POSTCOLONIAL CHALLENGES TO THE STUDY OF RELIGION

Willy Pfändtner & David Thurfjell (eds)


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Box 118, SE–751 04 Uppsala
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E-mail: info@ssp.nu

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INTRODUCTION

Willy Pfändtner & David Thurfjell

In recent years, postcolonial perspectives have become somewhat fashionable within the humanities. In numerous research projects, publications and academic conferences, scholars have endeavoured to integrate the questions that these new academic perspectives are supposed to entail. Despite the disintegration of the colonial empires in the mid-twentieth century, the distinction between centre and margin in the world-order has remained. Politically and economically, the distribution of power and wealth that was established under European colonialism has not changed as significantly as many had hoped and expected. The gap between the wealthy and the dispossessed is still wide, and the signs that it will diminish are few. The inequality that this situation creates is one of the causes of the cultural changes that the postcolonial situation brings about. Through globalisation, migration and increased intercultural interaction, people in our time find themselves in situations and predicaments for which their cultural heritage seem to have few solutions to offer. New identities are formed from the alienation that this creates, identities that merge the components of a changing world into new hybrid entities, or identities that reach back to the now challenged shelters of tradition, religion or nationality. Within literature and the fine arts, the impact of these processes have been significant.

Postcolonial Studies describe and analyse this situation. Such studies may be most firmly rooted within the fields of literature and language studies, but their impact on anthropology, ethnology, education and gender studies can hardly

be overestimated. The works of postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak are today read as integral parts of the core curriculum of these disciplines in many universities around the world.

The impact of postcolonial theory reached religious studies somewhat later than many of its neighbouring disciplines. Nevertheless, many of the phenomena that we usually designate as religious play an enormously important role in the societal and cultural developments of the postcolonial era. Furthermore, religious beliefs and practices change as a result of the present world order. For many (maybe even most) religious traditions of the world, the subjugation brought about by colonialism and modernity is the most profound challenge they have ever faced. Most notably, many indigenous religions did not survive the encounter with European modernity and imperialism. Others still struggle to recover some form of self-respect despite the hegemonial status of the West. For people with a migration background, religion may prove to be the only link to the lives and land of one's parents and grandparents that survive the challenges of migration.

So, religion is significant for people in the postcolonial situation. Important as it may be, however, it is not the only reason why postcolonial perspectives are important in the academic study of religions. The political and demographical changes in postcolonial times have brought about a change in the status of non-western intellectual traditions. The various Indian and Islamic schools of thought, for instance, are no longer merely the objects of orientalist exploration. In the wake of postcolonial critique, the insights of these traditions are beginning to be taken at face value as contributions to our understanding of the world. For many decades now it has been possible in the West to study Indian philosophy from a western philosophical perspective. Maybe we are approaching an academic climate where it is also possible to study European and American philosophy using Indian philosophical concepts and categories.

For the academic study of religions the endeavour to take the views of the Other seriously is a great challenge. As an academic discipline, *Religionswissenschaft* is mainly rooted in the cultural and intellectual environment of liberal European Protestantism. The very concept of religion, however debated, possesses in itself a strong eurocentric bias. Needless to say, the endeavour to open up the academic arena for the challenging preconceptions of other traditions may prove to be detrimental to many definitions and conceptual structures that hitherto have been more or less taken for granted. Taking postcolonial critiques seriously means questioning the hegemony of modern western worldviews. It entails theoretical challenges that should not be taken lightly.

It is important to emphasise that the field of postcolonial studies, much like the scholarly traditions it criticises, is founded on and motivated by an ideological conviction. At its core lies a concern for the victims of the economic, political and cultural inequalities of today's world and a conviction that cultural, political and philosophical pluralism is desirable. Little would be gained if the changes brought about by postcolonial critique were to result in the establishment of a new hegemony with the same potential for oppression as the abandoned one. In terms of philosophical location and ontological firmament, the postcolonial project is rooted in a postmodern critique of the so-called logocentrism of "the West". It here falls back on the experience of alienation and discomfort in late modern society.

The aim of this anthology is to critically discuss the consequences that postcolonial perspectives could have for the study of religions within different academic disciplines. Is it possible to include other voices than the western hegemonic one in that study? Which would be the consequences of such an attempt? The volume consists of six essays, each of which discusses the possible implementation of postcolonial perspectives in different disciplines.

The first essay focuses on sociology of religion, more specifically on sociologically oriented research on Islamism. In

that essay, David Thurfjell discusses problems in connection with scholarly attempts to give voice to marginalised Muslims while still maintaining a sociological interpretation of their situation that largely differs from their own.

In the second contribution, Anna-Pya Sjödin suggests a way to implement postcolonial perspectives in philological studies of Indian texts. She underscores the problems embedded in having a strong demarcation between philosophy and philology in dealing with Indian classical scriptures and calls for a wider diversity of interpretational stances.

Essay number three deals with education studies. Taking her point of departure in the case of Muslim faith schools in Sweden, Jenny Berglund here lifts forth the importance of seeing the complex and sometimes paradoxical nature of the relation between religious minorities and the secular majority in societies like that of Sweden.

The fourth chapter discusses the tacit ideological agenda of archeology. Using examples from excavations of ancient Laotian Buddhist shrines, Anna Karlström shows how the preservationist principles of western archaeology may collide with the worldview of the communities whose heritage one is trying to rescue.

The fifth essay criticises the way historians have chosen to identify one specific voice as subaltern in modern Indian history. Bringing to light the complex and contradictory nature of the postcolonial situation in India, Shraddha Kumbhojkar shows that competing ideological movements can rightly be labelled subaltern. Thus she exemplifies the complexity of power structures in the recent history of the sub-continent.

The sixth and final contribution sums up the discussion and proposes a possible way forward. Willy Pfändtner here criticises the way philosophers of religion, by using a strictly theological and analytical understanding of religion, have maintained a colonial understanding of pluralism and thereby distorted our comprehension of other religions. The essay proposes different strategies to come to terms with the problem.

IS THE ISLAMIST VOICE SUBALTERN?
On the Postcolonial Trend in Islamic Studies

David Thurfjell

In her well-known essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Gayatri Spivak makes two key arguments. First, she argues that postcolonial studies, although its aim is to help the oppressed, risks perpetuating a neo-colonial exploitation of the economically and politically dispossessed. Postcolonial studies, Spivak argues, ironically risks reinscribing colonial imperatives of political domination and cultural exploitation. The post-colonial scholar wants to help the oppressed, but ends up doing the opposite. This happens because the postcolonial scholar attempts to improve the subalterns' condition from the outside by granting them collective speech. This attempt creates a situation where the subaltern depends upon western intellectuals to "speak for" them. Instead of being allowed to speak for themselves, they are spoken for. Furthermore, they are treated as a group with a collective cultural identity: the identity of being dispossessed.

This situation, Spivak argues, will in fact re-inscribe their subordinate position in society. Because if they were not subordinate, there would be no need for them to speak as a collective group or to be spoken for in the first place.

Spivak sees this academic understanding of the subaltern — as a unified group that needs to be spoken for — as a form of epistemic violence that perpetuates the ethnocentric western imperialist domination of the world. In Spivak's words, there is "an extension of the Western logos" that does not take into

account the heterogeneity of the colonised body politic. She concludes that postcolonial intellectuals must understand that their privilege is their loss. That is, as soon as one has gained the platform to speak for the oppressed, one does not represent them anymore.[1]

This would of course be true for someone such as myself. As a male, rich, healthy, white, heterosexual academic in my mid-thirties, I am a prime example of an absolute non-subaltern. So why do I address these issues? The same question could of course be posed to the theoretical giants whose names are imbued with subaltern auras, such as Gayatri Spivak herself, Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, all of whom have had an enormous impact on the way scholars think about these matters. One of their critics, Martin Kramer, writes ironically about Said: "positioned within taxi distance of the media's Manhattan epicenter /.../ Said [complained] that Palestinians were systematically denied 'permission to narrate' their own story".[2]

Thus, by speaking for the dispossessed one risks reinscribing their marginalisation. This brings me to the second argument that Spivak puts forth in her article, namely, that the subaltern simply cannot speak. Because if you are subaltern, she argues, no people will listen to you, and if they do, you are not subaltern anymore. If the two arguments are brought together, it seems as though there is no way whatsoever that the subaltern can be heard. Subalterns can neither speak for themselves nor can anyone else speak for them without reinscribing their marginalisation.

I believe that Spivak is right. It is by definition impossible to speak and be heard from the margins of a discourse. The subaltern cannot speak. Maybe, however, this is only true as long as we are discussing speech within a chosen discourse, if we mean that one will not be heard in a certain arena as long as one speaks from the margins of that very same arena. But what happens if one completely ignores the arena, if one builds another one and refuses to adjust to the language, rules

and codes of the first arena? What happens if the realisation of one's subalternity results, not in striving for a position in the centre from which one is excluded, but in the establishment of a new, alternative centre?

This is the main question of this essay, and it is connected to another query: how do we as predominantly western scholars interested in postcolonial perspectives react to the establishment of such alternative centres? I will argue that we often react to this with indignation because of its seeming unawareness or disregard of what we see as our central position. I will exemplify this with the case of Islamism

The Case of Islam

By the term "Islamism" I refer to the religious and political movement that strives for the establishment of modern states founded on the principles of Islamic revealed law. A product of the twentieth century, Islamism is one of many responses to the colonial and postcolonial situations in the so-called Muslim world.

It could be argued that Islamism represents a conscious attempt to establish an alternative arena for politics and culture as well as for academic discussion. Islamism is an attempt to provincialise Europe and thereby make its own adherents able to speak. A closer look at the Islamist movement on both the elite and popular levels seems to support such an interpretation.

On the elite level, the formulations of Islamist ideologists are interesting. Sayyid Qutb is one prominent example. He was one of the early leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and has, since his execution in 1966, remained an immensely influential Islamist ideologist. An important notion in his work is that everything positive that has come from "the West" is already to be found in Islam. Muslims, he argues, need not make the detour through Europe to find the tools to build a good society. Hence human rights, social justice

and care for the environment are brought forth as originally Islamic ideals.[3]

Ruholla Khomeini is another example. He was the founder of the Islamic republic of Iran and an outspoken critic of western imperialism and secularist ideologies. In many of his speeches he also criticised the dominance of the imperialist western discourse on a meta-level. "The trouble with arguments against the use of familiar and time-honoured vocabulary," he said on one occasion, "is that it is expected to be phrased in that very vocabulary."[4] What Khomeini called for, in this quotation and elsewhere, is the abandonment of the view that the western discourse, or vocabulary as he calls it, is the language one should use in one's critique of "the West". Khomeini seemed to argue that one can never defeat a discourse by using its own vocabulary. Western imperialism will not be conquered by a western-style criticism but by an Islamic one, he argued, as he led the revolutionary Iranian movement in calling for "independence, freedom and Islam".

On a popular level, the establishment of an independent Islamist arena can be seen in the refusal of Islamist activists to recognise the rules of the hegemonic western discourse. The Mohammed caricature incident in January, 2006, is a case in point. In this controversy, Islamist groups held the Danish government responsible for the contents of an independent Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*. To do this is, so to speak, against the rules of a modern western democratic system. In such a system, different public institutions in society are independent of each other, and prime ministers can therefore by definition not be held responsible for the publications of independent newspapers.

Muslim activists' inability to understand this basic principle has been a source of great frustration among people in Scandinavia and elsewhere. Journalists and participants in TV debates were annoyed by the fact that Muslims did not follow the rules. Muslims may criticise *Jyllands-Posten*, they

said, but they cannot blame the Danish prime minister for what it chooses to publish. In other words: Muslims have to conduct the fight in our arena.

The interesting thing is that both the Islamists and the defenders of *Jyllands-Posten* know that the Islamists can never win such a fight. Muslims did not make the rules of the compartmentalised modern society, and if they follow such rules in their own struggle, they are bound to fail.

The history of the twentieth century shows many examples of Muslims who try to formulate their subalternity in the terminology of different European ideologies. But socialist, nationalist or democratic struggle to "catch up" with "the West" have all failed. Muslim societies are all still lagging behind. Islamism, however, although it is also dependent on these ideologies, is based on something that is truly one's own, namely the religion of Islam. As such, it is a discourse that provincialises "the West" while creating a centre of its own.

The core of postcoloniality is the ambition to decentralise "the West", or western modernity. Islamism has successfully managed to provide an alternative centre of moral, political and ontological focus among its adherents. This arguably makes it one of the most obvious examples of a subaltern postcolonial voice today.

As to the western responses to the challenge of Islamism, it is no exaggeration to say that there is a consensus about it. Everyone seems to be negative: right-wing and left-wing politicians, publicists, churches and NGOs are united in condemning this movement, which is regarded as anti-democratic, male chauvinist and downright dangerous.

This response would seem to prove Spivak's point. The hegemonic discourse is, as always, colonial in its attitude. The subaltern cannot speak, and those in the centre will not or cannot listen. The centre of the western discourse will also produce arguments that legitimate disregarding the Islamist voice. For instance, Islamists will be labelled as undemocratic and therefore not worth negotiating with.

If an Islamist organisation turns out to be democratically elected (as was the case in Palestine), it will be labelled as potentially undemocratic and for this reason excluded from the discussions.

On a theoretical or academic level, it can be argued that a sociologistic paradigm legitimates disregarding the Islamist voice. By "sociologistic paradigm" I am referring not to a particular scholarly research method, but to an ontological understanding of the human condition, which is often, but need not be, entailed by that methodology. The sociologistic paradigm conceives of reality as well as our notions of what is morally right and wrong as social constructions created by humans or in human societies. It emphasises social factors to the exclusion of other aspects. Religious worldviews are here spoken of as symptoms of social relations and power only. Moreover, since they are expressions of the social they need not be taken at face value as valid expressions of often subaltern human experiences.

The examples of the sociologistic paradigm in studies of Islamism are innumerable. Akbar Ahmed, to take just one example, argues that Islamic "fundamentalism" is one response to the doubts that postmodernity gives rise to. Muslims who cannot cope with reality retreat back to old myths and hierarchies to strengthen their identity. Islamism is a social strategy.[5]

Let us return to Spivak's first argument and see if the sociological explanation of religiosity could be regarded as an example of the epistemic violence of which she speaks. Should we regard the sociologistic paradigm as the theoretical counterpart of the more concrete forms of violence that we find in the spheres of politics and military force?

Personally, I hold such an understanding to be reasonable. Foucault's notion of the relation between research and power finds a clear illustration in this instance. Sociologistical explanations of Islamist beliefs and practices must be seen as a part of a deauthorisation process through which the

Other is silenced, since whether we want to listen to it or not, it provides arguments for why we do not need to listen to them.

Nowadays, many sociologically or anthropologically oriented scholars of Islamology (such as myself) tend to think of ourselves as friends of the Muslims we study. We do everything we can not to be like the orientalist scholars criticised by Edward Said. We try not to homogenise or romanticise the Muslim world. In a sense, we see ourselves as the spokespeople for our marginalised informants. But since most of us at the same time explain the experiences of our informants in sociological terms only, we provide arguments for not listening to their voices, and thereby continue to re-inscribe their marginalisation — a stance that is similar to the deauthorisation of the colonised world carried out by the much-criticised orientalist scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Recently, it has become fashionable to adopt a postcolonial approach in the academic study of religion. There is an expressed ambition to listen to unheard voices and to counteract the dominance of modern European thought. Postcolonial studies is both a description and a manifesto. When we declare that "the subaltern cannot speak" we also make an ethical statement, namely, that it is morally wrong that the subaltern cannot speak and that they *should* be allowed to speak. If the analysis offered in this essay is correct, there would seem to be a certain degree of hypocrisy in the postcolonial trend. If we really want the subaltern to speak, it is inconsistent to only want them to do so when they say what we want to hear.

Islamism is a subaltern voice. Perhaps the strongest in the world today. Our reactions to its independent agenda clearly reveal the limits of our stated ambition to let the subaltern speak.

