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Somanatha and Mahmud

Mahmud of Ghazni's raid on the Somanatha temple in 1026 did not create a Hindu-Muslim dichotomy. Indeed a rigorous historical analysis of five different narratives or representations of what happened yields surprising new insights.

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MAHMUD'S raid on the temple of Somanatha and the destruction of the idol has become an event of immense significance in the writing of Indian history since the last couple of centuries. According to some writers, it has been seminal to antagonistic Hindu-Muslim relations over the last thousand years. Yet a careful investigation of the representation of this event and related matters in various sources of this thousand year period suggests that this conventional view is in itself a misrepresentation of the reading of the event in terms of Hindu-Muslim relations.

In 1026, Mahmud of Ghazni raided the temple of Somanatha and broke the idol. Reference is made to this in various sources, or reference is omitted where one expects to find it. Some of the references contradict each other. Some lead to our asking questions which do not conform to what we have accepted so far in terms of the meaning and the aftermath of the event. An event can get encrusted with interpretations from century to century and this changes the perception of the event. As historians, therefore, we have to be aware not just of the event and how we look upon it today, but also the ways in which the event was interpreted through the intervening centuries. An analysis of these sources and the priorities in explanation stem, of course, from the historian's interpretation.

I would like to place before you five representations of this and other events at Somanatha, keeping in mind the historical question of how Mahmud's raid was

viewed. They cover a wide span and are major representations. The five are the Turko-Persian chronicles, Jaina texts of the period, Sanskrit inscriptions from Somanatha, the debate in the British House of Commons, and what is often described as a nationalist reading of the event.

Let me begin with a brief background to Somanatha itself. It is referred to in the *Mahabharata* as Prabhas, and although it had no temple until later, it was a place of pilgrimage.[1] As was common to many parts of the subcontinent there were a variety of religious sects established in the area - Buddhist, Jaina, Shaiva and Muslim. Some existed in succession and some conjointly. The Shaiva temple, known as the Somanatha temple at Prabhas, dates to about the 9th or 10th century A.D.[2] The Chaulukyas or Solankis were the ruling dynasty in Gujarat during the 11th to 13th centuries. Kathiawar was administered by lesser rajas, some of whom were subordinates of the Chaulukyas.

SAURASHTRA was agriculturally fertile, but even more than that, its prosperity came from trade, particularly maritime trade. The port at Somanatha, known as Veraval, was one of the three major ports of Gujarat. During this period western India had a conspicuously wealthy trade with ports along the Arabian peninsula and the Persian Gulf.[3] The antecedents of this trade go back many centuries.

Arab raids on Sind were less indelible than the more permanent contacts based on trade. Arab traders and shippers settled along the West coast married locally and were ancestral to many communities existing to the present. Some Arabs took employment with local rulers and Rashtrakuta inscriptions speak of Tajika administrators and governors in the coastal areas.[4] The counterparts to these Arab traders were Indian merchants based at Hormuz and at Ghazni, who, even after the 11th century, are described as extremely prosperous.[5]

The trade focused on the importing of horses from West Asia and to a lesser extent on wine, metal, textiles and spices. By far the most lucrative was the trade in horses.[6] And in this funds from temples formed a sizable investment, according to some sources.[7] Port towns such as Somanatha-Veraval and Cambay derived a handsome income from this trade, much of it doubtless being ploughed back to enlarge the profits. Apart from trade, another source of local income was the large sums of money collected in pilgrim taxes by the administration in Somanatha. This was a fairly common source of revenue for the same is mentioned in connection with the temple at Multan."[8]

WE are also told that the local rajas - the Chudasamas, Abhiras, Yadhavas and others - attacked the pilgrims and looted them of their donations intended for the Somanatha temple. In addition, there was heavy piracy in the coastal areas indulged in by the local Chavda rajas and a variety of sea brigands referred to as the Bawarij.[9] As with many areas generating wealth in earlier times, this part of

Gujarat was also subject to unrest and the Chaulukya administration spent much time and energy policing attacks on pilgrims and traders.

