed "whatever knowledge I gained with respect to disputed site is based on newspaper reports or what others told" (other experts). She said she prepared a report on the Babri dispute "after reading newspaper reports and on basis of discussions with medieval history expert in my department." Supriya Verma, another expert who challenged the ASI excavations, had not read the ground penetration radar survey report that led the court to order an excavation. She did her PhD under another expert Shireen F Ratnagar.

Verma and Jaya Menon alleged that pillar bases at the excavated site had been planted but HC found they were not present at the time the actual excavation took place.

Archaeologist Shireen F Ratnagar has written the "introduction" to the book of another expert who deposed, Professor Mandal. She admitted she had no field experience.

"Normally, courts do not make adverse comments on the deposition of a witness and suffice it to consider whether it is credible or not, but we find it difficult to resist ourselves in this particular case considering the sensitivity and nature of dispute and also the reckless and irresponsible kind of statements..." the judge has noted.

He said opinions had been offered without making a proper investigation, research or study in the subject. The judge said he was "startled and puzzled" by contradictory statements. When expert witness Suraj Bhan deposed on the Babri mosque, the weight of his evidence was contradicted by another expert for Muslim parties, Shirin Musavi, who told the court that Bhan "is an archaeologist and not an expert on medieval history".<sup>463</sup>

It goes to the credit of Indian judiciary that went strictly by evidence and declared that a temple indeed had stood underneath the mosque. If only Doniger's JNU 'historians' had been truthful from the beginning, 100s of innocent lives in India would have been saved. Today, except for these hardcore Marxists, no scholar of Indian studies worth his salt defends the lies of these Marxist (like Romila Thapar, R S Sharma, Shireen Ratnagar, Suvira Jaiswal, Supriya Verma, Suraj Bhan, Irfan Habib etc.). Perhaps, Doniger still does.

**Page 664, para 2:** *"As the historian William Dalrymple put it, "One after another, as if they were symbols of India's traditions of tolerance, democracy and secularism, the three domes were smashed to rubble."*

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<sup>463</sup> "How Allahabad HC exposed "experts' espousing Masjid cause", by Abhinav Garg, in *The Times of India*, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2010. Available online at <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/How-Allahabad-HC-exposed-experts-espousing-Masjid-cause/articleshow/6716643.cms><checked on 11th March 2014>

**Comment:** It defies explanation as to what was so special about the destruction of Babri mosque when there are thousands of historical mosques in India falling to ruins,<sup>464</sup> or when dozens of temples were demolished or vandalized earlier in Kashmir during the height of Islamist insurgency. Were these other acts of inter-religious violence not detrimental to India's traditions of tolerance, democracy and secularism? Surely, these values cannot be thrust on the Hindus alone.

**Page 665-666:** Doniger then touches upon the controversy over the Ramsetu which the Congress-I led Indian Govt. wanted to dredge through ostensibly for reducing shipping times around the southern coast of India. She cites an archaeological report that the Congress govt. produced in court, claiming that the bridge did not exist and was mythical. Then she cites the Marxist historian Romila Thapar's statement that in the centuries BC, it was technical infeasible to construct the bridge. The entire section of Doniger's book is a continuation of her thesis that since the Ramayana is fiction, the bridge must also be mythical.

**Comment:** Doniger of course quotes her sources selectively. First, she does not point out that the Congress party was dependent upon the support of the Rama hating Dravidianist parties who sometimes threatened to withdraw their support to the government if the dredging through the bridge was stopped.

Doniger also does not refer to the subsequent report from the archaeological survey of India that clarifies that they had never done any

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<sup>464</sup>As archaeologist Dilip Chakrabarti remarks: "A controversy certainly erupted about the presence or absence of a Hindu temple below the level of the mosque at the site in Ayodhya. Those historians and archaeologists who were unwilling to let go this opportunity to add to their 'secular and progressive' image used the occasion fully to harangue us on how to interpret archaeological remains. The fact that the same set of historians and archaeologists have, to our knowledge, been always silent about, or ignorant of, the destruction of hundreds of archaeological sites and monuments all over the country only adds to the piquancy to the whole issue. That the same bunch of 'mainstream historians', some of whom were reputedly inducted in the Indian committee for the organization of the World Archaeological Congress-3, stood in the way of developing science-based archaeological research in the universities they serve (or served) makes any attempt on their part to speak of archaeology downright sordid and sleazy." In *Colonial Indology – Sociopolitics of Ancient Indian Past* (1997), Munshiram Manoharlal (New Delhi); pp. 21-22

excavation to establish whether the bridge had existed or not. Quite clearly, the so called archaeological report appended by the Congress Govt. in its submission to the Supreme Court of India was politically motivated.<sup>465</sup>

And Thapar has pursued her agenda of spreading hatred against the Hindus for decades, and has not spared even school textbooks meant for little kids. Doniger and Thapar are tied together in a marriage of convenience, predicated upon a shared hatred against the Hindus. There is plenty of evidence from literature, archaeology and other sciences to suggest that the existence of the Rama Setu is not a myth.<sup>466</sup>

**Page 667, para 3:** Doniger then refers to Tamil Separatist versions of the Ramayana in which the Aryan Rama defeated the Dravidianist Ravana.