1 Spivak 1988.
2 Kramer 1992.
3 See, for instance, Qutb 1974.
4 Quoted by Sayyid 1997: 114.
5 Ahmed 1992: 28–42.

UNDERSTANDING INDIAN EPISTEMES

Towards a Diversity of Interpretational Stances in Indology

Anna-Pya Sjödin

In the following essay I will outline and discuss academic approaches towards the Indian Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition(s) of philosophy. I will begin with a short introduction to the subject matter and then proceed with an analysis of the academic discourse in terms of what I call mimetic interpretation. The main purpose of this essay is to point out some problems in the current academic discourse on Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika.[1]

In this essay I focus on research done on two Indian philosophical schools or traditions that initially called themselves Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika respectively. Later on towards the 10th century they gradually merged (Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika) and finally around 1400, they named themselves Navya-Nyāya. Nyāya means reasoning or some kind of structured thinking, and Vaiśeṣika means those who distinguish, differentiate or particularise. Navya-Nyāya simply means the new Nyāya (reasoning). These two traditions seem to have begun their written transmission around 400 B.C.E. and since then texts have been produced in Sanskrit up to the present time. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition has foremost dealt with ontology and epistemology. From the 10th century C.E. onward epistemological aspects gradually became more and more predominant, and this led to the new school of Nyāya, Navya-Nyāya.

It is important to keep in mind that up to the time of colonial rule, the philosophical discourse in India entertained a high degree of freedom of speech, which in turn resulted in a number of various epistemes throughout the pre-colonial

history. Together with Buddhist philosophers, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas have been major contributors within the sphere of epistemology and philosophical debate in so far as they have shaped a vocabulary used within philosophical discourse at large and irrespective of differences pertaining to particular analyses of knowledge processes.[2]

"Indian" Philosophy and Philology

The academic discourse dealing with Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Navya-Nyāya has been, and is, to a great extent philosophical in nature. By philosophical I mean the activity of interpreting, evaluating and creating philosophy. This should be understood in contrast to the philological activity of the historical interpretation, editing and ordering of texts. These two fields of aims and activities are often combined in Indology, and the scholars writing as indologists are often versed in European/American philosophy as well as Sanskrit and Indian philosophy. Thus the secondary sources of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Navya-Nyāya often have a twofold character: they are at once both philosophical and philological in nature.

Furthermore, many of these secondary sources have an explicitly, or sometimes implicitly, expressed intention of wanting to make Indian philosophy known to philosophers dealing with European/American philosophy. Philosophically inclined indologists, or indologists interested in the history of ideas, are often forced to work within departments of philology, linguistics or religious studies rather than departments of philosophy or history of ideas. Such is the case at Uppsala University. In my opinion the current situation has arisen for a number of complex reasons: one being the Eurocentric division of subjects and departments within academia, which in turn is related to the insistence that philosophy proper has only been conducted in Europe, historically beginning with the ancient Greeks; and another the even older, but still prevalent idea, that "Indian thinking" in general is oriented towards mysticism or

religion as opposed to the thinking of a Kant or a Plato.[3]

All the above could in turn be seen as related to the practice of viewing European/American philosophy, beginning with the Greeks, as a universal discourse in contrast to Indian philosophy which remains culturally bound. In short, this gives us "Philosophy proper", which is European/American, and "Indian Philosophy", "African Philosophy" or "Chinese Philosophy" et cetera. "Philosophy proper" in this sense is not a phenomenon pertaining to a certain culture or era; it is not thought of as European/American; it is universal and timeless and ahistoric, whereas the philosophies of different non-European/American cultures are only historically interesting as cultural phenomena. Kant is then possible to study as a free-floating individual with interesting thoughts to which one can relate today, while Gaṅgeśa remains an Indian late medieval Navya-Nyāya thinker.[4]

Richard King has described the ambivalent situation for "Indian Philosophy" as "stuck between a rock and a hard place". What King has identified by this are the conceptions that "Indian Philosophy" is either always a specific cultural phenomenon without any universal use or is described in terms of and reduced to categories decided by a universalised "European/American" philosophical discourse.

> Some liberal-minded western philosophers might take the view that non-western thought should not be excluded from philosophy and that Indian materials (for example) ought to be included in contemporary debates. However, joining the debate means entering a philosophical arena that has already been established according to the hegemonic presuppositions and preoccupations of modern western philosophy.[5]

"Mimetic Interpretation"

It is within the above situation that a certain interpretative stance, which I call "mimetic interpretation", has surfaced and has restricted the scope of both philosophical and philological

academic research on Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Navya-Nyāya. The idea of "mimetic interpretation" has sprung from a reading of Homi Bhabha's analysis of a colonial discourse in terms of mimicry, which is described by Bhabha as

> the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. Mimicry is, thus the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation and discipline which "appropriates" the other as it visualises power.[6]

According to Bhabha, mimicry is an expression of dominance and sovereignty; here mimetic interpretation is seen as a strategy of survival within an environment of such dominance.[7] Mimetic interpretation could thus be understood as a consequence of, and a reaction to, a situation that is characterised by a discourse of mimicry. This strategy is expressed by a tendency to "translate" a subaltern discourse (i.e. Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika) in terms of a dominant hegemonic discourse (i.e. European/American philosophy).[8] That is, the only way of presenting "Indian philosophy" to the dominant European/American discourse has been to translate it into terms familiar to that very discourse. The problem pertaining to such translation is that the subaltern discourse will remain suspended in a state of "almost the same but not quite", that is, not quite up to the standard that the dominant discourse has already laid out, or not quite as brilliant or rational or formal or developed a form of thought as that of the dominant discourse.[9] Due to this state of affairs a mimetic interpretation is often conducted in a negative space; the subaltern discourse is described in terms of a "lack" or "incompleteness".[10]

> Indian logicians, however, have a tendency not to speak of membership in terms of the relation between a set and its member. Instead they are apt to consider membership in terms

> of the relation between an individual manifestation and the generic character residing in it. This way of reasoning is closely connected with the fact that Indian philosophers have not developed the concept of class as a set consisting of members.[11]

There are numerous such examples of mimetic interpretation within the secondary discourse of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Navya-Nyāya. Bimal Matilal's "The Character of Logic in India", for example, contains a list of four common differences between "Indian logic" and "Western logic". The list deals with four aspects of "Indian logic":

> 1. The tendency to psychologise logic.
> [Lack of proper distinctions]
> 2. The tendency to include epistemology within logic.
> [Lack of proper distinctions]
> 3. The tendency to relate logic to grammar and not mathematics. [Lack of formal logic]
> 4. The lack of distinction between induction and deduction.[12]

These four points are articulated in relation to a very specific Fregean idea of what "logic" should be. There is some amount of embarrassment around the slippage a mimetic interpretation of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika produces. The psychological analysis of knowledge processes within this episteme has caused a great deal of trouble for the interpreters.

> The Indians psychologised logic, but perhaps without totally committing the blunder into which an emphasis on psychology may often lead. Thus one may claim that they psychologised logic, without committing the fallacy of psychologism. Alternatively, the claim could be that this was a different conception of logic, where the study of the connections between mental events and the justification of inferentially-acquired knowledge-episodes is not a fault.[13]

Matilal's comments on the tendency towards psychologisation are interesting because of the precarious balance between

"apologies" and "explanations" of "Indian logic" apparent in the text. In this passage the first two sentences could be understood as apologetic (handling the embarrassment) and the last sentence as explanatory. This is a good example of how a subaltern discourse must navigate in order to have a voice at all within the dominant discourse. I would like to emphasise that this must not be seen as a critique of Matilal's work, which is outstanding, but rather a critique of the situation in which Matilal is writing. Mimetic interpretation is not a shortcoming of any individual scholar's research but rather a consequence of an overall structure of academia. As previously mentioned, mimetic interpretation is seen as a *strategy* within a structure.

There has also been some discussion within the field concerning the very term "logic" and its use and meaning in relation to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Navya-Nyāya epistemology. In general the term "Indian logic" is frequently used to describe the theories on inferential knowledge, but it is less frequently given a specific definition or explanation.[14] Chatterjee, for example, uses "logical" with reference to questions concerning validity, in particular validity of induction, but does not explicitly define or clarify this.[15] Mohanty, on the other hand, distinguishes between logic_1 and logic_2, where logic_2 is the so-called "Indian variant" with its own internal distinctions.

His whole argument is built up from his understanding that in logic_1 there are certain distinctions that are incompatible with logic_2, the most important here being that between psychology and logic. Logic_1 seems to be derived from an understanding of logic found in Frege, Russell and to some extent Husserl who all embrace the idea that logical and psychological concepts should be kept in separate discourses. Examples of psychological concepts are, for example, "doubt" and "desire", concepts that play an important role in the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika analysis of inference. Mohanty's point of departure for the division of logic_1 and logic_2 is that the term "logic" should be possible to use in a "transcultural" sense.[16]

Matilal, on the other hand, uses the term "logic" in a wider

sense than Mohanty's logic$_1$ implying "the systematic study of informal inference-patterns, the rules of debate, the identification of sound inference vis-à-vis sophistical argument and similar topics".[17] He differentiates between an old and a new concept of "logic", where the older is wider in scope and thus more applicable than the newer concept of logic, which is highly specific.[18]

Siderits take another route altogether by problematising the very direction of our inquiring activity. Towards the end of his article on the nature of *anumāna* (inference) he suggests that we ask questions the other way around, as it were, so that the comparing element in our enquiry is directed towards ourselves rather than towards the other.

> We should instead be asking such questions as whether the Aristotelian syllogism is an *anumāna*, or whether the proofs of Euclidian geometry represent a kind of *tarka*...we should at least strive to make sure our investigations are not based on assumptions that hinder the raising of such questions.[19]

The point Siderits is trying to make, as I have understood it, is that one must remain aware of the limitations of one's own approach and be ready to abandon it, should it prove to be more of a hindrance than a clarifying enterprise.[20] Siderits arrives at this point through an enquiry concerning whether *anumāna* is deductive, inductive, both or neither.

The main problem in the discussion on the understanding of the term "Indian logic" is, of course, that the term "logic" does not have one single meaning or use within the discourse of European/American philosophy. Neither do we find one single understanding of *anumāna* within the Indian philosophical discourse. Insofar as this is the case the danger with mimetic translation is that it produces broad generalisations and homogenisations instead of painting a more heterogeneous and, perhaps foremost, a more particularised picture of the discourse. I have suggested elsewhere, as has Daya Krishna,

that one way out of this predicament is to begin to make specific, particularised outlines of the philosophising done by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, that is, to treat each and every philosopher writing within the textual tradition(s) of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika as an individual philosopher in his or her own right.[21]

Philosophy and Religion

A further point of embarrassment within the interpreting discourse is the presence of religious thought in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Navya-Nyāya. The epistemology, logic and ontology have, in these traditions, been expressed within a framework of soteriological expectations and theological ideas. This has been a general problem in many secondary interpretations and is related to two images of Indian philosophy. The first image could be understood as orientalistic, in the sense that Indian thinking in general is identified with spirituality and irrationality. India, in short, is construed as the opposite of European enlightenment rationality. Within such an understanding, Indian philosophy is easily dismissed as "religious" within the western academy. It was in this environment that in the early 1950s some Indologists begun to point out and emphasise the non-religious and rational, scientific aspects of Indian philosophy in general and Nyāya-Vaiseika and Navya-Nyāya in particular. The soteriological and theological strands of the traditions were sometimes dismissed as lip service to a cultural heritage presupposing and demanding them. Sometimes these aspects were simply ignored and not accounted for. Matilal writes the following apt remark concerning the contents of his book on logic, language and reality in Indian Philosophy:

> I have been concerned with certain broader questions of Indian Philosophy — the goal of human life, the idea of freedom, *moksha* and *samsāra* and the notion of the self and non-self. Although these problems are typically Indian, I still believe they ought to be of intrest to some modern philosophers (if, however, "philosophy" is narrowly defined to mean

simply analytical philosophy or the so-called "naturalism" in modern philosophy then this would not be the case).[22]

Although the need to disregard or suppress theological or soteriological concerns is slowly fading into the background, it is nevertheless still present in the current discourse. Phillips, for example, writes thus about Udayana, a medieval Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika who wrote an entire book on the topic of good reasons for god's existence: "My impression is that a vague theological universalism was honoured culturally, and that Udayana's apparent endorsement of it is mostly hand-waving."[23] Such dismissals, I must add, are common when it comes to all aspects of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Navya-Nyāya that are not apprehended as "philosophical" or "logical", in the analytical way of apprehending philosophy or logic, that is, where dimensions that could be interpreted as psychological, phenomenological, metaphysical and religious are left out.

This "leaving out" or "suppressing" makes for a secondary discourse that is one-sided and sometimes even shallow.[24] I think it is possible to understand this tendency to ignore large areas of the interpreted material within the secondary discourse in terms of a strategic mimetic interpretation. That is, in order to upgrade Indian philosophy in the eyes of European and American philosophers it was necessary to point to rational, logical and non-religious aspects if one wanted to be heard at all. Furthermore it was sometimes necessary to actively explain away embarrassing aspects. The strategy of mimetic translation has, however, failed. Philosophically inclined Indologists from Europe and America still claim to be overlooked by the philosophical discourse in large.[25]

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion I would like to outline two main problems connected with mimetic interpretation and the understanding of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. First of all, mimetic interpretation is problematic since it universalises one specific discourse into a

master discourse, the master discourse in this specific case entailing a specific European philosophical school, the analytical Anglo-Saxon tradition. This school operates with an absolute separation between psychology and logic and an opposition between rationality and religiosity.[26] This has resulted in a secondary discourse that is one-sided and narrow in scope. In my opinion, this demands that we particularise the master discourse by claiming that there is a multitude of ways of philosophising, arguing instead for perspective-sensitive and self-reflective research that can be conducted so as to produce multiple understandings of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Navya-Nyāya instead of one single miming. It should, however, be noticed here that western analytical philosophers have more readily taken in various Indian philosophical theories than their phenomenological colleagues. This is a state of affairs that according to Mohanty has to do with the historicist notions underlying phenomenology.[27] This brings us to the second problem of mimetic interpretation, which is more general and pertains to the understanding of our own understanding. That is, our understanding of the concepts we use to define and analyse our object of research: concepts such as rationality, logic, philosophy, religiosity, modernity, tradition, development, identity, culture, worldview and so on. In the mimetic interpretation, the understanding of rationality, for example, remains static and reified, and as such it only re-produces a slightly tarnished reflection of ourselves, and it thereby also fails to generate an ongoing understanding of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophising in its complexity and variety. This problem demands not only an identification of our terms of understanding but also an unlearning of the core of static ideas about our terms for understanding that produce shallow generalisations. We could, for example, cease to use culture as a defining aspect of difference and thereby unlearn the problematic tendency to speak of "Indian Philosophy". Or we could follow up the deconstruction of historicism so that development and progression will no longer be used to describe idea-historical events.[28]

It is my hope that in the course of identifying and unlearning we will also continually discuss and create alternative ways of understanding and thereby open up a space in which we may engage philosophically with a Praśastapāda or a Gaṅgeśa, just as we now can engage with a Plato or a Kant.

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[1] It is important to distinguish between the discourse that I analyse here and that of comparative philosophy, a discourse that explicitly aims to compare "European/American/Chinese" philosophy with "Indian" philosophy, which the sources in this essay do not.

[2] It should be noted that there is a great variety in the number of means of knowledge that are discerned by different schools of philosophy and by different individual philosophers.

[3] King 1999: xiii, 239.

[4] See for example Chakrabarty 2000: 5; King 1999: 14 and Mohanty 1993: 212. For a work on Gaṅgeśa that elegantly ignores this state of affairs, see Phillips 2002.

[5] King 1999: 240.

[6] Bhabha 2004: 122.

[7] I have used Bhabha's text passage as a stepping stone here, in spite of the fact that he eventually arrives at a conception of mimicry different from that described above.

[8] "Translating" here is of course not only related to the activity of translating certain Sanskrit texts but also to descriptions of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Navya-Nyāya episteme.

[9] Ganeri's "double-bind" that Indian logic risks falling into in a comparative project: either Indian logic is no logic at all, or it is seen as logic but remains in the state of being almost as good but not quite. Ganeri 2001: 21.

[10] Chakrabarty 2000: 31.

[11] Tachikawa 1981: 4.

[12] Matilal 1998: 14.

[13] Matilal 1998: 14 and Matilal 1986: 118.

[14] See for example Vidyabhushana 1921; Randle 1930; Stcherbatsky 1962; Goekoop 1967; Guha 1979; and Potter 1995.

[15] Chatterjee 1950: 249.

[16] Mohanty 1992: 106.