Despite all this, trade flourished. Gujarat in this period experienced what can perhaps be called a renaissance culture of the Jaina mercantile community. Rich merchant families were in political office, controlled state finances, were patrons of culture, were scholars of the highest order, were liberal donors to the Jaina *sangha* and builders of magnificent temples.

This is the backdrop, as it were, to the Somanatha temple which by many accounts suffered a raid by Mahmud in 1026. There is one sober, contemporary reference and this comes, not surprisingly, from Alberuni, a central Asian scholar deeply interested in India, writing extensively on what he observed and learnt. He tells us that there was a stone fortress built about a hundred years before Mahmud's raid within which the *lingam* was located, presumably to safeguard the wealth of the temple. The idol was especially venerated by sailors and traders, not surprising considering the importance of the port at Veraval, trading as far as Zanzibar and China. He comments in a general way on the economic devastation caused by the many raids of Mahmud. Alberuni also mentions that Durlabha of Multan, presumably a mathematician, used a roundabout way involving various eras to compute the year of the raid on Somanatha as Shaka 947 (equivalent to A.D. 1025-26).[10] The raid therefore was known to local sources.

Not unexpectedly, the Turko-Persian chronicles indulge in elaborate myth-making around the event, some of which I shall now relate. A major poet of the eastern Islamic world, Farrukhi Sistani, who claims that he accompanied Mahmud to Somanatha, provides a fascinating explanation for the breaking of the idol.[11] This explanation has been largely dismissed by modern historians as too fanciful, but it has a significance for the assessment of iconoclasm. According to him, the idol was not of a Hindu deity but of a pre-Islamic Arabian goddess. He tells us that the name Somnat (as it was often written in Persian) is actually Su-manat, the place of Manat. We know from the *Qur'an* that Lat, Uzza and Manat were the three pre-Islamic goddesses widely worshipped,[12] and the destruction of their shrines and images, it was said, had been ordered by the Prophet Mohammad. Two were destroyed, but Manat was believed to have been secreted away to Gujarat and installed in a place of worship. According to some descriptions, Manat was an aniconic block of black stone, so the form could be similar to a *lingam*. This story hovers over many of the Turko-Persian accounts, some taking it seriously, others being less emphatic and insisting instead that the icon was of a Hindu deity.

THE identification of the Somanatha idol with that of Manat has little historical credibility. There is no evidence to suggest that the temple housed an image of

Manat. Nevertheless, the story is significant to the reconstruction of the aftermath of the event since it is closely tied to the kind of legitimation which was being projected for Mahmud.

The link with Manat added to the acclaim for Mahmud. Not only was he the prize iconoclast in breaking Hindu idols, but in destroying Manat he had carried out what were said to be the very orders of the Prophet. He was therefore doubly a champion of Islam.[13] Other temples were raided by him and their idols broken, but Somanatha receives special attention in all the accounts of his activities. Writing of his victories to the Caliphate, Mahmud presents them as major accomplishments in the cause of Islam. And not surprisingly, Mahmud becomes the recipient of grandiose titles. This establishes his legitimacy in the politics of the Islamic world, a dimension which is overlooked by those who see his activities only in the context of northern India.

BUT his legitimacy also derives from the fact that he was a Sunni and he attacked Isma'ilis and Shias whom the Sunnis regarded as heretics.[14] It was ironic that the Isma'ilis attacked the temple of Multan and were, in turn, attacked by Mahmud in the 11th century and their mosque was shut down. The fear of the heretic was due to the popularity of heresies against orthodox Islam and political hostility to the Caliphate in the previous couple of centuries, none of which would be surprising given that Islam in these areas was a relatively new religion.