**Comment:** Doniger makes it appear that the Dravidian verses Aryan dichotomy has always been a prominent feature of the Indian culture. The fact of the matter is that this divide was practically unknown (and used mainly to distinguish between the 5 communities of Gauda Brahmins from the five communities of Dravida Brahmins) till the colonial and racist historians advocated and promoted it. Koenraad Elst remarks:

“Until the mid-19th century, no Indian had ever heard of the notion that his ancestors could be Aryan invaders from Central Asia who had destroyed the native civilization and enslaved the native population. Neither had South-Indians ever dreamt that they were the rightful owners of the whole subcontinent, dispossessed by the Aryan invaders who had chased them from North India, turning it into *Aryavarta*, the land of the Aryans. Nor had the low-caste people heard that they were the original inhabitants of India, subdued by the Aryans and forced into the prisonhouse of caste which the conquerors imposed upon them as an early form of Apartheid. All these ideas had to be imported by European scholars and missionaries, who thought through the implications of the *Aryan Invasion Theory* (AM, the theory that the Indo-European (IE) language

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<sup>465</sup> For a brief review of political and other aspects of the Ramsetu controversy, refer to: Subramanian Swami (2008), *Rama Setu – Symbol of National Unity*, Har-Anand Publications (New Delhi)

<sup>466</sup> B B Lal (2007), *Rama – His Historicity, Mandir and Setu*, Aryan Books International (New Delhi)

family had spread out from a given homeland, probably in Eastern Europe, and found a place in Western and Southern Europe and in India as cultural luggage of horse-borne invaders who subjugated the natives.”<sup>467</sup>

**Page 668, para 3:** “*Amar Chitra Katha comic books have flooded the market with bowdlerized versions of many of the great Hindu classics, in a kind of Gresham’s law (bad money driving out good) that is not Darwinian at all but merely Adam Smithian, or Capitalist.*”

**Comment:** Hindu haters like Doniger and Thapar hate the Amar Chitra Katha because these comic books have done more to spread the knowledge of Indian history and Hinduism than the works of all these scholars put together. The comic books have instilled a sense of pride in their heritage in the minds of Indian children. For that very reason, there is almost a cottage industry of run-of-the-mill ‘scholars’ writing entire books arguing how misogynist, ‘anti-Muslim’, ‘Upper-Hindu caste biased’ these comic books are. Why don’t Doniger and her ilk not produce a parallel comic series that is not X-rated? In fact, looking at the propagandizing and sloppy errors in their hundreds in Doniger’s book(s), we are lucky to have better histories in the Amar Chitra Katha.

**Page 669, para 1:** The Internet has democratized the proliferation of information and knowledge. But elitist, exclusionist, segregationist ivory-tower academics like Doniger see it as a threat. And of course, she has to rally against the Hindus on the net: “*The Internet too has facilitated the mass circulation of stories that substitute for the storyteller’s art the power of mass identity politics.....A self-selecting but vociferous group of disaffected Hindus have used this Indian ether to communicate with one another within what is perceived as a community. This accounts in large part for the proliferation of these groups and for the magnitude of the reaction to any incident, within just a few hours; it’s more fun than video games, and a lot more dangerous too....It is this tendency to tune out all other messages that characterizes the blog mentality of the Hindu right.*”

**Comment:** Ironically, the same elitist scholars, who much like champagne socialists, talk about social rights and free speech are the ones that work against these when their own privileges seem threatened. Take

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<sup>467</sup> See <http://voiceofdharma.org/books/ait/ch11.htm> <checked on 11th March 2014>

for example Doniger's supporter and colleague Martha Nussbaum. She has argued that anonymous posts should be banned on the internet.<sup>468</sup>

Doniger's other supporter, the Marxist historian Romila Thapar has made similar comments in the past that seem laughable today and are the product of an autocratic and a paranoid mind. The aversion that Left of the center intellectuals have for free market, and unregulated media is often reflected in Thapar's remarks in the article. For instance, she says—

“In theory, if Internet and information technology are not controlled by the state then those with access to them will claim to be free of the fear of becoming closed minds. They will be however, only a fraction of the population. Will the kind of knowledge pursued by this fraction ensure a society committed to the freedom of the individual and humanist values? Technological proficiency by itself is no a sufficient safeguard against the increasing tendency in India to be comfortable with the soft underbelly of fascism and not recognize it for what it is...”<sup>469</sup>

In another publication 10 years earlier, Thapar also noted with disdain that Indian scholars in the west use ‘the computer’ to facilitate their research!