[17] Matilal 1998: 1.
[18] Matilal 1998: 1.
[19] Siderits 2003: 317.
[20] Siderits 2003: 303.
[21] Sjödin 2006: 162 and Krishna 1991: 14.
[22] Matilal 1985: ix.
[23] Phillips 1997: 69.
[24] For example as in the case of *tarka*, a supportive reasoning within the process of reaching inferential knowledge. Sjödin 2006: 148.
[25] King 1999: 239, Phillips 2000: 235.
[26] Siderits 2003 is a good example of an analytical philosopher who is sensitive to this problem.
[27] Mohanty 2000: 278.
[28] The unlearning of historicism is argued for by Chakrabarty 2000: 249. See also Sjödin 2006: 29 and Mohanty 2000: 279.

TEACHING ISLAM
Approaching Secular Hegemony in Education

Jenny Berglund

Who has the right to decide which representations of the world that are the most valid? In whose interests are the representations made? Even though Sweden has not been a colonial power in the same sense as many other European countries, it is relevant to include Sweden in a postcolonial perspective since this country, both intellectually and politically, has been related to dominant colonial powers and thereby became a part of this historical and political phenomenon.[1] One part of the colonial project has been to create distanced pictures of "the Other" to legitimise one's own position of power.

The establishment of Muslim schools in Sweden raises several questions about cultural categorisation and representation that could be related to such a postcolonial perspective since the debates about these schools are generally coloured by created dichotomies between *we* and *others*, based on an essentialist understanding of culture and religion, where Islam is presented as a well-defined, unchangeable unity that exercises a determining influence over how people who belong to this specific culture or religion act.

Even though denominational schools adhering to Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions exist in Sweden, it is Muslim schools in particular that in the general media debate have been portrayed as schools for "others". These schools tend to be depicted as places where scientific facts are ignored and where the teachers are not properly qualified.[2] In this discussion, the municipal school easily becomes a stereotype

for non-confessional "modern" religious education, while the Muslim school with confessional Islamic religious education is viewed as something very different.[3] The dichotomy between *we* and *others* also carries a created duality between confessional and non-confessional religious education, as it is only in denominational schools (within the Swedish school system) that confessional religious education can take place. In the debate about Muslim schools, confessional and non-confessional education are discussed as fixed entities thereby nourishing the idea of them as being in opposition to each other.

The aim of this essay is to problematise this dichotomy between confessional and non-confessional education, using Islamic religious education at Muslim schools as an example. By doing this I also want to question the oft-created picture of Muslim schools as being opposed to municipality schools.[4]

In the first part of this essay, I show how Muslim schools might be seen as a reaction against the hegemony of the state school. I then continue by using the Islamic religious education that is provided at two Muslims schools as an example to point out the problems that dichotomising between confessional and non-confessional education entail, showing that they instead could be viewed as belonging to the same "meta-narratives" that dominate educational discussions in Swedish society.

Schools for Religious Others

One of the many reasons why Muslim schools began to be established in Sweden at the beginning of the 1990s is the fact that in 1992 the Education Act was amended to make it less difficult to found independent schools.[5] Although the education offered by independent schools (including those of a denominational character) must have the same basic aims as the education offered by municipal schools, an independent school is allowed to have a "profile" that distinguishes it from a municipal school. This profile often consists of a specific school ethos as well as additional curricular subjects

that are incorporated into the weekly schedule. In Sweden, schools classified as "independent" are generally divided into five distinct profile categories, "denominational" being one.[6] Sixty of Sweden's denominational schools are labelled as Christian, three as Jewish and nine as Muslim (2006). According to the Education Act, independent schools must be open to everyone, regardless of faith, and must be approved by the National Agency for Education. While run privately, Sweden's independent schools are nonetheless subsidised by the state. Ajagan-Lester claims that the establishment of Muslim schools might be seen as a reaction against municipal schools as they have nothing other than heteronomy and submission to offer to minority pupils.[7] In my opinion his claim is supported by a study made by the Swedish National Agency for Education which shows that Muslim parents[8] state the following reasons for their choice of a Muslim school: negative view of Islam in state schools and schoolbooks, poor religious education according to Islam, insufficient discipline, fear of narcotics and alcohol, too many immigrant groups in the state schools that are in the neighbourhood, no respect for some of the practical rules concerning food, clothing, prayer, nudity, fasting et cetera. Another important aspect that was highlighted in the study was the possibility to make oneself understood in the Muslim school. Parents who had had their children in state schools gave witness to a humiliating and degrading feeling of being an outsider and stranger. They felt it was impossible to live up to their parental roles in relation to the school and their children.[9] A more recent study about "the choice of school" (*skolvalfribet*) points in the same direction: the choice of a Muslim school is not generally a choice made for religious reasons, but rather for the sake of security and wellbeing. The choice is a way of avoiding differentiation; hence the choice has to do with power to exert of influence and democracy.[10]

According to the national curriculum, *all* parents should be able to feel "the same confidence that they can send their

children to the state school certain that the children would not be influenced by any particular view."[11] Apparently many of the parents who choose Muslim schools do not agree that *all* parents feel confident in the municipal schools. As the above mentioned studies indicate, the choice of a Muslim school is often made to get away from the municipal schools where the parents feel they are in an unbalanced power relation. Muslim schools thereby risk becoming schools for "religious Others" in the eyes of the majority society, as the parents who have chosen the Muslim school feel like strangers in the municipal school. According to studies done in other European countries, many Muslim pupils are enrolled at public as well as private Christian schools. Some researchers state that Muslim parents who prefer Christian schools do this because of the positive attitude towards religion, the stricter discipline and the fewer numbers of foreign children in these schools.[12]

Reactions to the Hegemony of Secularism

When distinguishing between confessional religious education and non-confessional religious education, the expressions learning *into*, *about* and *from* are often used. Learning *into* religion is when education brings the pupil *into* one specific faith tradition. When learning *about* religion, the pupil learns what religion means to believers of a particular faith. Learning *from* religion is when pupils are required to consider different answers to major moral and religious questions in order to develop their own views.[13] A goal of the non-confessional religious education that is stipulated by the Swedish national syllabus is to learn *about* and in some respects *from* different religious traditions and worldviews. It is clear that a school should not teach the pupils to practise any specific religion; instead it is supposed to be "neutral" in relation to religious traditions. The "neutrality" of religious education has been strongly questioned, and it has been claimed that the non-confessional religious education is instead an education *into*

secularism, or at least has a very strong secular bias.[14] It has also been suggested that to claim a certain set of "fundamental values" independent of religion is as much an expression of faith as any religion, as it has a truth claim that is binding for everyone.[15] Confessional schools in general might therefore also be seen as a reaction against this "religiously secular" position.

Meta-Narratives of Non-Confessional Religious Education

In order to further understand reactions against the non-confessional religious education and to get a suitable tool for the further analysis of Islamic religious education, I use an analysis offered by Andrew Wright in a somewhat modified form. He claims that the whole idea of learning about and from religion is based on what he calls "the meta-narratives" of modernity: naturalism, romanticism and liberalism.

1. Naturalism, as the desire to learn about religions from a neutral standpoint, leads, according to Wright, to the reduction of religion to "the sum of religious culture as it is described, organised and categorised within the framework of post-Enlightenment modes of thought". The concern for objectivity hides the idea that religion is only properly understood from the vantage point of faith, and in so doing demands acceptance of the values and assumptions of modernity itself. It thereby neglects theological questions of truth, and the truth claims of religious traditions are pushed aside as if they are not important for the believer.

2. Liberalism means that religious education aims to promote freedom and tolerance. It thereby risks avoiding the fact that many interpretations of religions are non-liberal. This leads to a situation where religious education, for the sake of political correctness, interprets most religious traditions as liberal.

3. Romanticism is relevant because when religious education claims that it is possible and desirable for the individual

to learn from different religious traditions, it reduces religious doctrine to expressions of spiritual experience rather than providing a viable explanation of "the order-of-things".[16]

I find Wright's analysis useful for several reasons. It clarifies aspects of religious education in Sweden, highlighting the fact that non-confessional religious education might be seen as an education *into* naturalism, romanticism and liberalism. Therefore it is possible to apprehend it as confessional even though it claims to be objective or neutral, thereby further clarifying that against which denominational schools might be seen as reacting. I am aware of the fact that Wright's analysis may simplify the situation of religious education, not taking in account its complexity. My intention when using his argumentation in relation to Islamic religious education and the question of Muslim schools is not to claim that Islamic religious education is the same as non-confessional religious education. My intention is simply to show that the here analysed Islamic religious education is dependent on the same meta-narratives as non-confessional religious education, even though it also might be seen as a reaction against it.

Education into Islam

Islamic religious education only makes up a small part of the daily schedule at Muslim schools in Sweden. Among the schools I have visited and done fieldwork in, one school has three hours of Islamic religious education per week. Most schools have one hour per week, sometimes complemented with morning gatherings and religiously inspired music lessons. All other lessons are, according to teachers or headmasters, taught in a non-confessional manner as stipulated by the national syllabuses.[17] Even though it is possible to label Islamic religious education in all these schools as education *into* religion, as the intention clearly is to show the pupil how to live a good life in accordance with Islam, the content of the lessons varies between schools. For example, in some schools

Quran education is part of the lessons, in others it is not.[18] Ethical and moral concerns are often taught through Quranic narratives.[19] These narratives are chosen by the teachers in order to give guidance for situations in Swedish society that the teachers consider important for the pupils. Even though it is not my intention in this essay to further elaborate on the reasons for the variations between the Islamic religious education at different schools, I find it important to mention that one reason for differences is that these schools are run by different groups of people who adhere to different interpretations of Islam. The pedagogical background of the teacher is also of importance. Most teachers of Islamic religious education have a pedagogical education, although their pedagogical education is not acknowledged or recognised by the National Board of Education.[20] The ethnographic accounts that follow are intended to highlight the meta-narratives in which I claim that the here analysed Islamic religious education as well as non-confessional religious education might be seen to be embedded.

One Has to Understand

Sana is an experienced teacher of Islamic religious education. Her teaching is very much concerned with what she calls "behaviour". She wants the pupils to learn what appropriate Muslim behaviour is, and that practising Islam is more important than only believing in Islam. Even though she considers memorisation and recitation of the Quran important, it is not part of her Islamic religious teaching. As she only has one lesson a week for Islamic religious education, she prefers to use this lesson to teach the pupils how to practise Islam on a concrete level. That is, how to perform certain rituals and how to behave properly in different situations. If the parents want their children to learn how to recite the Quran, they will have to teach them themselves or send them to Quran classes outside school (many parents do). Even though she does not

teach the children how to recite the Quran, the recited words of the Quran are an important part of her teaching. For example, when teaching the children how to pray, reciting the al-Fatiha (the opening sura of the Quran that is recited in the daily prayers) becomes an important part of Sana's lessons. The following talk is from a classroom of second graders:

Sana, together with the class, has just counted how many times a day one recites the al-Fatiha. She then says:

> Consider that we read the al-Fatiha 17 times every day! What does this mean? It means that we must understand what we are reading. Perhaps it is a little bit easier for those of you who know Arabic, but one has to understand. If we do not understand, we cannot concentrate.[21]

Historically, children have learned how to recite the words of the Quran without any translations or explanations of the meaning of the words; this is also the case in many Quran lessons today.[22] The purpose of memorising verses in the Quran is most often to teach the pupils how to recite. Recitation is not only considered a feat of memory and oral performance, it is also regarded as "worship, meditation and sublime aesthetic enjoyment".[23]

To memorise the verses of the Quran without translation and explanation might seem unusual as many children often do not understand the words, especially in terms of what we experience as a western pedagogical outlook where the prevailing ideal is that children learn through an interactive process that takes place between teacher and pupil and where the pupil is actively constructing knowledge.[24] This has led to the fact that many western scholars have characterised the memorisation and recitation of the Quran as being "without any process of thinking as such"[25], thereby depreciating the tradition of memorisation which is important in many Muslim societies.[26] In some respect Sana agrees with the idea that recitation without understanding is wrong. According to Sana, learning

to understand what the words of the al-Fatiha mean is part of the process of *taqwa* which is her aim with Islamic religious education. She explains *taqwa* as "protection". She says "protection so that the child learns what is right or wrong. The child has to learn to decide on things without its mother, father or teacher." *Taqwa* is often translated as piety;[27] to have *taqwa* is to be virtuous and God conscious. Sana claims that if the child learns *taqwa*, it becomes protected from bad things in life. When Sana talks to the children about praying, she says that it is a way of talking to God and therefore they have to understand what they say. Sana spends many weeks explaining the words of the al-Fatiha; every word is translated and interpreted. That teachers spend time on the al-Fatiha is not at all unique. To start by teaching the al-Fatiha and then continue with the shortest suras in the end of the Quran is the most common way of teaching the suras in classical Quranic education.[28] But Sana does not teach the children how to recite; she considers the understanding of the words more important. She claims that it is of the utmost importance for the pupils to learn what the words of the al-Fatiha mean, to understand what they say during prayer. Note that the precise explanation of the Quran is by many considered a science in itself.[29] Thus, at least historically, informal attempts to explain meaning have often not taken place within the first years of Quran education.[30]

Sana's way of arguing for understanding exemplifies a shift in the structures and sources of religious authority among reformist Muslims who want to inspire the individual to an individual commitment to the Scriptures instead of leaving it to the scholars of religious law.[31] This reformist position is a product of modernity as well as a way of "coming to grips" with it.[32] The reformist approach to modernity has often been to argue for a return to the time of the prophet Muhammad to find the "authentic Islam", an Islam that, according to their interpretation, has many signs of modernity. For example, it is through *understanding* that Sana argues that children have

to learn how to decide what is right or wrong; it is through understanding the words of God that they eventually can be released from the patronage of their parents and teachers.[33] Hence, it is possible to argue that Sana's teaching is not only an education *into* Islam; it is also an education *into* some of the presumptions of modernity. According to Sana, this is the original way of teaching and understanding Islam. This is how Islamic religious education should be performed, according to her, the way Islam was taught during Muhammad's life and during the first generations after him, long before modernity.

Religion Is a Private Matter

Fatme, another teacher of Islamic religious education, claims that Muslim schools are important as there are so many prejudices about Muslims in municipal schools and that Muslim children often feel aggrieved there. She says that there is a risk that children get lost in society if they do not receive support from their environment. According to her, both parents and children feel "safer" in the denominational school.

Fatme also has one hour of Islamic religious education with each class per week. During this hour she teaches recitation of the Quran through memorisation, stories about the prophets, how to perform the most important rituals, handwriting and *nasheed,* singing. Her aim with Islamic religious education is that the children should become confident as Muslims, and that they should learn about Islam "in the right way". Fatme wants the pupils to "get a good foundation and find their identity". In our discussions, she often returns to her opinion that "religion is a private matter." For example, she argues that there is no reason why Muslims should have to defend their faith all the time. She says that: "We believe in Christianity and Judaism, and therefore, it is important to teach the pupils to respect these religions. We believe that Jesus is a prophet, but it is important to show respect to those who think he is the son of God." During a lesson, a pupil says: "There are Arabs

who say that that we (Muslims) should not believe in Jesus." Fatme answers: "We have to believe in Jesus as a prophet, but we do not believe that he is the son of God. We have to respect the faith of others."

Fatme's way of talking about her teaching could be situated within the meta-narrative of liberalism. She adheres to the liberal idea of religious education promoting tolerance when she talks about her belief in Christianity and Judaism. On the other hand, it would be misleading to disregard how her arguments differ from liberalism as well, since it is ascertained by the Islamic tradition and is thereby not a matter of choice. For Fatme it is the true way of understanding Islam. Tolerance is apparently a goal both in the confessional religious education of Fatme and in the non-confessional religious education that is stipulated in the national syllabus. An interesting feature is that if one follows Wright's line of argumentation, the idea of non-confessional religious education promoting tolerance depends on a situation where religious education interprets religious traditions as liberal. In Fatme's line of argumentation, tolerance depends on an interpretation in which people are Christians or Jews. Both these lines of argumentation might be seen as problematic as all interpretations of religion are not liberal, and all people are not Christians or Jews.