Mahmud is said to have desecrated their places of worship at Multan and Mansura. His claims to having killed 50,000 *kafirs* (infidels) is matched by similar claims to his having killed 50,000 Muslim heretics. The figure appears to be notional. Mahmud's attacks on the Hindus and on the Shias and Isma'ilis was a religious crusade against the infidel and the heretic.

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With the majestic Somanatha temple for backdrop, Bharatiya Janata Party leader L. K. Advani begins his rath yatra on September 25, 1990.

But interestingly, there were also the places and peoples involved in the highly profitable horse trade with the Arabs and the Gulf. Both the Muslim heretics of Multan and the Hindu traders of Somanatha had substantial commercial investments. Is it possible then that Mahmud, in addition to religious iconoclasm, was also trying to terminate the import of horses into India via Sind and Gujarat? This would have curtailed the Arab monopoly over the trade. Given the fact that there was a

competitive horse trade with Afghanistan through north-western India, which was crucial to the wealth of the state of Ghazni, Mahmud may well have been combining iconoclasm with trying to obtain a commercial advantage.[15]

In the subsequent and multiple accounts - and there are many in each century - the contradictions and exaggerations increase. There is no agreement on the form of the image. Some say that it is a *lingam*, others reverse this and describe it as anthropomorphic - a human form.[16] But even with this there is no consistency as to whether it is a female Manat or a male Shiva. There seems to have been almost a lingering wish that it might be Manat. Was the icon, if identified with Manat, more important perhaps to Muslim sentiment?

THE anthropomorphic form encourages stories of the nose being knocked off and the piercing of the belly from which jewels poured forth.[17] Fantasising on the wealth of the temples evoked a vision of immense opulence, and this has led a modern historian to describing the Turkish invasions as a "gold-rush".[18] One account states that the image contained twenty *man* of jewels - one *man* weighing several kilograms; another, that a gold chain weighing two hundred *man* kept the image in place. Yet another describes the icon as made of iron with a magnet placed above it, so that it would be suspended in space, an awesome sight for the worshipper.[19] The age of the temple is taken further and further back in time until it is described as 30,000 years old. One wonders if Somanatha was not becoming something of a fantasy in such accounts.

MORE purposive writings of the 14th century are the chronicles of Barani and Isami. Both were poets, one associated with the Delhi Sultanate and the other with the Bahmani kingdom of the Deccan. Both project Mahmud as the ideal Muslim hero, but somewhat differently. Barani states that his writing is intended to educate Muslim rulers in their duties towards Islam.[20] For him, religion and kingship are twins and the ruler needs to know the religious ideals of kingship if he claims to be ruling on behalf of God. Sultans must protect Islam through the *shar'ia* and destroy both Muslim heretics and infidels. Mahmud is said to be the ideal ruler because he did both.

Isami composes what he regards as an epic poem on the Muslim rulers of India, on the lines of the famous Persian poet Firdausi's earlier epic on the Persian kings, the *Shah-nama*. Isami argues that kingship descended from God, first to the pre-Islamic rulers of Persia - in which he includes Alexander of Macedon and the Sassanid kings - and subsequently to the Sultans of India, with Mahmud establishing Muslim rule in India.[21] Interestingly the Arabs, who had both a political and economic presence in the subcontinent prior to Mahmud, hardly figure in this history. That there is a difference of perception in these narratives is important to a historical assessment and requires further investigation.

The role of Mahmud, it would seem, was also undergoing a change: from being viewed merely as an iconoclast to also being projected as the founder of an Islamic state in India, even if the latter statement was not historically accurate. Presumably, given his status in Islamic historiography, this was a form of indirectly legitimising the Sultans in India. The appropriation of the pre-Islamic Persian rulers for purposes of legitimacy suggests that there may have been an element of doubt about the accepted role models of Muslim rulers. The Sultans in India were not only ruling a society substantially of non-Muslims, but even those who had converted to Islam were in large part following the customary practices of their erstwhile caste, which were often not in conformity with the *shar'ia*. Is there then a hint of an underlying uncertainty, of a lack of confidence, in the insistence on taking Islamic rule back to Mahmud, a champion of the Islamic world? Can we say that these accounts had converted the event itself at Somanatha into what some today would call an icon?