Doniger blames the Hindus of tuning out ‘all other messages’, but in fact, she is the one who has refused to respond to criticisms of her book, even though she has been made aware of them multiple times. Her refusal to engage with the ‘objects’ her study reflects her arrogance, and inability to treat the Hindus as equals. Little wonder then that she is treated as a hero on a white-supremacist website.<sup>470</sup>

**Page 670-671:** Doniger then refers to the controversy over A K Ramanujan's essay “Three Hundred Ramayanas” as prescribed reading material at the Delhi University. She projects the protestors as Hindu right wingers, and quotes their objections to inclusion of divergent versions like those of Santhals.

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<sup>468</sup> See Arvind Kumar, “*Matha Nussbaum's Doublespeak*”, March 01, 2014 in India Facts. Available online at <http://www.indiafacts.co.in/author/arvind-kumar/#sthash.aQ30As5f.dpbs> <checked on 11 March 2014>

<sup>469</sup> Romila Thapar (2000); *India, Another Millenium?* Viking: New Delhi; pp. xxvii-xxviii

<sup>470</sup> <http://www.stormfront.org/forum/t690954/> <checked on 11th March 2014>

**Comment:** The question is not why the Hindus protested against the prescription of this article by university students. The question is why, of the hundreds of alternatives available, this piece was selected for prescribed reading in a class on literature! There are political agendas behind this. Aditi Banerjee demonstrates<sup>471</sup> how Doniger's support for A K Ramanujan betrays her larger narrative about Hinduism:

[QUOTE]The story Doniger wants to tell about the *Ramayana* fits into her larger narrative about the character of Hinduism. Her overarching narrative is captured in her statement: "That's why Hinduism is such a wonderful religion. It's because people are allowed to have their own texts ... there was no one who said there was only one way to tell the Ramayana ... And no one would say that you got it wrong."

Of course, there is great diversity in Hinduism—after all, over three hundred versions of the *Ramayana* co-exist peaceably within the pantheon of Hindu literature. There are no unnecessary battles about which version is the *definitive* version—Hinduism does not subscribe to the notion of One Book or One Prophet, which is the predominant characteristic of the Semitic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

It is misleading to say, in a scholarly context, that just because multiple versions of a story exist, "no one [can] say that you got it wrong." For, there is a significant difference between creating a new version of a story—e.g., Tulsi Das retelling the Ramayana in his Sri Ramacharitamansa, which does not purport to be the "original" or "corrected" version of the Valmiki Ramayana—and offering an academic explanation or interpretation of an existing story (the Valmiki Ramayana) that takes liberties with and/or misquotes the text. It is the difference between artistic interpretation and scholarly rigour. For a scholar, it is not sufficient to demonstrate that a constructed narrative or story is possible by stringing together disparate phrases and passages; rather, a scholar must show why her preferred version is more persuasive than other versions—why it is a more coherent narrative or a more insightful explanation. This is particularly important when the scholar's preferred version sharply diverges from the canonical traditions of interpretation. This is not fundamentalism—this is what it means to be a scholar!

The diversity within Hinduism and Hindu society is one of its greatest strengths, but the danger of saying that there is no *one* Hindu identity is concluding that therefore there isn't *any* Hindu identity. Diversity should not be falsely treated as a lack of unity; to the contrary, *e pluribus unum* (from many, one). Actually, in the Hindu framework, it would be from one, many—c.f., *Bhagavad Gita* (15:1): "There is a banyan tree which has its roots upward and its branches down and whose leaves are the Vedic hymns. One who knows this tree is the knower of the Vedas." In other words, from One Truth flower many expressions of that same truth, from one root of *dharma*

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<sup>471</sup> Aditi Banerjee, "Oh, But you Do Get it Wrong," at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262511> <checked on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2014>

flower the *hymns*, traditions, philosophical doctrines and sacred lore that comprise the tree of Hinduism. Or, to give a musical analogy, within one scale or *raaga*, many variations may be improvised.

In concrete fact, unity underlies every instance of diversity in Hinduism over the cons—that is why, for example, Adi Shankara Bhagavadpada, spiritual titan and amongst the greatest intellects of the world established the four seats of his monastic order on the four corners of India—Jyotirmath / Badrinath in the North, Puri in the East, Dwaraka in the West and Sringeri in the South—he also installed Namboodris from the deep south of Kerala as officiating priests in the Himalayan temple of Badrinath (a practice that continues to this day).