Fatme also speaks of religion as a private matter, encapsulating the secular assumption that religion belongs to the private sphere, not the public. Her argumentation is interesting in relation to the idea of Muslim schools as a reaction against secularism, which might be understood in different ways. One way of understanding secularism is through the growing differentiation of society into separate fields, leaving religion as a private concern separated from the public realms of society.[34] In my understanding, Fatme's words about religion as a private matter might be seen in relation to the notion of secularism, as she gives the same answer as secularism to the question about where there is room for religion, thereby moving religion away from the public realm.[35] On the other hand, denominational

schools in general pose a challenge to this understanding of secularism, as religion in denominational schools creates an awareness of Islam that is not located in the private sphere. In a way, denominational schools in general create a paradox. When the religious Others choose to establish their own schools, they confirm the secularist idea that it is problematic to be religious in the state school. Although they might be seen as a reaction against the secular school, denominational schools become a confirmation of the dominant secularist notion that there is no room for religion in the common public space. In a way, denominational schools become necessary for the secularist (not secular)[36] idea of education, as it is through being the opposite of confessional religious education that the secularist education finds its legitimacy.

Science and the Quran

For Sana it is important to show the pupils that there is no opposition between science and Islam. Many of her relatives are highly educated within the natural sciences as well as in Islam, which according to her is the same process; to learn more about the universe through natural science is a way of learning more about God. The following examples from classroom situations are meant to show how she talks about the relation between science and religion with the pupils. The first example is from the introduction of a lesson about the daily prayers in grade two:

> This weekend I read an article from the United States. It was about a hospital with worried and restless patients. The doctors have shown that massage with water on the hands and the feet of the patients make the patients calmer. We, Muslims do this five times a day, and this makes you calmer. The prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, said that if you are angry, drink water or do *wudu*.[37] You can also change your position so the anger goes away. If you are sitting, you can stand up and if you are standing, you can sit down. The

> anger comes from the fire and water removes the anger. Then you can come back and talk to the person you are on bad terms with.

The next example is also from grade two. In science class, the class is working with space, and the classroom is covered with pictures of planets and the solar systems. Several pictures describe the Big Bang theory both in writing and drawing.

> I heard that you are talking about space. What does Islam say about space? You have learned about the Big Bang and I have copied a verse for the other class that I want to give to you as well. It is *Aya* 30 from the Prophet's Sura. [Sura 21] Those who did research came to the conclusion that the Big Bang happened. Allah made a marble and it split. The scientists came to the same conclusion as the Quran that Muhammed, peace be upon him, reached 1400 years ago.

Sana explains in an interview that the children get the scientific explanation in science class and the religious explanation in Islamic religious education and that she finds it important that they know both. She says that it happens that the children think they conflict. She gives an example of some children who said to their science teacher that it is not the sun that makes them healthy — it is God. Sana then took a mediating position and said that as God created the sun, there is no opposition.

In the first example, Sana, with her religious authority as a teacher, shows that reading scientific articles is a good thing to do. The fact that the article is American and that it deals with the concerns of doctors give it scientific weight. The ritual washing of feet and hands with water (*wudu*) that precedes the daily prayers is given a scientific and rational explanation through the article. When she says that anger comes from fire, I understand her as referring to the Islamic belief in Sheytan (Satan) who is supposed to have been created by fire. According to Sana, calmness is a way of avoiding doing or saying bad

things. Sheytan is the force that makes people become angry and do bad things. The children know that fire is put out by water, and in analogy with this it becomes logical that the water used in *wudu* makes people calm, as it washes away the anger. In the second example, the Big Bang is legitimised by the Quran and at the same time the Quran is legitimised by the scientists. I understand her comment as being meant to show the pupils that God knows everything, but as the world is so complicated, it apparently takes time before humans find out how it is all organised.

These examples show how Sana's religious education might be seen as part of the meta-narrative of naturalism, which is embedded in the idea that it is by describing our observed experience in a scientific, well-organised and logical way that we are able to establish knowledge of the natural world.[38] Sana's way of speaking is related to the realm of God, who in her opinion is observable through the natural world. Sana's argument above exemplifies a trend among Muslim reformers to use established concepts of Islamic thought and identify them with dominant ideas in the natural sciences.[39] This process is often described as "the Islamisation of science".[40] Accordingly, Sana's teaching might be seen as a teaching *into* naturalism. What differs from the non-confessional subjects is that God is explicitly part of her worldview and that she believes that God's existence is possible to prove with scientific facts. This shows that the dichotomous idea of confessional Islamic education being the opposite of non-confessional education that supports the notion of we and others is much more complex than perceived in the general debate about denominational schools.

The Question of Representation

When discussing the ethnographic accounts I have tried to show that Sana's and Fatme's teaching could be understood as part of the same meta-narratives as in the non-confessional

religious education, that is the meta-narrative of naturalism, liberalism and modernity. This suggests that the oft-created dichotomy between non-confessional religious education and the Islamic religious education of Sana and Fatme is inadequate. Instead of being one of two possible positions within a dichotomy, their Islamic religious education is rather part of the same meta-narratives as non-confessional education.

Nevertheless, there is a difference concerning ontological assumptions. God is an unquestionable part of reality for Fatme and Sana. The reason why the children need to learn *taqwa*, according to Sana, is to be in line with God's will. As God has a certain intention for humans on earth, the scientists have found out that earth was created by the Big Bang. Scientists can only find out what God has created. For example, an American scientist has found that water calms worried patients because God has created humans in this particular way. A proof of God's existence is that he has revealed his intentions and many other things in the Quran. If one would compare the ethnographic accounts with similar situations within the non-confessional education, it is, as I see it, not the content that differs but the presuppositions of reality. The Big Bang, calming patients with water and the necessity of solar radiation for human health are not connected to the existence of God in non-confessional education.

The Religious Other?

I now would like to bring the discussion back to the post-colonial perspective that aims to question the creation of the distinction between *we* and *the others*. In my opinion, an essentialist representation generated by dichotomies dominates the discussion about Muslim schools even though there apparently are more versions. In this essay, I have tried to show why the dichotomies surrounding the contemporary discussion about confessional religious education at Muslim schools are insufficient. Even though Islamic religious education

presupposes the existence of God, which of course differs from non-confessional religious education, it has a great deal in common with non-confessional religious education. Instead of being the opposite of non-confessional religious education, Islamic religious education, at least in the case of Sana and Fatme, is to some extent part of the same meta-narratives as non-confessional education. The dichotomy needs to be questioned since it creates otherness and tends to exclude and throw suspicion on teachers, parents and pupils in Muslim schools.

The creation of otherness works in several stages. It begins when pupils and parents feel like strangers in the municipal school, and when they do not perceive the teaching as neutral but as "religiously secular". The choice they make to feel security is understood by the majority society as a choice of dissociation and often leads to a view of Muslim schools as being in opposition to the municipal schools.

The image of Muslim schools and Islamic religious education as something very different from education in municipal schools is something that is created without the participation of the pupils, parents and teachers involved. Even though Islamic religious education is part of the same educational meta-narrative as non-confessional religious education, and the teachers have the intention to teach the pupils to take part in the majority society, Muslim schools are still most often viewed by the majority society as schools for "the religious Other".

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[1] Mc Eachrane & Faye 2001.

[2] For example, "Children should have the right to a rational picture of the world within the obligatory school. It is therefore time for the society to 'put its foot down' concerning the question of denominational schools. They should not be accepted." Sturmark 2005. See also Sabuni 2005 and Fjelkner 2006.

[3] The debate about Muslim schools has been heated during the latest years. These schools are, at least by the media, seen as a controversial part of the Swedish educational system. What sets Muslim schools apart from state schools is that, in addition to the subjects that are mandated by the national syllabus, they teach Islam in a confessional manner. This is done within a school system which is regulated by a national curriculum that stipulates that "education in school should be non-confessional". See for example Berglund & Larsson 2007.

[4] This study is based on fieldwork conducted for my forthcoming thesis (Berglund 2009). I find it interesting to study Islamic religious education because it is a school subject that differs from the ones taught at municipal schools. All the targets of the subjects mandated in the national curriculum have to be reached in both state and independent schools; Islamic education is not mentioned in the national curriculum but might be seen as an extra curricular subject. Extra curricular subjects also have to live up to the "fundamental values" stipulated by the national curriculum. Utbildningsdepartementet 1994.

[5] Before 1992, few denominational schools existed in Sweden. These were mostly Christian, although one Jewish school had been established in Stockholm. See for example Algotsson 1975; Berglund & Larsson 2007.

[6] Descriptive data 2006: 42. The other profiles are "General, Special Education Method, Language/Ethnic and Special Subject".

[7] Ajagan-Lester 2001.

[8] I want to point out that the parents in this study do not represent Muslim parents in general. These parents make up a subgroup of all Muslim parents in Sweden.

[9] Skolverket 1997.

[10] Bunar & Kallstenius 2006.

[11] Utbildningsdepartementet 1994, see also www.skolverket.se.

[12] Shadid & Koningsveld 1995: 106.

[13] Schreiner 2002: 86–87.

[14] Wright 2004; Björlin 2006 and Osbeck & Cöster 2005. The national curriculum in Sweden does express a secular worldview in terms of not wanting to favour any religion (although Christianity is claimed to be the administrator of the fundamental values), but it does not express hostility against religious practice and faith in a secularist mode. Utbildningsdepartementet 1994.

[15] Osbeck & Cöster 2005.

[16] Wright 2004: 179–194. Wright claims that there are religions that could be considered non-liberal. I do not agree with Wright on this matter, as I do not think it is possible to talk about an entire religion in this sense. Instead I find it more fruitful to talk about interpretations of religions.

[17] I have visited nine schools and done fieldwork in three of them. The fieldwork consists of classroom observations primarily in Islamic religious education classes (but sometimes also in religiously inspired music classes) and informal interviews with teachers responsible for these classes. The fieldwork took place during 2005. At the 6 schools that I only visited, I held informal interviews with the teachers of Islamic religious education and/or headmasters. I also had informal talks with teachers who were responsible for other subjects.

[18] For an example of Quran education within a Muslim school in Sweden, see Berglund 2006.

[19] A Quranic narrative is a narrative that has a connection to the Quran but might not be found in its entirety there.

[20] At one school I visited I had the opportunity to read a statement from the National Agency of Education which organised made an inspection of the school. In this statement it is said that the teacher of Islamic religious education has no pedagogical education. The teacher has no Swedish teacher training but has a diploma in teacher education from a non-European country. For some reason the National Agency of Education does not consider this do be a pedagogical education. This is a general problem for many people holding foreign diplomas. See for example Englund 2003.

[21] It is important to keep in mind that the vocabulary and grammar of the Quran are not immediately accessible to speakers of colloquial Arabic, which is what some of the pupils speak. This means that the pupils most often do not understand what they are reading and reciting.

[22] Robinson 2003: 172–173; Eickelman 1978: 492. See also Berglund 2006 for an example from a Swedish school.

[23] Denny Mathewson 1995: 397. The word Quran or al-Qur'ān means "the recitation" both in a performative and instructive sense. Graham 1987: 88. The concern for the ability to be able to read or recite the Quran originates from the fact that the Quran is regarded as the very word of God. Hence, the act of reciting is considered a good and pious act. According to Graham, appreciation of reciting

the Quran is "not only a sign of Muslim faith but the essential common thread in the diverse fabric of the myriad of different cultures of the Islamic world — the identifiable tie binding Muslims across barriers of language, colour, and custom, as well as time and place." Graham 1987: 105. See Sura 33:41 for reference in the Quran.

[24] Eickelman 1985: 57.

[25] Hodgson in Eickelman 1985: 57.

[26] Dale F. Eickelman argues, in contrast, that the measure of "understanding" suitable to the memorisation of religious texts is its use. The "understanding" consists in the ability to use particular Quranic verses in suitable contexts. Eickelman also shows how parents or other skilled adults outside school integrate Quranic verses into particular contexts, thereby showing the young generation how to use the memorised verses. The ability to understand the verses might consequently be seen as more practical and functional than theoretical, having many similarities with the knowledge of crafts. Eickelman 1978: 492–494 and Graham 1987: 103.

[27] Shboul 1995: 189.

[28] Sells 1999.

[29] Explicit explanation is considered a science in itself to be acquired only through years in the advanced study of exegetical literature: *tafsir* = "interpretation". For example: a *tafsir* of the Quran provides an interpretation or commentary on the Arabic text, Rippin 2000.

[30] Robinson 2003.

[31] Waines 2003: 230–231.

[32] Zia 2006: 8. The works of Muslim scholars such as al-Afghani (d.1897), Muhammad Abduh (d.1905) and Hasan al Banna (d.1949) have been and are an inspiration for reformism in Islam. See also Sayyid 2003.

[33] Compare with Kant: Enlightenment gave education a very special position in society. Kant's classical definition of enlightenment: "men's release from his self-incurred tutelage through the exercise of his own understanding" makes us understand the importance of education, as Kant claimed that it was only through education that humans could be able to use their ability to think freely. The idea of modern education is easily traced back to Kant's ideas and in many western democracies the ideal is that the school system should create democratic citizens. Kant & Beck 1959. See also Biesta 2002: 345.

[34] McGuire 2002: 285.

[35] For a discussion about secularisation in Islam, see for example

Tayob 2005.

[36] In the secularist idea religious considerations should be excluded from education, but in the secular idea religious considerations should not be influenced by any specific religion.

[37] *Wudu* = ritual ablutions before the daily prayers.

[38] Wright 2004: 17.

[39] See for example Larsson 2006: 56 about interpretations of the Quran in relation to the natural sciences.

[40] See for example Stenberg 1996.

PRESERVING THE IMPERMANENT PAST

Challenging Notions of Heritage Preservation in Archaeology

Anna Karlström

Preservation is one of the main aims within applied international heritage management. Starting from the idea that heritage is universal and belongs to all the people of the world, UNESCO states in the World Heritage Convention[1] that heritage is an irreplaceable property threatened by destruction and therefore needs to be protected and preserved for future generations (and preferably forever). Even though UNESCO is not the only organisation currently working with heritage management internationally, this organisation still is responsible for much of it, and the World Heritage Convention has to be taken into consideration by everyone working within this field. When looking at the history and development of heritage management as an academic discipline and practice, it is not difficult to see that it has its roots in a eurocentric world, founded on western worldviews.

Even if recent debates in heritage management are interdisciplinary and aim at being inclusive, they still are based on the above-mentioned ideal, namely that things from the past must be maintained unchanged. Preservation is the core of heritage management and is seen as opposed to impeading destruction and decay — the Utopian ideal would be to preserve everything. And in a way the colonial project continues, because the conventions and guidelines formulated by organisations representing western worldviews are supposed to be followed and implemented all over the world, regardless of the fact that the majority of the people in the world do not

share western worldviews. For most people in the area where I work, Southeast Asia, the heritage management described above is an abstract mental construct of no significance to more than a very few.

Materiality is central to heritage management. The old model of heritage as material has now partly given way to another model: heritage as social action,[2] in which immaterial and spiritual values, such as living traditions and forms of expression, are also recognised.[3] Even though cultural heritage is not limited to material manifestations, it is still the appreciation of heritage as material that motivates preservation and protection of this intangible heritage as well. But protection of intangible heritage, which for the most part is recreated and constantly changing, becomes a contradiction in terms.

To illustrate the problem that occurs when western worldviews, through these heritage conventions, are imposed on people and contexts that are not part of the western world, I will in this essay explore different understandings of materiality and argue for a deeper questioning of the taken-for-granted preservationist ideal that operates within recent heritage management practices. My focus is the understanding of materiality within the kind of Buddhism that to a great extent constitutes most Lao people's worldview today. This includes particular religious practices and beliefs that are not taken into account in the field of heritage management. These religious practices and beliefs are complex, as are all religious practices and beliefs, whereas universal heritage management strategies, such as UNESCO's conventions, instead presuppose essential notions about what heritage is and means.

Archaeology, Heritage Management and Buddhism

Buddhist archaeology (as a subfield of archaeology) is often based on a historical perspective and focuses primarily on material concerns in early Buddhism: its origin, art and

architecture, and the typology of Buddhist monuments, artefacts and sites,[4] but it is also based on socio-political relationships to the non-Buddhist world (in history) and how archaeology can contribute to our understanding of religious practice.[5] More rare are discussions on how Buddhist ideologies, cosmologies and values are related to perceptions of heritage, which means employing a contemporary perspective.

Anna Källén combines the historical and contemporary perspectives in her doctoral thesis, which is a study of a site in Laos where people lived 2500 years ago, but also a study of how this site is perceived and used today, and the reasons for that.[6] In his paper in a *World Archaeology* issue on Buddhist archaeology,[7] Denis Byrne focuses on the field of heritage studies and utilises a contemporary perspective. He claims that current conservation practices prioritise original, physical structures and materials over local religious practice.[8] This results in the exclusion of other discourses which might not even regard the objects as archaeological. I also agree with Byrne's claim that religious monuments and objects are primarily spiritual in nature and have little to do with the physical continuity of that religion's structure and form.[9] In such a discourse, spirituality must be taken into account when developing conservation ethics or heritage management programmes.