LET me turn now to the Jaina texts of this period. These, not unexpectedly, associated a different set of concerns with the event, or else they ignore it. The 11th century Jaina poet from the Paramara court in Malwa, Dhanapala, a contemporary of Mahmud, briefly mentions Mahmud's campaign in Gujarat and his raids on various places, including Somanatha.[22] He comments, however, at much greater length of Mahmud's inability to damage the icons of Mahavira in Jaina temples for, as he puts it, snakes cannot swallow Garuda nor can stars dim the light of the sun. This for him is proof of the superior power of the Jaina images as compared to the Shaiva.

In the early 12th century, another Jaina next informs us that the Chaulukya king, angered by the *rakshasas*, the *daityas* and the *asuras* who were destroying temples and disturbing the *rishis* and *brahmanas*, campaigned against them.[23] One expects the list to include the Turushkas (as the Turks were called) but instead mention is made of the local rajas. The king is said to have made a pilgrimage to Somanatha and found that the temple was old and disintegrating. He is said to have stated that it was a disgrace that the local rajas were plundering the pilgrims to Somanatha but could not keep the temple in good repair. This is the same king who built at Cambay a mosque which was later destroyed in a campaign against the Chaulukyas of Gujarat by the Paramaras of Malwa. But the Paramara king also looted the Jaina and other temples built under the patronage of the Chaulukyas.[24] It would seem that when the temple was seen as a statement of power, it could become a target of attack, irrespective of religious affiliations.

Various Jaina texts, giving the history of the famous Chaulukya king Kumarapala, mention his connection with Somanatha. It is stated that he wished to be immortalised.[25] So Hemachandra, his Jaina minister, persuaded the king to replace the dilapidated wooden temple at Somanatha with a new stone temple.

The temple is clearly described as dilapidated and not destroyed. When the new temple on the location of the old had been completed, both Kumarapala and Hemachandra took part in the ritual of consecration. Hemachandra wished to impress the king with the spiritual powers of a Jaina *acharya*, so on his bidding Shiva, the deity of the temple, appeared before the king. Kumarapala was so overcome by this miracle that he converted to the Jaina faith. The focus is again on the superior power of Jainism over Shaivism. The renovating of the temple, which is also important, takes on the symbolism of political legitimation for the king. It does seem curious that these activities focussed on the Somanatha temple, yet no mention is made of Mahmud, in spite of the raid having occurred in the previous couple of centuries. The miracle is the central point in the connection with Somanatha in these accounts.

SOME suggestion of an anguish over what may be indirect references to the raids of Mahmud come from quite other Jaina sources and interestingly these relate to the merchant community. In an anthology of stories, one story refers to the merchant Javadi who quickly makes a fortune in trade and then goes in search of a Jaina icon which had been taken away to the land called Gajjana.[26] This is clearly Ghazna. The ruler of Gajjana was a *Yavana* - a term by now used for those coming from the West. The *Yavana* ruler was easily won over by the wealth presented to him by Javadi. He allowed Javadi to search for the icon and, when it was found, gave him permission to take it back. Not only that but the *Yavana* worshipped the icon prior to its departure. The second part of the narrative deals with the vicissitudes of having the icon installed in Gujarat, but that is another story.

This is a reconciliation story with a certain element of wishful thinking. The initial removal of the icon is hurtful and creates anguish. Its return should ideally be through reconciling iconoclasts to the worship of icons. There are other touching stories in which the ruler of Gajjana or other Yavana kings are persuaded not to attack Gujarat. But such stories are generally related as a demonstration of the power of the Jaina *acharyas*.