In closing, there does exist an easily recognizable non-fundamentalist Hindu identity, built upon a body of history, sacred texts and philosophical and ritualistic traditions that span several thousands of years. This Hindu identity is diverse and multidimensional but also internally consistent—a consistent scale, as it were, upon which millions of Hindus improvise their own variations.

[UNQUOTE]

**Page 672-676:** Doniger then focusses on some ‘Dalit’ retellings of the Mahabharata including the episodes where Karna abused Draupadi, the Ekalavya episode, and the burning of the Lac palace in which 6 Nishadas were burnt alive. All these retellings are used to create the impression of a widespread Dalit identity that rejects the standard narratives of the Hindu epics.

**Comment:** Here and elsewhere, Doniger would make us believe that the Dalit identity is pan-Indian and that it has existed in the past as well.

Smita Nirula’s “*Broken People*” (1999) published by Human Rights Watch group based in New York says that the word is used by activists of the community (see the glossary section of the book).

Robert Deliege. “*The Untouchables of India*”. Berg (1999), on page *x* says that most of these Dalit activists do not represent the vast majority of Hindu untouchables, and many such movements actually have non Hindu roots. The word is merely a politically correct, but a very inaccurate term.<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> “As a matter of fact, it (i.e., the term dalit) is gaining ground as some sort of politically correct way to refer to untouchables....Yet the people whom I worked with in Tamil Nadu used the term ‘Harijan’ as indeed do many other untouchable groups....I fear there is today a tendency, which to my mind is also a danger, to



Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany. *"The Untouchables"*. Cambridge University Press (1998), on p. 4 says that most members of the community still do not use it to refer to themselves, and it is a very politically loaded word with militant overtones. Untouchables in the Gangetic plains do not use it to refer to themselves in particular.

Likewise, other books reveal that the word Dalit was first popularized (not used) as a proper noun to denote the untouchable community by the militant Dalit Panther's Party (modeled after the Black Panthers) as recently as 1970's, for instance Joshi, B., *Untouchables! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, Zed, MRG, London (1986), pp. 141-147.

Another paper shows that the Scheduled Caste members themselves prefer to use the term 'Harijan' in lieu of 'Dalit'.<sup>473</sup> A recent work has the following interesting comments about the Dalit ideology that is being promoted by the likes of Doniger:

"The Dalit ideology is one of confrontation, if not of hatred. To what it will lead is still dubious: if it succeeds in spreading its influence to larger sections of the population, it might exacerbate violence. There is however a chance that it will die out as people are more concerned with

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see the problem only through the eyes of *dalit* organizations. The temptation is great to focus on the latter, who are highly concentrated in urban areas and are led mainly by radical intellectuals who speak some English. To be sure, *dalit* activism is a respectable topic of research; yet one should not forget the millions, indeed the vast majority, who live in the villages. The representivity of *dalit* organizations is far from obvious to me and I wonder whether they always represent the interests of the people. I also have reservations about those who claim to monopolize the right to speak on behalf of the untouchables. On the whole, *dalit* organizations are an interesting development in the history of untouchability. Yet what they say and write is sometimes closer to myth than to history, and deserves to be considered as such: that is to say as a recent political and limited expression of a struggle, not as any kind of final truth. Many of these groups merely represent their own members; and, in any case, the differences between the various groups are as deep as they are numerous, from some brand of Marxism to the worst type of old-fashioned casteism. I must say that I could find little of the *dalit* ideology and strategy among the villagers with whom I lived...."

<sup>473</sup> "Dalit or Harijan?" by Alan Marriott in *Economic and Political Weekly*, issue dt 6<sup>th</sup> September 2003. Online at <http://www.epw.org.in/showArticles.php?root=2003&leaf=09&filename=6229&filetype=html>

bread-and-butter matters. The Untouchables know perfectly well that they belong to Indian society, that they have no culture of their own and that they share most of the values of the people among whom they live. Most of them know that Untouchability is a problem of the past and that their future lies in a better integration within society. Meanwhile, the current militantism of a tiny elite is worrying, as it tries to influence vulnerable, poor, illiterate and sometimes frustrated people. What is, for instance, the meaning of being converted to Buddhism apart from trying to insult the Hindus?"<sup>474</sup>

Detailed studies of anthropology of Indians demonstrate that both the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes overwhelmingly declare their religion as Hindu.<sup>475</sup>

**Page 678, para 2:** *"In 1914, a tax officer near Varanasi named Hariaudh published a long poem entitled "Sojourn of the Beloved" (Priyapravasa)..."*

**Comment:** Hariaudh (the pen name of the legendary Hindi poet Ayodhya Singh Upadhyay) is introduced merely as a 'tax collector' whereas he was a Middle School headmaster as well as a professor at the Benares Hindu University. Hariaudh wrote the very first epic in the Khari Boli dialect of Hindi. Doniger's reference to him is most insulting.