The notion of material impermanence, which governs the perception of reality in a Buddhist context, and its relation to the preservationist ideal in heritage management must be brought up for discussion.[10] To better understand the contemporary perspective, it is also necessary to include the disciplines of Religion, History and Southeast Asian and Culture Studies in general. For my particular study, Stanley J. Tambiah's *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in North-east Thailand* (1970) has been important, as it explores the religious practices and beliefs of the people living geographically very close to Vientiane in Laos, which is the area where I have been working. What Tambiah describes

is a complex mixture of Buddhism and animism, which is applicable to the context I study. Donald K. Swearer provides a comprehensive analysis of popular Buddhism and its role in the modern nation states of Southeast Asia,[11] which also contributes to a better understanding of how materiality and the past are perceived in Laos today.

The Complexity of Buddhism in Laos

It seems common to think of Laos's history as something that started in the thirteenth century. This is also the point in time when Theravada Buddhism entered the scene and a Buddhist world-view started to be generally accepted and adopted by people in this area. Today, Buddhism officially constitutes the primary religion in Laos. According to official statistics the proportion of the population who consider themselves Buddhists varies between 60 and 95 per cent.[12] This statistically vague picture illustrates, I think, more than anything else the heterogeneous nature of Buddhism in general.

There is a distinction between canonical (or doctrinal) and popular[13] Buddhism, which is of some importance here. Canonical Buddhism is more or less a theoretical construct, and could best be described as an extreme religious practice that only, but not always, occurs within the temple and is practised by the *sangha*.[14] In canonical Buddhism, materiality is a matter of no concern, whereas in popular Buddhism it becomes extremely significant as people gain merit and tangible benefits through constantly performing "material" acts that are part of public worship and ritual.

These material acts exist mainly because animism, the belief in spirits, is a significant part of popular Buddhism. Therefore, the prevalent religious reality in Laos today is better represented by these complex and individual combinations of Buddhist and animist beliefs and practices in popular Buddhism, rather than by canonical Buddhism

with its high ideals and otherworldly goals, which often is how Buddhism is understood and characterised in western academia. I will describe popular Buddhism and how it is practised in Laos soon, by focusing on certain representations, how they become empowered and also on the act of merit-making. But first I will present animism and its relation to Buddhism.

Basically, animism means that spirits animate various kinds of objects. In Laos, the belief in spirits, or *phii*, is the most obvious and common expression of animism. *Phii* are ubiquitous and diverse, and include "a wide variety of supernatural agents ranging from those who are a permanently existing category of supernaturals to those who are transformations of dead human beings".[15] During my different fieldwork seasons I made an effort to understand the significance of *phii*, but realised it was a somewhat sensitive issue as my informants often were reluctant to answer my questions about it. However, after persistently asking about the spirits I understood that *phii* can exist in many different ways. There are for example bad, dangerous and wild spirits residing in nature (forest *phii* and *phii* of the rice field), and a number of malevolent spirits that cause illnesses.

One can seek protection and remedies against these through the performance of different rites and offerings, or by wearing certain protective objects such as amulets or tattoos. Other spirits are protective, such as the *khwan*. It is believed that the human being has thirty-two *khwan*. Together they comprise a unity, which is thought to be a kind of spirit essence.[16] But if one or more of these spirits leaves the body, this can also cause illness. To preserve the balance or restore the individual spiritual essence, which the *khwan* represent, particular rites are performed: the *sukhwan* rites, more commonly known as *baci*.

In addition to the malevolent and protective spirits, there are also ancestor and guardian spirits. Maintaining good relations with these often involves certain rituals and acts at

different levels (community, household and individual). An example is the daily food offerings at spirit houses, which are miniature houses located in private gardens, temple compounds or elsewhere, and which host beneficient spirits of the household or temple, depending on where they are placed. My understanding of *phii* is that they are very much present in the everyday life of most people living in Laos.

Animism and Buddhism are seemingly contradictory. In Western academia this contradiction and fundamental inconsistency between animism and Buddhism is often recognised as a categorical opposition. Often, it is also the canonical Buddhism that is regarded as the essence and reality of Buddhism, and is therefore studied. I can agree with that to a certain extent, because I also use the ideas of canonical Buddhism as the baseline in my study. I have for example already mentioned that materiality is a matter of no concern in canonical Buddhism. But I am content with that short statement and do not go on to study the doctrines underlying that approach to materiality, because this approach bears little resemblance to the actual practice of Buddhism in Laos. Instead of recognising animism and Buddhism as two opposing religions, I prefer to acknowledge them as necessarily intertwined in a complex way where one is impossible to distinguish from the other.

Following Tambiah, this complexity becomes even more obvious. He shows how the ritual system is based on the seemingly opposing ideas of Buddhism and animism, and argues that this opposition "operates within a *total field* that expresses other relations, complementarity and a hierarchical ordering" between Buddhism and animism (my emphasis).[17] The village he studies is located just south of Vientiane, not more than thirty kilometres as the crow flies from the Lao border.

Even though I have by no means done such a thorough and well grounded study as Stanley Tambiah did in the 1960s and 70s, I can see how his descriptions correspond to the

religious practices and beliefs among people in Vientiane, and are therefore directly applicable to my fieldwork experiences.

Fields of Merit — Popular Buddhism in Laos

Most people who consider themselves pious Buddhists today in Laos are surrounded by different kinds of material objects, or representations, important and necessary in their everyday religious practices. Images in different forms and shapes are one example. The first known Buddha image was produced 400 years after the death of Buddha, but legends say that depictions had already been fashioned during his lifetime. There is, for example, one tale in the Pannasa-jataka that tells of King Pasenadi of Kosala, who made a sandalwood image so that the inhabitants of Sravasti would have something to which to make offerings when the Buddha was out of town.[18]

When a Buddhist offers flowers, or lights a candle before the Buddha image, it is not an act of worship because the Buddhist does not pray to anyone. The image serves as a medium for concentration to seek inspiration in finding the right way. This applies not only to the Buddha image, but also to many sorts of objects, places or actions that bring to mind the person of the Buddha. These representations are often referred to as "reminders". It is not the physical form and material of these reminders that are of importance. It is instead the case that the Buddha's attainment is symbolised by them, and that they thereby act as a "field of merit".[19]

The most common (and for the majority most important) kind of image of the Buddha used today for religious practices is the Buddha statue, of which we often find numerous examples in temples. Other kinds of images are printed pictures and paintings. Often the images have a story or a certain representation, which "charges" them with significance and personality, and which also is the basis for their religious

value. In that way the religious value is different than the archaeological or art-historical value, which has more to do with form and material. The amulet is another kind of image, very common and popular in Laos (and throughout the whole of Southeast Asia). Apart from the fact that amulet collecting has become a fine art, these are the most common items of Buddhist belief that people use in their everyday lives. Amulets are primarily intended to provide protection from evil spirits, to bring good luck, and to give the wearer a sense of well-being.[20] Most effective and valuable are amulets that have been made or consecrated by especially saintly monks, or that depict famous monks or famous Buddha statues, or are made of the remains of a sacred object (scraps of plaster or bronze from famous images or stupas).

In addition to Buddha images, representations or reminders also include relics of the Buddha's body. The remains from his cremation, primarily bone and teeth fragments, were divided [21] and distributed by his disciples over the whole of South Asia, and further on to Southeast and East Asia together with the teachings of the Buddha. One of India's great emperors, King Ashoka, who ruled three hundred years after Buddha's death, was closely involved in this transmission of Buddhism. As the relics were spread they were enshrined in stupas. Even though the relics themselves are the most sacred and important reminders for a Buddhist, because they represent a direct connection to the actual person Buddha, stupas have also become a strong symbol for the Buddha. A stupa functions as an instrument through which the significance of Buddha's life reaches people in the present.[22]

Common to all these reminders are that they are attributed with power. This clearly illustrates the merging of Buddhism and animism, as these obviously Buddhist objects (Buddha images, stupas and amulets) become animated with spiritual power through different kinds of sacralisation rituals, which are animistic and magical. Empowering objects makes them become storage places for spiritual values. And it is the spiritual

value that has to be maintained, and therefore at some stage the material container needs to be destroyed so that the spirit can move on to animate another object or material container. The spirit has to "pour through".

Looking again at the amulets, we can see that this is exactly one of their functions too: to store and be a container for the power from the Buddha, giving protection and good luck. Even though some of the amulets are made from material reused from an ancient stupa or temple building, this is not for the sake of material authenticity. Such authenticity is ascribed to objects that are true and in their original state. This concept of authenticity to a great extent privileges unchanged conditions and presupposes a linear time perception, where appreciation and value grow the closer we come to the original state.

Material authenticity is also one of the foundations of heritage management practice. But authenticity in popular Buddhism is more about the extent to which the object is empowered. This is not dependent on age or the material's originality. Exploring religious practices and beliefs as well as the production and use of images in Thailand, Denis Byrne writes that it is more relevant to speak of authenticity established via performance in a Southeast Asian Buddhist context than about material authenticity.[23] In this way new images are constantly produced and recreated and must establish their own identities, which gives them authenticity if they contain spiritual values that have been poured through from another object. It is exactly this act of making new containers that is central in merit making.

There is a reciprocal relationship between the Buddhist community of monks and nuns (the *sangha*) and the laity. Laypersons provide monks and nuns with material donations and necessities and receive in return not only Buddha's teachings (*dhamma*), but also merit. That is what accumulates as a result of good actions and thoughts that a Buddhist performs in life, and is the only thing a person can take with

her/him when s/he dies. Making merit during one's lifetime can contribute to a better life after rebirth and ultimately to liberation.

There are different ways in which merit can be gained. Doctrinally speaking, a layperson must follow the overall principles of ethical behaviour established by the Buddha, and also pray and actively conduct meditation. But in reality, the focus is on good actions in general, which is the first step towards increasing merit. Giving is the most common merit making activity in a layperson's everyday life.[24] In practice, this means daily food offerings to the *sangha* and also, more occasionally, the donation of clothes and other supplies. By financing or financially contributing to ceremonies and the building of stupas and temples, a person or a group of people can gain an even greater amount of merit. The more costly the act, the better the chances for increased merit.

The Stone in Viengkham

In February 2004 I excavated a temple site near Vientiane together with staff from the Lao authorities and residents of the village where the investigations were carried out. After we had finished the work, we wanted to bring one of the excavated *bai sema*[25] to the National Museum in Vientiane to include it in an exhibition about recent archaeological work in this ancient village. It did not take long before we understood that this was impossible. The villagers did not dare to let anything leave the ancient temple site. After attending numerous meetings in the village we were finally allowed to borrow the stone, and include it temporarily in the exhibition.

Later on, as part of my interview study, I discussed the incident with monk Sayadeth Khampee from Vat Ong Teu in Vientiane together with Mr. Kanda Keosopha, a former monk now employed as an archaeologist at the National Museum. During the discussion it became clear that if the people in the village had all been Buddhist monks, there would have

been no problems with taking away the stone, because the material thing in itself is not at all important in such a context. But the villagers combine Buddhism with animist belief in and worship of spirits, and consider material things very important since the spirits are contained in them. *This* was the actual reason why they did not allow us to take the stone to Vientiane. It did not have very much to do with Buddhism. Evident in this discussion is the distinction between villager and monk, between popular and canonical Buddhism. But it is also evident that the two are inseparable. Societal Buddhism is based on the existence of them both and cannot function without one or the other. And, as monk Khampee also pointed out, materiality may be a matter of concern if it is considered a symbol or a representation.

A similar discussion with a group[26] from the village Ban Viengkham took place at the old temple site a week after the stone was moved to Vientiane. The members of the group all agreed that the spiritual values are much more important than the material, but that they need objects and material things for the power (which from the beginning comes from the Buddha himself and has been transmitted since then) to pour through and maintain the spiritual values in society. Spirituality is the most important thing, but in practice, materiality is necessary as spirits empower objects and give them agency. This agency illustrates the dialogic relation between materiality and spirituality — they are two sides of the same coin.

Ruined Temples in Viengkham and Vientiane

Let us remain in Ban Viengkham for a while. At the site where the archaeological excavation was carried out, the remains of two ancient temples could be seen above ground. One turned out to be the foundations of a temple built in the twelfth or thirteenth century. On top of it there was a small tin roof on poles covering some weather-beaten Buddha statues, burnt

out candles and incense sticks, and some plates of rice. I soon realised that this place, with its visible remains from past times and evident markers of sanctity, was indeed important to all the inhabitants of Ban Viengkham. It was a place where no one dared to be alone, but was often visited by families or other groups of people for special reasons or on certain occasions, such as rites of passage,[27] pregnancy or to perform rites for dispelling bad luck. What I also discovered was that this place had once hosted the Phra Bang, the golden Buddha that is the palladium of the Lao nation. The second mound at the site was the foundation of the Phra Bang temple, built in the middle of the fourteenth century by the illustrious king Fa Ngum, who was the founder of the first Lao state, the Lan Xang kingdom.

Stories constantly followed our excavation at the site, told by people who were participating or who just visited us. These stories revealed tangible as well as intangible values and ways of appreciating the place. One thing which played an important part in both these aspects, was the Phra Bang. Mr. Pau, who helped us in our excavation of the site, introduced us to his mother, who had lived in the village all her life. We had all our meals in Pau's house, and his mother sometimes came and kept us company. Her vivid memory and lively descriptions of former times in the village kept us absorbed long after our meals were finished. She also told us her version of the story of the Phra Bang:

> Hundreds of years ago, before the Lan Xang kingdom was founded, a people called Kha inhabited this village. They believed strongly in the power of the spirits of their dead ancestors. When king Fa Ngum had conquered this area he soon decided to send a Buddhist mission here, to stop the spirit cults from being practised by the inhabitants. When the mission arrived from Cambodia, where the king was Fa Ngum's father-in-law, they brought a golden Buddha statue. This statue, the Phra Bang, was supposed to be installed in

> the kingdom of Lan Xang and inspire its people to become pious Buddhists. The mission arrived in Viengkham, but when they were to continue to the capital they had to leave the Phra Bang here, because the statue was impossible to move further. First the two strongest men tried to move it, but without success. Then four strong men tried together, but it was still impossible to move it. Eight men collected their whole strength for a try, but the Phra Bang was too heavy. When 16 men did not succeed, they gave up fighting against the divine forces. Instead it was decided that a temple, Vat Phra Bang, was to be built to host the Buddha statue. After 150 years in Viengkham the Phra Bang was finally taken to Xieng Dong Xieng Thong, which was still the capital of Lan Xang. Then the city changed its name to Luang Prabang, meaning the Golden Phra Bang. It is because of the remains of this temple here in Viengkham that we know that this is the old Vat Phra Bang, and that is why we are afraid.

There she stopped and after a few moments she changed her mind and said instead: "no, that is why we respect this place". After finishing that meal, Pau's mother went together with us to the ancient temple site, and she continued to tell us another story of the place:

> In a neighbouring village many, many years ago there was a monk who was originally from Thailand. He gathered a group of eleven people around him, went to this place and planned to find gold. Since this is an old and important temple, we all know that there must be lots of gold buried in its ruins. So, when the monk came there he first prayed for a long time and then one of his helpers threw an onion in different places on the ground. The place where the onion started to turn around by itself was the right spot for finding what they were searching for. Close to the ruined temple they dug a two meter deep hole, but soon they heard strange sounds, deep and muffled, almost like elephants screaming far away. Suddenly the police came and took them all to prison. That time we were lucky, at least if we compare it

> with what had happened before. A group of people came here to take one of the stones from Vat Phra Bang to Vientiane. It was a very beautiful stone covered with inscriptions.[28] After it was removed from here a few people in the village became very, very ill, and one even died. This place is really important, and that is why we come here to continuously honour Buddha and make offerings to the spirits of our dead ancestors.

This place was not important because of its ancient temple ruins, their form and material and their universal values of authenticity and being testimonies of historical events. It was important because of its present state and the fact that it comprises immaterial and spiritual values. In the same way as discussed above, the objects at the site (the things we found during the excavation), the things that already earlier had been found by the villagers and now were kept in different house altars, the temple remains, and the *sema* stones) were regarded as containers for these immaterial and spiritual values.