The Jaina sources therefore underline their own ideology. Jaina temples survive, Shaiva temples get destroyed. Shiva has abandoned his icons unlike Mahavira who still resides in his icons and protects them. Attacks are to be expected in the Kaliyuga since it is an age of evil. Icons will be broken but wealthy Jaina merchants will restore the temples and the icons will, invariably and miraculously, mend themselves.

The third category of major narratives is constituted by the inscriptions in Sanskrit from Somanatha itself, focussing on the temple and its vicinity. The perspectives which these point to are again very different from the earlier two. In the 12th century the Chaulukya king, Kumarapala, issues an inscription. He

appoints a governor to protect Somanatha and the protection is against the piracy and the looting of the local rajas.[27] A century later, the Chaulkyas are again protecting the site, this time from attacks by the Malwa rajas.[28] The regular complaint about local rajas looting pilgrims at Somanatha becomes a continuing refrain in many inscriptions.

In 1169, an inscription records the appointment of the chief priest of the Somanatha temple, Bhava Brihaspati.[29] He claims to have come from Kannauj, from a family of Pashupata Shaiva *brahmanas* and, as the inscriptions show, initiated a succession of powerful priests at the Somanatha temple. He states that he was sent by Shiva himself to rehabilitate the temple. This was required because it was an old structure, much neglected by the officers and because temples in any case deteriorate in the Kaliyuga. Bhava Brihaspati claims that it was he who persuaded Kumarapala to replace the older wooden temple with a stone temple.

AGAIN no mention is made of the raid of Mahmud. Was this out of embarrassment that a powerful icon of Shiva had been desecrated? Or was the looting of a temple not such an extraordinary event? The Turko-Persian chronicles may well have been indulging in exaggeration. Yet the looting of the pilgrims by the local rajas is repeatedly mentioned. Was Kumarapala's renovation both an act of veneration for Shiva and a seeking of legitimation? Was this, in a sense, an inversion of Mahmud seeking legitimation through raiding the temple? Are these then counter-points of legitimation in viewing the past?

In 1264, a long legal document was issued in the form of an inscription with both a Sanskrit and an Arabic version and concerns the acquisition of land and the building of a mosque by a trader from Hormuz.[30] The Sanskrit version begins with the usual formulaic symbol - the *siddham* - and continues with invoking Vishvanatha, a name for Shiva. But there is also a suggestion that it was a rendering into Sanskrit of Allah, the Lord of the Universe. We are told that Khoja Nuruddin Feruz, the son of Khoja Abu Ibrahim of Hormuz, a commander of a ship, and evidently a respected trader - as his title Khoja/Khwaja would indicate - acquired land in Mahajanapali on the outskirts of the town of Somanatha to build a mosque, which is referred to as a *dharmasthana*. The land was acquired from the local raja, Sri Chada, son of Nanasimha, and reference is also made to the governor of Kathiawar, Maladeva, and the Chaulukya-Vaghela king, Arjunadeva.

THE acquisition of this land has the approval of two local bodies, the *panchakula* and the association of the *jamatha*. The *panchakulas* were powerful administrative and local committees, well-established during this period, consisting of recognised authorities such as priests, officers, merchants and

local dignitaries. This particular *panchakula* was headed by *purohita* Virabhadra, the Shaiva Pashupata *acharya* most likely of the Somanatha temple, and among its members was the merchant Abhayasimha. From other inscriptions it would seem that Virabhadra was related to Bhava Brihaspati in a line of succession. The witnesses to his agreement of granting land for the building of the mosque are mentioned by name and described as the "the big men". They were the *thakuras, ranakas*, rajas and merchants, many from the Mahajanapali. Some of these dignitaries were functionaries of the estates of the Somanatha and other temples. The land given for the mosque in Mahajanapali was part of these estates.

THE other committee endorsing the agreement was the *jamatha*, consisting of ship-owners, artisans, sailors and religious teachers, probably from Hormuz. Also mentioned are the oil-millers, masons and Musalmana horse-handlers, all referred to by what appear to be occupational or caste names, such as *chunakara* and *ghamchika*. Were these local converts to Islam? Since the *jamatha* was to ensure the income from these endowments for the maintenance of the mosque, it was necessary to indicate its membership.