**Page 678-679:** Doniger gives the gist of Jyotiba Phule's interpretation of the Dashavatara: "...he [Phule] radically reinterpreted Puranic mythology, seeing the various Avatars of Vishnu as stages in the deception and conquest of India by the invading Aryans, and Vishnu's antigod and ogre enemies as the heroes of the people.....To this day many Maharashtrian farmers look forward not to Ram Rajya (they regard Rama as a villain) but to the kingdom of Bali..." Doniger cites works of Gail Omvedt in this regard.

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<sup>474</sup> Robert Deliege, "Is There Still Untouchability in India?", in Mikael Aktor and Robert Deliege (eds.), *From Stigma to Assertion - Untouchability, Identity and Politics in Early and Modern India* (2010); Museum Tusculanum Press, University of Copenhagen (Copenhagen, Denmark): pp. 13-30

<sup>475</sup> See K S Singh, *"The Scheduled Castes,"* Anthropological Survey of India, Oxford University Press (New Delhi): 1995.

This monumental work demonstrates the fact that more than 80% of SCs report their faith as Hinduism in decadal populations censuses, and that their religious practices are Hindu. Another companion volume on Scheduled Tribes by the same author also demonstrates that 90% of the Scheduled Tribe members are also Hindu by faith.

**Comment:** Again, Doniger fails to point out that Phule had merely interiorized colonial ideas and that these were not traditional beliefs in the Hindu society. Elst points out:

“One of the first natives to interiorize these ideas was Jotirao Phule, India’s first modern Mahatma, a convent-educated low-caste leader from Maharashtra. In 1873, he set the tone for the political appropriation of the AIT: Recent researches have shown beyond a shadow of doubt that the Brahmins were not the Aborigines of India. Aryans came to India not as simple emigrants with peaceful intentions of colonization, but as conquerors. They appear to have been a race imbued with very high notions of self, extremely cunning, arrogant and bigoted.”<sup>476</sup>

**Page 679, para 3:** “*Vinay Lal’s delightful short book on Hinduism identifies President George W Bush as the contemporary form of Kalki....*” The book referred to is “*Introducing Hinduism*”.

**Comment:** Doniger finds Lal’s book delightful, without mentioning that he is a hardcore communist.<sup>477</sup> His book has been criticized<sup>478</sup> by me in detail for giving a false and a hateful view of Hinduism. The short ‘delightful’ book is also full of errors and political propaganda.

**Page 680, para 1:** “*Today, horses are worshipped all over India by people who do not have horses and seldom ever see a horse, in places where the horse has never been truly a part of the land.*”

**Comment:** Horses are not worshipped all over India. Perhaps, as a former rider of Arabian horses, Doniger became a bit over-enthusiastic. Horse terracotta figurines are made in parts of India outside temples and elsewhere and rarely worshipped.

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<sup>476</sup> See <http://voiceofdharma.org/books/ait/ch11.htm><checked on 11th March 2014>

<sup>477</sup> See “The Forum of Intentional Liars”, ‘Vinay Lal’ at <http://thetruthaboutliars.wordpress.com/chapter-1-background-2/section-1-01a-spotlight-on-prominent-foil-members-and-their-affiliates/vinay-lal/><checked on 11th March 2014>

<sup>478</sup> “*Hating Hindus as a Fun Activity*” by Vishal Agarwal, downloadable from <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/24334881/Review-of-Vinay-Lals-Introducing-Hinduism><checked on 11th March 2014>

## 24. Review of the Chapter 25, “*Inconclusion or the Abuse of History*” by Vishal Agarwal

**General Comments: The Lies that our ‘History Teacher’ Wendy Doniger Told Us** – The chapter is titled very aptly indeed. Throughout the book, Wendy Doniger has herself (sexually) abused the history of Hindus, and has depicted them as misogynist, oppressive and over-sexed perverts. And then she ends the book with a very amateurish 3 page chapter that has the rigor of an undergraduate student’s mid-term paper.

She starts with two statements – one by Golwalkar (an RSS leader and luminary) and the other by Mahatma Gandhi. The intent is to insinuate that anyone who critiques the sexualized and distorted version of the history of Hindus belongs to the camp of the hated Hindu Nationalists and anyone who appreciates her version of history belongs to the camp of Mahatma Gandhi. And lest someone accuse her of bigotry and hatemongering, she tries to hide behind the egg that supposedly missed her, and plays victim.