Of course, this also explains the hesitation among the villagers when we wanted to remove one of the *sema* stones and take it to Vientiane. The unearthed brick structures did not attract very much attention from the village residents involved in the excavations, nor did the underlying cultural layers, stratigraphies and datings. Instead, the focus in the discussions was on the building of a new temple at the site, which seemed to be everyone's dream for the future.

In December 2000, the old temple at Vat Ou Mong in Vientiane was being replaced by a new one, as an act of merit making. The residents of the village Ban Ou Mong had been saving money for years, and finally the plan could be realised. This temple was one of only a few rare structures containing depictions of the beloved epic Phralak-Phralam (the Lao Ramayana), and was one of the oldest in Vientiane. During the process of demolition the frescoes were documented and a few fragments preserved by an upset American freelance

consultant in environment planning currently residing in the same village. At the same time, the villagers who were gathered at the temple site seemed quite happy about the pulling down of the structure, shouting and clapping their hands. The relation between spirituality and materiality is also apparent here: the first is superior to, but yet dependent on the second.

The destruction of the old temple was necessary to let the spiritual values pour through and enter the new temple, which is the result of the most meritorious act the villagers of Ban Ou Mong could possibly have performed and that hopefully would increase their chances for a better position after rebirth. This example also illustrates different ways of valuing authenticity. Here, authenticity is obviously established through performance, rather than through the physical form and materials. This leads to the conclusion that the production of new temples (as an act of merit making) also means the production of temple ruins, a situation which becomes highly problematic in a heritage management perspective that is dominated by preservationist ideals.

Is it possible to bridge the obvious divide between what the upset American environmentalist called a "sophisticated preservationist sensibility where the Lao cultural patrimony should be conserved",[29] and the perceptions and priorities of the local community where the old temple is laid in ruins, the villagers make merit and by doing so take part in and hand over the intangible and ever changing heritage of a Buddhist community? If it is possible, *how* can we then bridge this divide, to best meet as many demands as possible? Or is it desirable to even try? This is an example of the difficulties in discussing preservationist ideals aimed at conserving a heritage and the ethic of merit making as alternative solutions to the same problem, as their respective frameworks are mutually incompatible. The framework for discussing preservation is that the temple in question be considered archaeological. In the case of merit making, the temple is not conceived or

constructed in this way at all.

To conclude, popular Buddhism, with its roots in canonical Buddhism and animism, is the means through which materiality is understood in the specific context in which I am working. It is a context in which materiality is important, but is approached differently within archaeology and heritage management, where it is primarily the physical form and materials that are appreciated. By exploring the material objects of popular Buddhism and how these are used, produced and perceived, we understand that it is primarily as containers for the immaterial and spiritual values they are important. This has to be the starting point for defining and managing heritage in Laos. I think general alternative strategies for dealing with a heritage that is constantly changing are difficult to find. We should instead continue debating preservation ethics in a somewhat more humble way, where a situated, particular and non-essentialist approach is called for. What is needed is imagination and sensitivity, to put heritage management into practice in a constructive and intelligent way, so that the people involved recognise their right to justify the values they consider important and sacred.

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[1] http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext, visited 15 October 2008.

[2] Byrne 2008: 149–173.

[3] UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Heritage, adopted in 2003.

[4] Coningham 2001: 61–95.

[5] Fogelin 2006.

[6] Källén 2004.

[7] Barnes 1995.

[8] Byrne 1995: 266–281.

[9] Byrne 1995: 267.

[10] Karlström 2005: 338–355.

[11] Swearer 1995.

[12] The lowest percentage is according to National Statistics Centre, Vientiane (Pholsena and Banomyong 2006: 161), and the highest according to the *International Religious Freedom Report*, U.S. (2007).

[13] For the term "popular" I use Donald K. Swearer's definition, in which "popular does not mean less serious, less rigorous, or distant from the idea; rather, it is intended to mean Theravada Buddhism as commonly perceived, understood, and expressed by the average, traditional [...] Laotian", Swearer 1995: 6.

[14] The Buddhist community or clergy, monks and nuns.

[15] Tambiah 1970: 263.

[16] Tambiah 1970: 223.

[17] Tambiah 1970: 41.

[18] Strong 2002: 39.

[19] Tambiah 1970: 45.

[20] Bunnag 1984: 168.

[21] The number of pieces ranges from eight to 300 000, according to different sources.

[22] Byrne 1993.

[23] Byrne 1993.

[24] Monks primarily gain merit through meditation and by strictly following the precepts of the *dhamma*, which for a monk or a nun are many more than for a layperson.

[25] A *bai sema* is a standing stone, or a sacred border marker. These stones appear in a variety of shapes and designs. They can for example be flat, round or octagonal, with depictions of the Buddha or other Buddhist elements, with inscriptions in Sanskrit, Pali or Mon, or without any depictions or inscriptions at all. *Bai sema* stones are one of the characteristics of the Dvaravati culture, which was established in central Thailand 1500 years ago, and which also spread towards the northeastern part of Thailand and Laos during the following centuries.

[26] In the group was the village chief, the secretary of the village chief office, and two residents of the village, of whom one was born there and the second had lived in the village almost forty years.

[27] These could be a variety of different ceremonies, for example marriage, ordination or any time a person enters a new phase of activity that requires protection and blessing (going on a trip, or into military service et cetera) or reintegration (after a person has

recovered from illness, or has returned to the village after a long absence et cetera).

[28] And can nowadays be admired at the museum in Vat Ho Phra Keo in Vientiane.

[29] Potkin 2001.

DENYING THE CENTRALITY OF VEDIC TEXTS

Alternative Routes in History Studies

Shraddha Kumbhojkar

The Indians, like their counterparts elsewhere, have visualised a perfect society — a Utopia — since the most ancient period, in which the moral and the pragmatic are in complete harmony with each other. "Let everyone be happy, let everybody be free from ill health; let everyone prosper, let no one suffer from pain", was the Utopian dream of mental, physical, material and spiritual harmony envisioned by the Upanishadic Indians some two and a half millennia ago.

Despite the rigid structures of social organisation that strengthened the walls between the real and the ideal, and contrary to popular perception, attempts were always carried out to bring about harmony in the Indian society.[1] Prominent among these attempts were the rise of Buddhism and Jainism in the 6th century B.C.E. as also the flourishing of Sufi orders and the widespread following of the Bhakti movement in pre-modern India.

Establishment of the British rule over India meant that the Indian culture was exposed to a dominant alternative. This was a traumatic experience for the Indians. An acute embarrassment about the inferiority of native ideas was deeply ingrained in the minds of the colonised people. The tendency is especially evident in the early writings of colonial India. Lokahitawadi (1823–1892), writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, lamented the "ignorance" of the natives in the following words:

> The people here are not worthy of touching upon any matter of consequence. They are ignorant about the whereabouts of

> the English. They haven't heard of the great development of knowledge achieved by the English... These people seem like fools in the new situation because a great variety of kinds of knowledge has emerged in India as a consequence of the English rule. These (native) people have no idea whatsoever about it.[2]

Lokahitawadi pointed out that the Indian people failed to have a quest for knowledge, which was the reason why the British who did possess such knowledge, succeeded in ruling over India. He asked: "Had these Bhats[3] undertaken a quest for real knowledge, wouldn't they have reached the English coast before the English reached here?"[4]

Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, another western-educated intellectual of the first generation, described the English language in his picturesque style as the "milk of a tigress". He claimed:

> Progress, liberty and happiness will be consequential to the spread of the English knowledge. If the thunderbolt of English knowledge is in our hands, then we need not pay heed to the tyranny of the likes of Lytton, Temple, Chatfield and Moore.[5]

The writings of Chiplunkar display a representative sense of awe in relation to the western civilisation in general and knowledge in particular.

Quest for Knowledge and Tradition

Realising the importance of knowledge, Indian youth embarked on a "Quest for knowledge". Large numbers of them started taking western education offered by the newly established (1856 onwards) universities in the big cities of Madras, Bombay and Calcutta, but some of them also took up the study of their own past and offered their own interpretations of it. Reinterpretation of the past was expected to serve a twofold purpose: to challenge the misrepresentation of Indian history

and to free the Indian mind of the guilt for a supposedly worthless history and inculcate pride instead. Lokmanya Tilak, in his editorial of *Kesari* on 7 May 1895, wrote:

> The descriptions of the disturbance of 1857 written by the capricious British authors were completely partial and exaggerating. They created an extremely unfavourable impression about the happenings in the mind of the reader.... The tendency of unjustified criticism of the leaders of 1857 adds insult to injury as far as their compatriots are concerned... If we are unable to set straight the false records of our recent history as created by the alien foreigners, how can we aim to know about our forefathers a couple of thousand years ago? How can our knowledge and arts hope to have a new lease of life?[6]

Thus, knowledge of the past was perceived to be necessary for rejuvenating the Indian mind. Administering the past with sympathy to the Indian masses was a part of the nationalists' efforts to nurse the injury inflicted by the biased western projection of Indian history.

Anthony Smith has observed that invocation of the past is an essential and effective element of nationalist upsurge because the ideal images and exemplars of the distant past serve as "prototypes and models for social and cultural innovation".[7] The writings of 19th century Indian intellectuals display this tendency to invoke the past in search of models on which the future progress of the nation might be fashioned. Many a nationalist intellectual offered new interpretations of the literature of ancient India in order to exhibit the potential of the Indian culture in adapting itself to a modern value system. Justice Ranade spelt out the reformers' stand thus:

> It would be a fatal objection if the argument for change were based on the ground that we must copy the foreign exemplar.... The change is sought not as an innovation, but as a return and restoration to the days of our past history. Those who advocate it justify it on the authority of texts revered,

> and admitted to be binding to this day. The intermediate corruption and degradation was not of the nation's seeking ... That (barbarous) force having ceased to be operative, we must now return to the old order of things, if we are to grow to our old proportions.[8]

One can trace the roots of this phenomenon to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the colonial administrators such as William Jones, H. T. Colebrooke and John Wilson combined their official and academic interests and initiated scientific and modern scholarship in the field of Indology. The Vedas that had hitherto never been written down were translated and published by western scholars.[9] It was noticed that Sanskrit and a number of European languages had structural affiliations. This led to the development of the theory of a common Aryan past, which essentialised the East and the West as basically spiritual and scientific offshoots of a common race of people.

Besides the linguistic similarities, the theory was based primarily on what later came to be recognised by Edward Said as "Orientalisation of the Orient". Max Müller, for example, was a German scholar in Oxford who never set his foot on the Indian soil but described the Indians as gentle, passive and steeped in other-worldly thoughts, and lacking the sense of aggression and competition.[10] Keshab Chunder Sen was one among the many prominent Indian intellectuals whose ideology was influenced by the theory of the Aryan race and common origins of the Indian and western European civilisations. He believed that British presence in India signified "a reunion of parted cousins, the descendants of two different families of the ancient Aryan race".[11] As Romila Thapar has observed, "depiction of Aryan society in glowing terms was soothing to the sensitivities of Indian scholarship".[12] Sudhir Chandra has suggested that the unacceptably painful reality of domination resulted in the search for a distant past that would have no connection with the oppressive present and would nurse the injury of subordination.[13] Reinterpretations of ancient texts

also provided a strong point against the universality of western knowledge. Lokmanya Tilak explained in the introduction of his *Geeta Rahasya*:

> It is not that the argument is proven better if it is supported by western corroborative thoughts. They are cited, however, for those who are dazed by the unprecedented growth of physical sciences, and who have learnt, as a result of their uni-directional system of education, to think of ethics in a superficial manner. They should be able to follow that ... human knowledge has not yet overtaken the principles laid down by our ancient thinkers.[14]

Interpretation of the ancient texts by the nationalists was an attempt to establish the superiority of Indian culture as against the western one.

It might not be out of place to look into the reasons why ancient Indian texts were chosen by Indian nationalists of the nineteenth century for creative reinterpretation. Firstly, since the social composition of the audience was predominantly Hindu, Hindu texts were more likely to be identified with by the masses. Secondly, most of the Hindus sincerely believed that their lives were regulated by these texts. A third reason why the ancient texts were preferred for reinterpretation is that with the lapse of about three thousand years between them and the present, they had become quite distant in the collective memory of the Indian masses for whom the reinterpretations were intended. Fourthly, the archaic character of the Sanskrit language rendered a plurality of interpretations possible which would meet the requirements of the modern intellectuals. Fifthly, according to the Indian tradition, age gives respectability. This gave the Sanskrit texts a certain sanctity and respectability that texts in no other Indian language could enjoy. Hence, the intellectuals tried to associate the modern ideals, they wished to propagate, with the ancient texts, thus trying to win respectability for the modern ideals. Lastly, in

their attempts to reconcile tradition with modernity, the Indian intellectuals wanted to retain the essence of tradition and combine it with modern values.

Which Tradition?

As for the modern values, there could be little argument as to which values were acceptable or otherwise. The problem rose about what tradition really meant. Since the Indian society was multicultural and plural in nature, there were numerous ways of life that existed simultaneously in tandem. People belonging to various religions, castes, sub-castes, regions and economic classes had entirely different ways of life. If one had to choose a common tradition for reconciliation with modernity, the choice was rather complicated.

The major differences of opinion in the nationalist discourse were based on this plurality of tradition. Vedas, the most ancient Sanskrit texts enjoyed a centrality in the reinterpretations offered by the nationalists in their efforts towards legitimising modernity with the help of tradition. The intellectuals belonging to the high castes and inclined towards a pro-tradition stand reinterpreted the Vedic texts in such a way as to prove that the Indian tradition was capable of adapting itself to modernity.

> It is a fortunate thing that most of the social evils complained of in these days, were unknown in the days of our highest glory, and in seeking their reform, we are not imitating any foreign models, but restoring its ancient freedom and dignity in place of subsequent corruptions. [15]

Ranade emphasised that change in the unacceptable social conditions as sought by the social reformers could be substantiated if the reformers managed to trace its roots to the ancient texts.

> In dealing with the masses, it would not do to follow any other method than that of taking the old texts, and putting

> new interpretation on them, so as to make all feel that there was an effort made to preserve the old continuity, and there was no attempt at innovation, which in the eyes of the ignorant, always meant revolution.[16]

On the other hand, intellectuals of a more reformist inclination would try to demystify them. Shankar Pandurang Pandit was one of the reformers who tried to point out the fallacy of the sacrosanct nature attributed to the Vedas. He noted:

> The Vedic hymns are not composed by sages that were always engaged in penance, and lived in mountain caves, but by poets who were householders, had children and always fought with their enemies riding on horsebacks. We term these poets as Sages and indulge in unprecedented and unfounded imaginations about them. If one of these poets was to resurrect and come in this world, he will be wonderstruck by our prejudices about him.[17]

Pandit thus demystified the Vedas in an effort to point out the fact that the Indian tradition is not inviolate, because there is nothing sacrosanct about it. Furthermore, he pointed out, some aspects of the tradition, which need to be modified in order to reconcile the Indian tradition with modernity, may be freely modified without apprehensions.

However, by either hailing the Vedic way of life as the Golden Age of Indian Civilisation, or by demystifying the Vedas to argue for the flexibility of the Indian culture, Indian intellectuals invariably attributed centrality to the Vedic texts. It was Jotirao Phule, a thinker-activist of the late nineteenth century, who showed the courage to deny the Vedic Texts this centrality. As a result, his ideas provide a real alternative to the hegemonising discourse of the modern West as well as that of high-caste Hinduism, offering the masses a freedom from political and cultural subordination and an alternative route to a Subaltern Utopia.

Voice of Dissent — Jotirao Phule

Jotirao Phule was born in the Mali caste of gardeners considered lowly by the contemporary Hindu society and experienced the resultant social injustices. Exposed to missionary education and influenced by Thomas Paine's writings, Phule was convinced of the inherent equality of all men. He was acutely aware of the dual subordination faced by many of his countrymen, viz. colonial as well as high-caste domination. He realised that the British colonial rule was, at least in principle, based on reason. On the other hand, the caste hierarchy in the Indian society defied all reason. Hence, he chose to fight the stronger enemy first and created an entire ideological and practical counter-culture to struggle against the social inequality and injustices.[18]

Phule posed a question as to the legitimacy of the upper caste people trying to represent the entire Indian nation in an essentialised way, while there were vast differences in the lifestyle and attitude of the upper and lower castes. He questioned the credentials of the elite intellectuals to present a monolithic picture of India's past without empathising with the agonies of the lower castes. He pointedly asked them, "Have you or your wives and children had the misfortune to do manual labour on a hungry stomach? Has any of the Brahmins carried night-soil on his shoulders?"[19]

Partha Chatterjee has observed that India possessed indigenous cultural resources by which it could maintain its independent spiritual identity.[20] Phule seemed to have realised this point. He tried to relate his ideal Indian identity to the pre-Aryan period when the non-Aryans occupied the Indian cultural landscape. The Utopia that he envisaged had its roots in an alternative tradition, which may be said to represent the "Little Tradition" unlike the mainstream intellectuals who traced the roots of their visions of an ideal Indian society to the Sanskritic "Great Tradition", if we may borrow these concepts from Robert Redfield.