The inscription lists the endowments for the mosque. These included two large measures of land which were part of the temple property from adjoining temples situated in Somanatha-*pattana*, land from a *matha*, income from two shops in the vicinity, and an oil-mill. The measures of land were bought from the *purohita* and the chief priests of the temples and the sales were attested by the men of rank. The shops and the oil-mill were purchased from the local people.

The tone and sentiment of the inscription is amicable and clearly the settlement had been agreed to on all sides. The building of a substantial mosque in association with some of the properties of the Somanatha temple, not by a conqueror but by a trader through a legal agreement, was obviously not objected to - neither by the local governor and dignitaries nor by the priests, all of whom were party to the decision. The mosque is thus closely linked to the erstwhile properties and the functionaries of the Somanatha temple. This raises many questions. Did this transaction, 200 or so years after the raid of Mahmud, not interfere with the remembrance of the raid as handed down in the minds of the priests and the local 'big men'? Were memories short or was the event relatively unimportant?

Did the local people make a distinction between the Arab and West Asian traders on the one hand, often referred to as Tajika, and the Turks or Turushkas on the other? And were the former acceptable and the Turks much less so? Clearly they were not all homogenised and identified as Muslims, as we would do today. Should we not sift the reactions to the event by examining the responses of particular social groups and situations? Hormuz was crucial to the horse trade, therefore Nuruddin was welcomed. Did the profits of trade overrule

other considerations? Were the temples and their administrators also investing in horse trading and making handsome profits, even if the parties they were trading with were Muslims and therefore of the same religion as Mahmud?

In the 15th century, a number of short inscriptions from Gujarat refer to battles against the Turks. One very moving inscription in Sanskrit comes from Somanatha itself.[31] Although written in Sanskrit, it begins with the Islamic formulaic blessing, *bismillah rahman-i-rahim*. It gives details of the family of the Vohara/Bohra Farid and we know that the Bohras were of Arab descent. We are told that the town of Somanatha was attacked by the Turushkas, the Turks, and Vohara Farid who was the son of Vohara Muhammad, joined in the defence of the town, fighting against the Turushkas on behalf of the local ruler Brahmadeva. Farid was killed and the inscription is a memorial to him.

It would seem from these sources that the aftermath of the raid of Mahmud on the temple of Somanatha took the form of varying perceptions of the event, and different from what we have assumed. There are no simplistic explanations that would emerge from any or all of these narratives. How then have we arrived today at the rather simplistic historical theory that the raid of Mahmud created a trauma in the Hindu consciousness which has been at the root of Hindu-Muslim relations ever since? Or to put it in the words of K. M. Munshi: "For a thousand years Mahmud's destruction of the shrine has been burnt into the collective sub-conscious of the (Hindu) race as an unforgettable national disaster."[32]

INTERESTINGLY, what appears to be the earliest mention of a 'Hindu trauma' in connection with Mahmud's raid on Somanatha comes from the debate in the House of Commons in London in 1843 on the question of the gates of the Somanatha temple.[33] In 1842, Lord Ellenborough issued his famous 'Proclamation of the Gates' in which he ordered the British army in Afghanistan to return via Ghazni and bring back to India the sandalwood gates from the tomb of Mahmud. These were believed to have been looted by Mahmud from Somanatha. It was claimed that the intention was to return what was looted from India, an act which would symbolise British control over Afghanistan despite their poor showing in the Anglo-Afghan wars. It was also presented as an attempt to reverse Indian subjugation to Afghanistan in the pre-British period. Was this an appeal to Hindu sentiment, as some maintained?