‘Egged’ on by her perverse view of Hinduism, even at the end of her book, she does not stop attacking the people who might not agree with her. She creates a false equation of Hindu Nationalists with Islamists – a notion fashionable with some of her other colleagues like Martha Nussbaum, who even blamed the Hindus for the slaughter of 165 Indians by Pakistani Jihadis on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2008 in Mumbai!

**Page 688, para 2:** “*Agni, the name of the Vedic god of fire, is also the name of one of India’s most powerful nuclear missiles. Pakistan named its missile Ghorid, after Muhammad of Ghor. Why should the two warring South Asian nations reach back into Vedic and eleventh century history to name their nuclear warheads? What is the relevance of history to religious intolerance?*”

**Comment:** It is Doniger who has joined hands with Pakistani Islamists (or to put it in a Donigeresque way, ‘she is in bed with Islamists’) to abuse history here.

The Indian missiles were named not after Vedic Deities, but after the elements – Agni (Fire), Akash (Ether), Prithvi (Earth) keeping in mind their special features.<sup>479</sup>

Right after India developed the Prithvi missiles, Pakistan responded by launching the Ghauri (not ‘Ghorid’ as Doniger mis-names them) and Ghaznavi missiles. The perpetually brain fevered Islamists of Pakistan imagined that India had named its missiles after the King Prithvi Raj Chauhan who fought and lost to Mohammad Ghauri – the Afghan invader. Therefore, to ‘tease’ India, they named their missiles after these fanatically Muslim Afghan rulers who had ravaged and raped the Hindu ancestors of modern Muslim Pakistanis, but are considered as heroes today in converted Pakistan!

In short, the joke is really on these Islamists of Pakistan, and their apologists like Wendy Doniger for imagining things that do not exist (viz. seeing the Hindu king’s name in a missile’s name). Or, Doniger is seeing both the rabbit and the man in ether.

**Page 690, para 1:** “...we must curb our optimism by recalling the violence embedded in many forms of bhakti, and by noting that it was in the name of bhakti to Ram that the militant Hindu nationalists tore down the Babri Mosque.”

**Comment:** Almost as a knee-jerk reaction, Doniger must balance any praise of Hindus with a negative equalizer. Five times in her book, and in totally irrelevant contexts (e.g., while discussing the Vedic period) she says that Muslim bigots ‘recycled’ materials to create mosques out of demolished temples, and projects this act of bigotry as some sort of religious syncretism! And yet when Hindus demolish a mosque constructed over a revered Hindu shrine by an invader, she condemns the Hindus! In her world, we Hindus are damned if we do it, and damned if we do not.

**Page 690, para 2:** Writing about the cover painting of her book, Doniger muses – “It is an example of the contribution of a foreign culture to India with the Mughals, and an example of the intersection of court and village, as the image traveled from the Mughal court in Delhi to a village in the state of Orissa, the

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<sup>479</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_missiles\\_by\\_country#India\\_.28Asia.29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_missiles_by_country#India_.28Asia.29) and “How Missiles Get their Names” in *The Times of India* (dt 20 January 2008) at [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2008-06-20/india/27765781\\_1\\_missile-akash-names](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2008-06-20/india/27765781_1_missile-akash-names)

*source of this contemporary example.”* Elsewhere in the book (page 692), she thanks Katherine Ulrich for procuring the picture for her book from the Orissan village.

**Comment:** The claim about the Orissan origins of the cover picture appears bogus. In a legal notice sent to Penguin Publishers India Ltd. by the ‘Shiksha Bachao Andolan,’ it is revealed –

QUOTE

*“...my client has got the following information from Santiarts- a Computer Graphics Company which is cited as the source for the jacket painting of your book. That this painting is not from Puri, Orissa as is falsely claimed by your book.*

*Raasa Leela*

*Serigraphed in 13 Colours*

*Size 29” x 21”*

*Code: APP 251 (included in the attached catalog received from santiarts.com).*

*That this is a painting horizontally flipped and used on the book jacket by YOU*

*NOTICEE.*

*That the Publishers through the author seem to have acquired the serigraph without verifying the source.*

*That my client states that if the above said is true, then YOU NOTICEE and the Publisher i.e. Penguin Group have used a plagiarized version, selectively chosen, chosen with deliberate intent”*

In other words, Wendy waxes eloquent on an image that is not from the village in Orissa according to the source that provided it!

## 25. Review of the Book's Bibliography by Vishal Agarwal

The bibliography is prepared very carelessly. Some texts or editions cited do not exist. For example: "Kaushitaki Brahmana. 3 vols. Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1903" is an incorrect reference.