Phule denied the precedence of the Vedic culture and asserted the existence of an indigenous culture of the "original inhabitants":

> Recent researches have shown beyond a shadow of doubt that Brahmans were not the aborigines of India.... The aborigines whom the Aryans subjugated, or displaced, appear to have been a hardy and brave people from the determined front which they offered to these interlopers.[21]

The interpretations of ancient Indian texts offered by Phule depicted the cultural traditions of the past in a modernistic light. Modern day motives of social welfare, democratic values and gender equality were projected to have existed in the ancient texts. Phule declared that the mythical sovereign of the downtrodden people, the *Mahasubha*, was "extremely just and kind" and really cared for the "welfare of the people".[22]

In his ballad on the life of the medieval king Shivaji, Phule described a story within a story where the young Shivaji was hearing historical stories from his mother. Here, Jijabai narrates that Shivaji's forefathers, the original inhabitants of the land who were called Kshatriyas, were vanquished by the outsiders under the leadership of Brahma. The Brahmins cowed the original inhabitants down and hence: "It hurts me like an arrow in my heart to let you know today that you are looked down upon as Shudras".[23] The past, thus administered, was expected to make people think about their present condition and act against the injustice to bring about a change in their present day identity.

Phule decried manipulation of history as done by the British historians who based their texts on the versions of history supplied by the Brahmin orthodoxy. In a letter to Mama Paramanand, a contemporary reformer, he pointed out the contemporary tendency of the Brahmanical poets "to create new ballads and introduce them to the public as true historical accounts. Such artificial ballads have no place in my collection".[24]

Phule challenged the misrepresentation of the condition of the lower castes in the past and the contemporary times. The significance of his writings lies in the fact that he was one of the earliest thinkers to have exposed that the Indian tradition was not monolithic and that there were voices of dissent from within the Indian tradition as well. Phule offered interpretations of the ancient Indian culture in an attempt to demythicise it. He challenged the claimed universality of the Vedas and questioned: "If God intended the Vedas for emancipating the entire human race, why are they composed only in the Sanskrit language and not in numerous others which humans use?"[25] He pointed out the inadequacy of the Brahmanical culture in encompassing the entire Indian society and thus highlighted its parochial nature.

What he meant by the entire Indian society was explained by him in the pamphlet *Ishaara*, meaning warning. Phule established the identity of the Indian people by defining the word "subjects" to mean "Shudras and Atishudras", that is the lowest castes.[26] He made clear that this was an identity of suffering and quoted the saying: "Only the one who is wounded is capable of understanding the pain, another is incapable of understanding it."[27]

Phule widened the horizons of this identity of suffering by encompassing various classes of oppressed people in it such as women, slaves, African Americans et cetera. In fact, he dedicated his monograph "*Gulamgiri*" published in 1873 to "the good people of the United States as a token of admiration for their /.../ devotion in the cause of Negro slavery." He offered etymologies of various names of lower castes in an attempt to establish a common origin for them. Phule traced the origins of the *Dashnami* castes to the word *Dasyu; Mahars* to *Maha-Ari* (Great foe); *Shudras* from *Kshudra* (insignificant). He also mentioned that "solid proofs of the cruelties committed by these heartless Arya Brahmins can be found in the writings of great men from Britain, France and America".[28] Phule cited the Vedic verse, *twachaam krishnam arandhavat*, which described

that the Vedic people "*scraped off the dark skin*" of the original inhabitants of India.[29] He explained that the ancient texts, which were supposed to regulate the life of the Indian people, were in reality the product of the crafty and selfish cunning of the Brahmanical tradition that depicted the "greatness of Aryans and slavery of the Shudras."[30] He indicated the authorities that exposed the true nature of the cunning of the Brahmins in his *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak*. Colonel Legrand Jacob and Sir William Jones were praised by him for exploding the insidious craft of the Brahmins in deceiving the Shudras in the name of Vedas. He noted that "it was thanks to the efforts of these English savants that the craft of the Brahmins is exposed to the Shudras".[31] The efforts taken by Phule to give proof to his argument in a modern and scientific manner indicate that he wanted to spare no method for drawing attention of his readers to the unequal foundations of the Indian society.

Phule questioned the unequal and unfavourable distribution of power in the Indian society. In his *Akhanda* poetry he questioned the servile identity of the Shudras and urged them to rid themselves of the Brahmanical dominance.

> God has given equally to the Shudras what he has given to the Aryas without exception. Then why are the Aryas the masters and Shudras the slaves? This is the right time to search for the truth. Grace of God it was, that Brahmins were discarded and the English introduced. Do not hesitate anymore, Joti says, down with the cunning Brahmins.[32]

He was grateful to the British rulers because, according to him, "it was during the rule of the kind English government that the Shudras have attained the status of humans".[33]

It must be noted here that Phule was among those intellectuals who considered the colonial intervention as a part of the Divine Plan. He was, however, not blind to the potential oppression by the British rulers. In this regard, his stand was clear. In his play *Tritiya Ratna*, Phule declared that if the

British rulers might, in future, oppress the subjects of this nation, the Shudras, who will be educated by that time, will establish their own kingdom like the one established once by the Great Shivaji. They will look after their own governance, but "never ever shall the cunning rule of the Bhat Brahmins return on this nation".[34] Thus, conscious of the oppressive potential of the British rule, he was determined in his choice of the lesser evil. The reason for his choice was quite simple. He knew that the British government was based on a "Rule of Law", while the Indian culture was a hierarchy based only on birth. He juxtaposed the Brahmanical and Aryan canons with the modern concept of justice and warned sarcastically: "Modern law is not applicable here! Vedas written on parchment by the crafty Brahmins are just enough."[35]

He questioned the validity of fundamental concepts of the Brahmanical culture such as sin and virtue and their applicability in life. He argued against the first Marathi interpretation of the *Bhagawat Geeta*, *Jnyaneshwari*. The *Jnyaneshwari* explains the ideal person as the one who attains unity with the "Ultimate Reality", the *Brahman*. Phule argued that if there is no difference between one's self and the others, what is the point of devotion for any one god? If the ideal person remains immutable in all conditions, then why should one discriminate between sin and virtue?[36] This was not just a rhetorical refutation of everything that was related to Brahmins. Phule was making conscious attempts at attacking the fundamentals of the Brahmanical discourse. All these attempts of Phule, to negate the superiority of the Brahmanical culture were a part of his effort to create a counter-culture that could sustain the Indian identity that he envisaged.

It may be noted here that contrary to popular belief, this identity was not incompatible with the idea of Indian nationalism. Phule intended to widen the base and scope of the concept of nation as against the attempts at restricting its scope to the high culture of Brahmanism by the upper castes. His ideas about the formation of the Indian nation were not ambiguous. He wrote:

> Unless the Shudras, Atishudras, Bhils, Kolis and all the people of this land of Bali become learned and capable of thinking, there can be no "unity of the people", no "nation". This being so, what is the worth of the National Congress that has been founded only by the Brahmins?[37]

Contemporary authors such as Chiplunkar bitterly criticised Phule's writings.[38] These writings however, as observed by G. T. Madkholkar, were a result of the "inability to comprehend the nature and significance of Phule's activities with regard to reformation of religion and society".[39] Contrary to the bitter and unfair criticism directed against his writings, Phule's ideology was not anti-national. In fact, his concept of "nation" was more comprehensive than that of the contemporary caste elite that entertained a parochial concept of nation.

The necessity to chalk out an all-encompassing Indian identity and the need to widen the base of the concept of "nation" is what motivated Phule, like other nationalist intellectuals, to search for a past that the masses could identify themselves with and which could be of therapeutic use for getting rid of the doubly "oppressive present". Phule, like other contemporary intellectuals, endeavoured to use the past as an exemplar for envisioning an ideal future, a Utopia.

Phule's Alternative Vision of Utopia

The Utopia that Phule wished to create had to be based on a different footing as against the one envisaged by the upper-caste intellectuals. Phule commemorated the myths and legends from the folk traditions such as that of Bali.[40] It was not an accident that Phule, who had read the writings of Thomas Paine and believed in rationality, gave sanctity of reality to the myths of the "Little Tradition". Aravind Deshpande has pointed out that Phule was conscious of the peculiar status of History in India. History for the Indians is not just a text but also a faith. His use of the myth of Bali was the logical outcome of his ideological consistency wherein he accepted both,

Bali as well as Vamana, as historical figures. It must be noted that his writings were not meant to make gentle requests to the authorities, but their purpose was to shock the readers into realisation of the nature of their oppression. This purpose was successfully achieved by Phule's writings.

Phule stands unparalleled in the social reform movement for the fact that he not only supported the emancipation of women but also put it into practice. Another characteristic feature of his writings is that he tried to relate the issue of gender with that of caste and class. The result was that his writings provide us with a wider picture of contemporary reality. He is also one of the few social reformers who publicly acknowledged the sexual deprivation of women as a part of their suppression.[41]

To give a brief idea of Phule's activities, it may be mentioned here that he was the first non-missionary in India to have started a school for girls. He was the pioneer of education of untouchable children in India. He himself educated his wife Savitribai so that she worked independently as the headmistress of the girls' school. In order to prevent infanticide of illegitimate babies, he started a rescue home for unwed mothers and pregnant widows. To eradicate the practice of untouchability, he made his private water tank available for the untouchables. To do away with the Brahmanical dominance of the low castes, he founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj — the Society of Seekers of Truth.

Phule drafted a completely novel text — Saarvajanik Satya Dharma Pustak — for the rituals of the followers of the Satya Shodhak Samaj. While charting out the rationality-based rituals from birth till burial of the Samajists, Phule left no space for discrimination. Gender, caste, economic status, occupation — no category was left open for discrimination by Phule in his Utopian vision of a "just" society.

The birth of a child was to be celebrated by rejoicing and promises to provide the child with good education. The marriage ceremony was to be celebrated between adult husband and wife, without dowry, and by exchange of vows to

take care of each other as equal partners. No Brahmin was required to conduct the marriage or any other ritual. The deities, besides the supreme Satya — Truth — that were invoked to bless the married couple were not the ones worshipped by high caste Brahmanical religion, but the local deities worshipped according to the folk tradition. When a Samajist died, he was to be given a burial according to the low caste customs instead of a cremation as followed by the higher castes. Prayers were to be said at the burial that hoped for the union of the departed with the ultimate Truth. Phule offered an alternative way of life for those who were disillusioned with high caste Brahmanism. As a result, his ideas provided a real alternative to the hegemonising discourse of the modern West as well as that of high caste Hinduism, offering the masses a freedom from political and cultural subordination and an alternative route to a Subaltern Utopia.

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[1] I am deeply indebted to my Guru, late Professor Aravind Deshpande, for the theoretical insights about Utopia and counter-culture in particular, and philosophy of History in general.

[2] Priyolkar 1967: 77.

[3] A pejorative word for Brahmins.

[4] Priyolkar 1967: 247.

[5] Chiplunkar 1917: 1225.

[6] Tilak 1895.

[7] Smith 1983.

[8] Ranade 1914: 81.

[9] Editions of the Rig-Veda were published by Max Müller (Müller 1849–74; 1877, 1877b; 1897 and 1883b). Translations were made into English verse by Griffith (Griffith 1896–97). There is also a selection in prose by Max Müller (Müller 1891) continued by Oldenburg (Oldenburg 1897). Translations into German verse was published by Grassmann (Grassmann 1876–77) and into German prose by Ludwig (Ludwig 1876–88).

[10] Müller 1883: 101.

[11] Chunder Sen 1923: 323.

[12] Thapar 2000: 8.

[13] Chandra 1991: 152.

[14] Tilak 1923: 265.
[15] Ranade 1914: 89–90.
[16] Ranade 1914: 111–112.
[17] Pandurang Pandit 1876: 33.
[18] Deshpande et al. 1998.
[19] Phadake 1991: 386.
[20] Chatterjee 1994: 4–6.
[21] Phadake 1991: 117–118.
[22] Phadake 1991: 235.
[23] Phadake 1991: 47.
[24] Phadake 1991: 406.
[25] Phadake 1991: 485.
[26] Phadake 1991: 387.
[27] Phadake 1991: 387.
[28] Phadake 1991: 485.
[29] Phadake 1991: 484–485.
[30] Phadake 1991: 538.
[31] Phadake 1991: 491.
[32] Phadake 1991: 557.
[33] Phadake 1991: 497.
[34] Phadake 1991: 30.
[35] Phadake 1991: 489.
[36] Phadake 1991: 475.
[37] Phadake 1991: 495.
[38] Phadkule 1975: 25.
[39] Cited in Phadkule 1975: 35–36.
[40] The Little Tradition in many parts of India celebrates the Myth of Bali. Bali was a just ruler of the Earth, who was so virtuous that his virtuosity posed a threat to the supreme position of the God Vishnu. This god, therefore, took the Avatar/form of a dwarf Brahmin named Vamana asking for alms. Bali promised to donate three footholds of land to him. Vamana, after getting the promise, changed his form and attained extraordinary proportions to occupy the entire earth in the first foothold, the sky in the second foothold, and for the third foothold, Bali offered him his head. Vamana thus stamped Bali down and sent him off into the dungeons. Women celebrate a day to commemorate the kingdom of Bali and make a wish for the return of this just king to the earth.
[41] Phadake 1991: 376.

CONCEIVING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY
A New Challenge for the Philosophy of Religion

Willy Pfändtner

> It is often said that we live today in a globalised, pluralistic and multi-cultural society. Shouldn't the way we practice philosophy reflect that?[1]

With these words Richard King ends one of his books, in which he convincingly argues in favour of extending the concept of philosophy beyond its western confinement. I would say that we also live in a multi-religious society, and that this fact should have an impact on the way we practise philosophy of religion. To be sure, it is not so that the fact of religious diversity goes unnoticed. What is conceived as "problems of religious diversity" are much discussed issues in current academic philosophy of religion. However, the way such problems are generally discerned reflects a certain way of understanding religious diversity that in my opinion is not very conducive for philosophically handling the interreligious situation. Furthermore, when diversity is primarily conceived of as a problem, and not as a resource, it leads to the expectation of social and political conflicts due to religion, and this may be an obstacle preventing the good of religion, in its diversity, to come to the fore.

In this article I will claim that much of the present-day academic debate about religious diversity within the disciplines of Philosophy of Religion and Theology of Religion(s) is burdened by what could be called the Enlightenment heritage. By this I mean that a certain conception of religion and a concomitant

conception of religious diversity are informing the debate to the effect that the debate itself is carried on within a rather confined space of little relevance for the very phenomenon of religious diversity that we today experience in societies globally. Implicit in the various theoretical standpoints are assumptions that preclude a constructive engagement with the religious Other. My own presupposition in this regard is that a constructive engagement with the religious Other is something good. I therefore consider theoretical positions that *a priori* preclude this possible good to be problematic.

An Account of Current Standpoints

Often problems are conceived of from a perspective marked by western religious metaphysical realism. As a consequence, incompatible truth claims about the nature of God[2] are treated as a central topic. For instance, Keith Yandell devotes a major part of his book *Philosophy of Religion: A Contemporary Introduction*[3] to presenting arguments for and against monotheistic and nonmonotheistic conceptions of ultimate reality. Such philosophy of religion comes very close to natural theology. It presupposes that we have access to a universal rationality that can be applied when discussing the nature of ultimate reality. Related to this way of thinking is the Enlightenment project of rational theism and the hope for a public rational religion.