The Proclamation raised a storm in the House of Commons and became a major issue in the cross-fire between the Government and the Opposition. The question was asked whether Ellenborough was catering to religious prejudices by appeasing the Hindus or was he appealing to national sympathies. It was defended by those who maintained that the gates were a 'national trophy' and not a religious icon. In this connection, the request of Ranjit Singh, the ruler of

the Punjab, to the king of Afghanistan, Shah Shujah, for the return of the gates, was quoted. But on examining the letter making this request, it was discovered that Ranjit Singh had confused the Somanatha temple with the Jagannatha temple. It was also argued that no historian mentions the gates in the various accounts of Mahmud's raid, therefore the story of the gates could only be an invention of folk tradition.

The historians referred to were Gibbon, who wrote on the Roman empire, Firdausi and Sa'adi, both Persian poets, and Firishta. The last of these was the only one who, in the 17th century, had written on Indian history. Firishta was well-known because Alexander Dow had translated his history into English in the late-18th century. Firishta's account of the sack of Somanatha was as fanciful as the earlier accounts, with obvious exaggerations such as the huge size of the idol and the quantity of jewels that poured out when Mahmud pierced its belly. Members of the House of Commons were using their perceptions of Indian history as ammunition in their own political and party hostilities.

Those critical of Ellenborough were fearful of the consequences: they saw the fetching of the gates as supporting a native religion and that too the monstrous Linga-ism as they called it; and they felt that its political consequences would be violent indignation among the Mohammadans. Those supporting Ellenborough in the House of Commons argued equally vehemently that he was removing the feeling of degradation from the minds of the Hindus. It would "... relieve that country, which had been overrun by the Mohammadan conqueror, from the painful feelings which had been rankling amongst the people for nearly a thousand years." And that, "... the memory of the gates (has been) preserved by the Hindus as a painful memorial of the most devastating invasions that had ever desolated Hindustan."

Did this debate fan an anti-Muslim sentiment among Hindus in India, which, judging from the earlier sources, had either not existed or been marginal and localised? The absence in earlier times of an articulation of a trauma remains enigmatic.

The gates were uprooted and brought back in triumph. But on arrival, they were found to be of Egyptian workmanship and not associated in any way with India. So they were placed in a store-room in the Agra Fort and possibly by now have been eaten by white ants.

From this point on, the arguments of the debate in the House of Commons come to be reflected in the writing on Somanatha. Mahmud's raid was made the central point in Hindu-Muslim relations. K.M. Munshi led the demand for the restoration of the Somanatha temple. His obsession with restoring the glories of Hindu history began in a general way with his writing historical novels, inspired by reading Walter Scott. But the deeper imprint came from Bankim Chandra

Chatterji's *Anandamatha*, as is evident from his novel, *Jaya Somanatha*, published in 1927. And as one historian, R. C. Majumdar, puts it, Bankim Chandra's nationalism was Hindu rather than Indian. "This is made crystal clear from his other writings which contain passionate outbursts against the subjugation of India by the Muslims."[34] Munshi was concerned with restoring the Hindu Aryan glory of the pre-Islamic past. Muslim rule was viewed as the major disjuncture in Indian history. Munshi's comments often echo the statements made in the House of Commons debate as is evident from his book, *Somanatha: The Shrine Eternal*.

MUNSHI made the Somanatha temple the most important symbol of Muslim iconoclasm in India. But prior to this, its significance appears to have been largely regional. Consistent references to it as a symbol of Muslim iconoclasm are to be found largely only in the Turko-Persian chronicles. Possibly the fact that Munshi was himself from Gujarat may have had some role in his projection of Somanatha. Prior to this, in other parts of the country the symbols of iconoclasm, where they existed, were places of local importance and knowledge of the raid on Somanatha was of marginal interest.

On the rebuilding of the Somanatha temple in 1951, Munshi, by then a Minister of the central government, had this to say: "... the collective subconscious of India today is happier with the scheme of the reconstruction of Somanatha, sponsored by the Government of India, than with many other things we have done or are doing."[35] Nehru objected strongly to the Government of India being associated with the project and insisted on its being restored as a private venture.[36] That the President of India, Rajendra Prasad was to perform the consecration ceremony was unacceptable to him. This introduces a further dimension to the reading of the event, involving the secular credentials of society and state.