Several other citations have serious spelling errors. For example: "Purva-mimamsa-sutra. Jaiminiya-mimamsa-bhashyam of Shabaraswamin. Hirayana: Ramlal Kapar, 1986." The correct place of publication is 'Sonapat, Haryana' (not 'Hirayana'), and the publisher's correct name is 'Ramlal Kapoor Trust'. This work came out in several volumes printed over several years whereas Doniger just lists the year of publication as '1986'.

Many journal article references are incorrect. For instance, "Shekhawat, V. "Origin and Structure of purushartha Theory: An attempt at Critical Appraisal." *Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research* 7:1 (1900), 63-67." The correct issue and year of this journal issue are actually 8:2 and 1991.

The format of the bibliography is also inconsistent, to the point of being annoying. Some works have their editor's name listed, but others do not. No distinction is made between publication years that are per the Gregorian calendar versus those in Indian calendars. For example, Doniger gives the year of publication of a work published in Shaka Samvat 1860 as simply '1860' even though the two calendars are offset from each other.

A perusal of the sources relied upon by Doniger for the chapters of her book are an interesting study in their own way and explain why certain errors and biases pervade her work. More comments on this aspect should be seen under respective chapter reviews.





## **Afterword: Hating the Hindus in a Scholarly Way?** By Vishal Agarwal

A safe way to bullet-proof your book from criticism is to claim that you are ‘representing the perspectives of oppressed classes, women and so on’; that you are ‘giving a voice to their contributions’; that your work ‘highlights the diversity inherent in your subject that is typically ignored’ and so on. Unfortunately, there are very few sections or chapters where Doniger has actually stayed true to this claimed professed goal. Instead, the book appears to be woven around the following non-academic agendas:

1. Demean the Hindu woman by projecting her as an over-sexed debauched human being who has not made any significant contribution to the Hindu traditions.
2. Portray to the West the ‘upper-caste’ Hindu male as the ‘horrid erotic other’ bent on killing Muslims, and raping women.
3. Downplay the fact that Scheduled caste and Scheduled tribe Hindus made real contributions that they made to ancient Hinduism by largely showing them as passive victims of discrimination, rather than as active agents of change and innovation.
4. Promote hatred against the Brahmins. Project Hinduism as a ‘Brahmanical Imaginary’ to alienate non-Brahmins from their faith.
5. Back-project current caste tensions and politics to paint a picture of an oppressive hell for lower castes in ancient India.
6. Deny Hindus the credit for many developments in their traditions and attribute these to other religions’ influence.
7. Deny that Hinduism even existed before the British colonialists invented it.
8. Promote colonial racist theories like the Aryan invasion theory.
9. Depict Hindus as savages, and thus indirectly make the case for colonial rule in India.
10. Demean Hindu Deities, scriptures, saints and traditions.
11. Ridicule and trivialize Hindu philosophy, theology and beliefs.
12. Boost the political agendas of India’s Marxist historians, and Left of the Center political parties in India.
13. Silence all her critics by stereotyping them as Hindu Nationalists and thereby sidestep the need to engage in a dialog with the Hindu community.
14. Curry favor with Islamists by white-washing the atrocities committed on non-Muslims during medieval India. Write apologies for Jihad and Jaziya and instead portray Muslims as victims of Hindu violence.

15. Promote her students (by referring to their help in the endnotes etc.) so that her academic cartel keeps growing. Already, the Empress' empire has struck back and her pet students like Laurie Patton, David Shulman etc have been writing blogs and articles defending her indefensible book.

Or, if one wants to summarize the book's contents in just a few words, these are Hinduism is 'sex', 'oppression' and 'violence'.

### State of the Art Colonial Indology:

Doniger claims that she is a recovering Indologist. That is her choice, but rather an unfortunate one. In her book, she reflects the zeal of a new convert, and not merely reproduces, but rather magnifies the racism, prejudices and hatreds that a lot of colonial scholars exhibited towards the Hindus. The following chart shows a comparison of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial prejudices against the Hindus, and those seen in the works of modern Indologists. Many of these 'new' stereotypes are seen also in "The Hindus, an Alternative History."