The received opinion is that events such as the raid on Somanatha created what has been called two antagonistic categories of epic: the 'epic of conquest' and the 'counter-epic of resistance'.[37] It has also been described as epitomising "the archetypal encounter of Islam with Hindu idolatry."[38] We many well ask how and when did this dichotomy crystallise? Did it emerge with modern historians reading too literally from just one set of narratives, without juxtaposing these with the other narratives? If narratives are read without being placed in a historiographical context, the reading is, to put it mildly, incomplete and therefore distorted. Firishta's version, for example, was repeated endlessly in recent times, without considering its historiography: neither was this done within the tradition of the Turko-Persian chronicles nor in the context of other narratives which can be said to impinge on the same event.

We continue to see such situations as a binary projection of Hindu and Muslim.

Yet what should be evident from the sources which I have discussed is that there are multiple groups with varying agendas involved in the way in which the event and Somanatha are represented. There are differentiations in the attitudes of the Persian chronicles towards the Arabs and the Turks. Within the Persian sources, the earlier fantasy of Manat gradually gives way to a more political concern with the legitimacy of Islamic rule in India through the Sultans. Was there, on the part of the Persian chroniclers, a deliberate playing down of the Arab intervention in India? And if this be so, can it be traced to the confrontations between the Persians and the Arabs in the early history of Islam? The hostility between the Bohras and the Turks, technically both Muslims, may have also been part of this confrontation since the Bohras were of Arab descent and probably saw themselves as among the settled communities of Gujarat and saw the Turks as invaders.

Biographies and histories from Jaina authors, discussing matters pertaining to the royal court and to the religion of the elite, focus on attempts to show Mahavira in a better light than Shiva. The agenda becomes that of the competing rivalry between the Jainas and the Shaivas. But the sources which focus on a different social group, that of the Jaina merchants, seem to be conciliatory towards the confrontation with Mahmud, perhaps because the trading community would have suffered heavy disruptions in periods of raids and campaigns.

FROM the Veraval inscription of 1264, cooperation in the building of the mosque came from a range of social groups, from the most orthodox ritual specialists to those wielding secular authority and from the highest property holders to those with lesser property. Interestingly, the members of the *jamatha* were Muslims from Hormuz and it would seem that local Muslim participation was largely from occupations at the lower end of the social scale. As such, their responsibility for the maintenance of the mosque would have required the goodwill of the Somanatha elite. Did the elite see themselves as patrons of a new kind of control over property?

These relationships were not determined by the general category of what have been called Hindu interests and Muslim interests. They varied in accordance with more particular interests and these drew on identities of ethnicity, religious sectarianism and social status.

I have tried to show how each set of narratives turns the focus of what Somanatha symbolises: the occasion for the projection of an iconoclast and champion of Islam; the assertion of the superiority of Jainism over Shaivism; the inequities of the Kaliyuga; the centrality of the profits of trade subordinating other considerations; colonial perceptions of Indian society as having always been an antagonistic duality of Hindu and Muslim; Hindu nationalism and the restoration of a particular view of the past, contesting the secularising of

modern Indian society. But these are not discrete foci. Even when juxtaposed, a pattern emerges: a pattern which requires that the understanding of the event should be historically contextual, multi-faceted, and aware of the ideological structures implicit in the narratives.

I would argue that Mahmud of Ghazni's raid on the Somanatha temple did not create a dichotomy, because each of the many facets involved in the perception of the event, consciously or subconsciously, was enveloped in a multiplicity of other contexts as well. These direct our attention to varying representations, both overt and hidden, and lead us to explore the statements implicit in these representations. The assessment of these facets may provide us with more sensitive insights into our past.

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