<b>A Distinction without a Difference</b> <b>DESCRIPTION OF HINDUS &amp; HINDUISM BY</b>	
Many Colonialists in the 19 <sup>th</sup> century	Many Western Indologists in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The White Man's Burden</li> <li>2. Killers of children</li> <li>3. Dark Savages, Superstitious</li> <li>4. Practice Sati, oppression of low castes, untouchability</li> <li>5. Worshippers of Jaggernaut and other monstrosities</li> <li>6. Aryan Invasion Theory</li> <li>7. Need the light of Christianity</li> <li>8. Effeminate due to a poor diet, meant to be ruled</li> <li>9. Vedas are primitive and foreign to India, Brahmanas are pedantic, Puranas are bad Sanskrit</li> <li>10. Holy cow, monkeys, chaos, smells</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Also, White Woman's Burden.</li> <li>2. Hindu nationalists, Muslim killers</li> <li>3. Hindu mothers do not love their children</li> <li>4. Objects of study, not equal as scholars of their own faith</li> <li>5. Practice dowry murders, oppression of Dalits, Sati</li> <li>6. Worship gods that rape, seduce, are addicted to drinks and sex</li> <li>7. Aryan Migration Theory</li> <li>8. Hinduism is a 'Brahminical Imaginary.' Darkness is in the hearts of Brahmins</li> <li>9. Eat curry, used to eat beef</li> <li>10. Rigveda is non-Indian, Brahmanas are tales of sex and violence, Puranas are bad Sanskrit, Yoga is not Hindu.</li> <li>11. Myth of the holy cow, monkeys, smells, chaos</li> </ol>

These prejudices are being justified today under the pretext of 'freedom of speech', 'academic freedom' and 'scholarly license to interpret.' However, as the present review of Doniger's book shows, these are mere excuses to side-step issues of academic dishonesty and a lack of rigor in Hinduism studies in the United States today.

## Withdrawal of “The Hindus” in India by the Publisher

In the year 2010, an organization named ‘Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti’ headed by a retired school headmaster Dina Nath Batra, filed a complaint in the Indian courts against the book. The Indian law allows withdrawal of books that deliberately hurt the feelings of any community. The case dragged on for almost 4 years, during which the organization members or other Hindus never indulged in violence or threats. Apparently, during the legal proceedings, the judges remarked that Doniger’s book was extremely vulgar. Finally, in February 2014, Penguin Books India Ltd. reached an out of court settlement with Mr Batra and agreed to pulp the remaining copies of the book and withdraw it from circulation. Obviously, a publisher with deep pockets such as Penguin that did not receive or face any threats from Doniger’s imagined ‘Hindu fundamentalists,’ must have withdrawn the book when it found the contents indefensible.

Since the withdrawal of the book, Doniger has tried to play victim, writing op-eds, addressing public meetings, giving keynote addresses etc., to claim falsely how her rights are being trampled. The same Doniger has had absolutely no time to discuss her faulty work with the Hindus, or attend academic panels devoted to a discussion of her book even though an advance invitation is sent to her.

Since mid-February 2014, Doniger and her followers have been writing articles peddling the following lies and half-truths:

1. India has a blasphemy law [*Truth*: It does not. The law only intervenes when it notices a deliberate intent to hurt and promote social discord].
2. The law protects only the Hindus [*Truth*: It protects all religious communities and has more frequently been applied to protect non-Hindus than Hindus].
3. India recently outlawed homosexuality [*Truth*: These laws date from the British rule, and the courts merely ruled that changing the law is not their business, but is the responsibility of the Indian legislature].
4. The ‘Hindu fundamentalists’ want to ban free speech in India [*Truth*: It is Doniger and her acolytes who do not allow free speech in their discussion forums].

5. Hindu upper caste males are angry that the book shows how oppressive they have been [*Truth*: As shown above, the book actually demeans Hindu women, Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and does not highlight the important contributions that they have made to Hinduism except incidentally].
6. Hindu critics of the book lack scholarship [*Truth*: They lack the perverse imagination and hatreds of Doniger and her ilk, but do possess true scholarship of their traditions that they often practice diligently to this day].

A reading of this review of the book should reveal to the reader that Doniger has persuaded a non-academic agenda that is quite different from what she has claimed. Her work is not an 'Alternative History', but is rather an 'Alternative to history.' It is an extremely crude, rude and lewd description of the heritage of the Hindus, especially of our women, Harijans and tribals.

The contributors to this review are emic (insiders) with regard to the Hindu tradition, but largely etic (outsiders) with regard to the cartels and dogmas of Indology, South Asian Studies and Hinduism studies. Therefore, they are not shackled by the politics, power plays, sycophancy, preservation instincts and rampant mediocrity displayed by the adherents of this politicized academic field(s). The objectivity of the reviewers in showing the mirror to Wendy Doniger, a powerful matron of Hinduism studies in the United States, should therefore be obvious to the general reader. The readers might not agree to all the errors pointed, but we hope the remaining hundreds on which they agree are sufficient to classify this book as academically flawed to the core. During an interview to the NPR radio in February 2014, Doniger acknowledged that there are errors in the book, but claimed, "Which book does not have them? Mine does not have more errors than the rest." This review shows that Doniger's claim about her book's inaccuracy is erroneous. To put it mildly, the book is academically very shoddy. Its defense by the academic cartel speaks very poor of their own commitment to academic integrity and scholarship.

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