After what they have considered the failure of such a project, many religious thinkers have given up this kind of traditional foundationalism and metaphysical reasoning, while still adhering to the Enlightenment idea of rational religion. They have attempted to justify religious beliefs by using an epistemology based on religious experience or perception. However, these epistemological accounts generally contain a problematic circularity, since they depend on a control system of background beliefs. Thus one must admit that religious experience can justify beliefs incompatible with one's own, when such experience is taking place within an alien religious tradition. Joseph

Runzo has taken the full consequences of this and developed a relativistic account where we have a plurality of incompatible religious worlds, with their own ultimate realities.[4] For others, such as Alvin Plantinga and William Alston, this is not an attractive solution. They maintain that only one religion can be the true religion, and they end up being *exclusivists* in their attitudes towards alien religions. Those religions must, somehow or other, be false, in so far as they are incompatible with the home religion, although there is no neutral ground from where this can be shown.[5] John Hick, on the other hand, develops an interpretation of religion where he considers the different incompatible notions of the Ultimate as phenomena experienced through culturally conditioned categories. Behind these is the noumenal Ultimate, the "Real an sich" in Hickian terms. Hick thus becomes a *pluralist* in his attitudes towards other religions. They are all true in a certain sense.[6]

Now to the unfortunate effect of these theoretical positions. Yandell's metaphysical account can, citing Kant, be characterised as the battlefield of endless controversy. Two incompatible claims can both be argued for convincingly. The main theme in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is to show that neutral reason can simply not settle such metaphysical matters.[7] The exclusivism of Plantinga and Alston ends up in an utterly passive attitude towards the religious Other, in that they claim the most rational thing to do is to sit tight with their own position, which they master so well, and not be unduly affected by difference.[8] Hick's and Runzo's theorising attitudes I take to be examples of the universalising tendencies of the Enlightenment in that they, in different ways, downplay particularity and introduce meta-perspectives. Kenneth Surin has the following significant words to say about Hick's theory: "All adherents of the major traditions are treated democratically in the pluralist monologue about difference."[9]

Even much of so-called post-Enlightenment philosophy of religion I find inadequate for constructively handling the interreligious situation. Certain trends in such philosophies

of religion tend to want to dissolve religious traditions and differences in a utopian vision of a future nonrealist universal world religion.[10] Another trend, the so-called post-liberal philosophy, tends to consolidate differences by stressing the incommensurability of traditions.[11]

The Problematic Concept of Religion

In order to overcome the universalising tendencies of the Enlightenment, which I think is a necessary route to take, the first step would be to deconstruct the very concept of religion. To do this, it could be fruitful to trace its origin in history. Originally the term *religio* was used to refer to a certain practice and attitude. The decisive change, according to Wilfred Cantwell Smith,[12] in the use of the term appeared in the seventeenth century with the development of new ways of looking at the world and a propositional conception of truth (as opposed to a Platonic one). *Religio* became the system of ideas in which the person of faith was involved and not the personal attitude of faith itself. When Hugo de Groot wrote *De Veritate Religonis Christianae*, he was concerned with establishing the truth of the Christian religion by proving that its precepts are statements of fact. Smith characterises the change that de Groot's undertaking implied thus: "[W]here the earlier writers would have said that Christian religion *is*, he says that *the* Christian religion *teaches* the worship of God with purity of mind and sincerity of moral behaviour."[13] Religion became a set of doctrines, and the truth of religion became the truth of doctrines. The basic question to ask about religious people became: What do they believe?

There was thus a transition from a personal orientation to a "depersonalised intellectual systematisation".[14] An ideal conception of truth (genuine religion) was replaced by a logical one (true religion). With this came the notion of natural religion, i.e. beliefs about God, human beings and the world accessible through reason alone and common to all human-

ity. Smith also mentions that, in line with this development, books about religion became highly apologetic or polemic. Significant in this kind of writing was the fact that one's own religion often was characterised by piety, faith and a vision of God, whereas alien religions were systems of beliefs and rituals, an observable, depersonalised pattern.[15]

A reaction to this development came in the nineteenth century with Schleiermacher, who stressed the nonintellectual feeling-aspect of religion. This did not have the effect that the rational intellectual concept of religion was eradicated. However, the concept came also to include the inward, nonintellectual attitude. Eventually, with Hegel, came the historical aspect as well, and the idea that religion as seen in human society is something real in itself which unfolds in history. Many thinkers were engaged in the search for the nature or essence of religion. Feuerbach's works on the essence of religion[16] is only one example among a great number of publications with similar titles appearing up until the middle of the twentieth century.[17]

The development of the concept of religion has thus, according to Smith, led to a situation in the twentieth century where the term religion is used in four distinct senses. First, in its adjective form, as *religious* it refers to the specific disposition of the religious person. A person can be understood to be more or less religious. In this sense religion is sometimes synonymous with piety. In both the second and third senses, a religion is understood as an overt system of beliefs, practices, values et cetera of a particular community. Thus there is a plurality of religions. However, religion in the second sense is the understanding of such a system as an ideal, which the theologians try to formulate. In the third sense, religion is an empirical phenomenon, studied historically and sociologically. It is very common that one speaks of one's own religion in the ideal sense and of other people's religions as they appear empirically.[18] In the fourth sense, the term religion is used as a "generic summation", in its most general sense, as a

phenomenon distinct from other human phenomena, such as art or economics.[19]

While speaking of and studying different things, the same word, "religion", is thus used to refer to different concepts. Smith claims that this is not only confusing but also distorting, and he suggests that the use of the term should be abandoned, at least in all but the first sense. He writes:

> I have become strongly convinced that the vitality of personal faith, on the one hand, and, on the other hand (quite separately), progress in understanding — even at the academic level of the traditions of other people throughout history and throughout the world, are both seriously blocked by our attempt to conceptualise what is involved in each case in terms of (a) religion.[20]

Thus the use of "religion" in the second and third senses has its origin in a specific Christian historical situation, where the necessity to employ putatively universal conceptions of truth and reason made its appearance. This led to the reification of "the religions" into more or less conflicting belief systems with universal pretensions. Smith's conviction that this implied a problematic distortion of the phenomena studied has recently gained support, not least from Feminist, Postcolonial and Subaltern Studies.[21] Richard King writes:

> The concept of "religion" is the product of the culturally specific discursive processes of Christian history in the West and has been forged in the crucible of inter-religious conflict and interaction. The term thus implies a pluralistic context. As Balagangadhara points out, Christianity has generally served as the prototypical example of a religion and thus as the fundamental yardstick or paradigm-case for the study of "other religions". This being the case, one should acknowledge that the comparative study of religion remains founded upon a conceptual framework that is unmistakably theological and Christian in orientation.[22]

The Distortion of Non-Western Religious Phenomena

The concept of religion has thus been active in creating a specific understanding of religious phenomena in non-western cultures. The impact of the concept, and of the specific understandings of religion it represents, was adopted by intellectuals in India, trained in western thought, which gave rise to Hindu reform movements modelled on the West. One example is the Brahmo Samaj, founded at the beginning of the nineteenth century by Rammohun Roy, representing a monotheistic Hinduism heavily influenced by Christian ideals. Roy used scriptural resources from the Indian tradition, specifically the *Upanishads*, to create a religion adapted to the moral and intellectual demands of the modern West. Incidentally, Roy is often referred to as "the father of modern India" and he propagated vigorously for modern education in India at the expense of the traditional Sanskrit system of education.[23]

Another obvious example of Indian adaptation to western conceptions of religion was the emergence of neo-Vedanta, or more accurately neo-Advaita, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. The most prominent names in this regard are Swami Vivekananda and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. They propounded a Hinduism well suited to prevailing romantic ideas of religion in the West. They found in the Indian religious tradition, specifically in the works of Shankara, a resource that could meet the requirements of a universal, coherent system. Thus Hinduism became the very model of an essentialist all-inclusive religion, attractive to intellectuals, both eastern and western, of the time.[24] Radhakrishnan gives us the following essentialist understanding of Hinduism:

> All sects of Hinduism attempt to interpret the Vedanta texts in accordance with their own religious views. The Vedanta is not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance. Thus the different sects of Hinduism are reconciled by a common standard and are sometimes regarded as the distorted expressions of the one true canon.[25]

The neo-Vedantic thinkers had such an impact on forming the western notion of Hinduism that their version of Hinduism has, until very recently, almost exclusively been taught in western educational institutions as the Hinduism that is the constitutive element of Indian culture.

In later years another "construction" of Hinduism has come to the fore to meet political challenges associated with modern secular society. This is the fundamentalist, nationalist version represented by movements such as the Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad as well as the Bharatiya Janata Party, the political party that recently ruled India for quite some time. As opposed to the neo-Vedantic inclusivist tradition, this kind of Hinduism is exclusivist and is characterised by an antagonistic attitude towards non-Hindu religions. It has also adopted western notions of literal and historical truth and is consequently concerned with questions of, for example, the historicity of God's "incarnations", such as Krishna and Rama.[26] The historical truth of religious stories has generally not been an issue for eastern religiousness. The truth of a story was rather conceived of in terms of whether it carried truthful insights with aesthetic and ethical qualities, affecting the life of the believer.[27]

Hinduism, as a religion in the sense of a worldview, a homogeneous picture of the world constitutive of the Indian culture, is thus a construction according to Enlightenment and Christian presuppositions. The majority of Hindus do not adhere to such a religion. S. N. Balagangadhara has convincingly argued that Indian culture is a culture without religion and without worldviews in this western sense of the term. What is significant is that the very concept of religion as worldview reveals a specific way of being religious. Balagangadhara expresses it thus: "[I]t is the nature of religion which makes those who have it believe that religion is a cultural universal."[28]

When applied to eastern cultures the concepts of worldview and religion (in the second and third senses described above) tend to distort the phenomena. As Smith and King

have forcefully argued, the method of conceptualising eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Sikhism, Jainism et cetera is inadequate. The very terms indicate more or less closed systems and communities.[29] The problem with this concept of religion becomes very obvious when considering, for example, the situation in China, where many persons then would adhere to three religions at the same time: Buddhism, Taoism *and* Confucianism. This does not indicate that the Chinese people are unusual in some sense, but rather that there is something wrong with the concept of religion.

Hence, I claim that the modern conception of a religion as a coherent metaphysical belief system is inadequate, and this I assert to be true also in the western context. To those who object and say that we cannot abandon the idea of coherent belief systems in this context, I answer that for a belief system to be religious, it must be related to individual persons' religiousness and religious practice, a point that is repeatedly stressed by, for example, D. Z. Phillips. He would say that those who treat religions as belief systems and are occupied with metaphysical and epistemological questions about the validity of such systems are conceptually confused since they do not give conceptual priority to the religious attitude and practice.[30]

A Postcolonial Approach

The failure of the Enlightenment quest for a universal natural religion, rational theism, led eventually to the establishment of the scientific worldview as constitutive for modern secular society. As a consequence, religious phenomena had to be relegated to the private sphere. However, certain fundamentalist forms of religion have come to challenge the modern secular society, where scientism as an ideology has gained a lot of influence when it comes to supplying universal claims as to, for example, the nature and meaning of human life. Thus fundamentalist religions have become powerful political

forces, presenting themselves as alternatives to scientism and formulating their religious messages as holistic, consistent and closed doctrinal systems. This has had the unfortunate effect that public awareness of religion to a large extent is in relation to political conflict and even violence. I would say that the main part, and the most positive examples, of human religious expressions in this way have fallen outside the public sphere. My claim is that current philosophy of religion often has the unfortunate effect of actually supporting this state of affairs by maintaining an outdated concept, based on Enlightenment thinking, in which religions are looked upon primarily as holistic belief-systems or worldviews, which to a great extent logically exclude each other.

I do not claim that reason and intellectual thought have no place in religious traditions. They certainly do as an aspect of religious practice. Such intellectual pursuits are therefore always related to religious moods, attitudes and goals. There is no neutral rationality that can determine the truth of religious traditions as was the idea behind the Enlightenment quest for rational theism. Considering this, what then is the task for the philosophy of religion today? John Clayton has looked to the Indian *vada*-tradition to find an alternative to the Enlightenment model. He has compared the western Enlightenment project, which "makes the Other invisible by rising above differences in an effort to occupy neutral ground in which Otherness is overcome by utopian reason", with the Indian *vada* model of philosophical contest or public debate.[31] In India there have been several different philosophical systems, and these systems' engagement with each other in debate is what is referred to as the *vada* model. Clayton summarises the difference between the two models in four points:

> 1. In the Enlightenment model, tradition-specific reasons have no place in public rationality. In the *vada* model, tradition-specific reasons can have a place in public rationality. Admission to public space is gained through contestability, not neutrality.

2. In the Enlightenment model, universal reason is a "given" and is simply applied to particular cases. In the *vada* model, reason constructs itself in and through its operations in public debate.

3. In the Enlightenment model, the Other is not necessary for public rationality. In the *vada* model, the Other is necessary in that it is through engagement that both the Self and the Other construct themselves.

4. In the Enlightenment model, the end served by rational debate is the achievement of consensus. In the *vada* model, the end served by rational debate is the clarification of difference.[32]

What I find appealing with the *vada*-tradition in Indian philosophical debate is that it provided a public forum for the exploration of a wide range of possible views based upon contestability and recognition that one was dealing with perspectives, that the participants were differently situated. The goal of such *vada* debates was not to achieve some kind of consensus or universal agreement, and one did not expect to convince the opponents of the truth of one's own position. The aim was rather to articulate, with as much philosophical precision as possible, the reasons as to why a position was held.

My purpose in bringing in this analysis by Clayton is not to suggest that the *vada* model is the most suitable model for our present problem of religious diversity and prospects for dialogue. Our situation is quite different from that of traditional India. My purpose is mainly to present empirical evidence that fruitful philosophical engagement without a neutral space has actually taken place. It should be noted, however, that partakers in these Indian debates were Hindus (including the atheistic and materialistic Lokayatas and Charvakas) as well as Buddhists.

I claim that exchange between traditions — philosophical and religious — in the form of intellectual debate and the sharing of existential experiences, is possible because it has

actually taken place and is taking place. I also claim that the prerequisites for such an exchange are not a shared neutral rationality and a shared worldview. I shall further claim that the presupposition that every human subject has, if not an explicit at least an implicit, coherent worldview is questionable. I suspect that the idea of a need for a worldview as a coherent system of beliefs is a remnant of Enlightenment thinking and that it must be given up in order to further a cross-cultural understanding. I will not deny that a certain kind of religiousness expresses itself in line with this Enlightenment idea, especially so-called fundamentalist forms of religion, but think that it should be understood as just a certain kind of religiousness. In support of my claims, I will draw upon a few sources.

Dipesh Chakrabarty has observed that many Indian scientists, and as he supposes other scientists as well, do not feel any intellectual or social obligation to find a single worldview within which to contain the diversity of their life practices. The practice of science does not oblige the researcher to develop a "scientific temper" beyond the practice of science itself. Chakrabarty refers to A. K. Ramanujan who writes about his astronomer father who had no difficulty being an astrologer as well:

> He was a mathematician, an astronomer. But he was also a Sanskrit scholar, an expert astrologer. He had two kinds of exotic visitors: American and English mathematicians who called on him when they were on a visit to India, and local astrologers, orthodox pundits who wore splendid gold-embroidered shawls dowered by the Maharaja.[33]

I think that there is no problem of recognising the coexistence of thought forms and practices with different criteria for truth. My claim is that they can indeed function within one and the same society and even within one and the same individual without disharmony.

Sometimes different thought forms are taken as incompatible beliefs. However, the incompatibility appears only when the same criteria for truth are applied to both perspectives. That the sun circles around the earth is in one sense true if you view it from the earth, and such a perspective can be useful for practical purposes, such as for example measuring time. With another perspective, and other criteria, the earth circles round the sun. Incompatibility appears only if you claim that the geocentric perspective is true in the same sense as the heliocentric.

I am in agreement with Paul Feyerabend that problems occur when an entrenched worldview and an entrenched philosophical anthropology are considered normative, and incommensurable thought forms are not allowed to enter public space to be contested but are discarded a priori. Feyerabend writes:

> A society that is based on a set of well-defined and restrictive rules so that being a man becomes synonymous with obeying these rules, *forces the dissenter into a no-man's-land of no rules at all and thus robs him of his reason and his humanity*. It is the paradox of modern irrationalism that its proponents silently identify rationalism with order and articulate speech and thus see themselves forced to promote stammering and absurdity.... Remove the principles, admit the possibility of many different forms of life, and such phenomena will disappear like a bad dream.[34]

I claim that the fact that we live in a globalised, pluralistic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society demands that we allow many different forms of life to enter public space. If this is not done, distortive theoretical presuppositions will continue to dominate academic and public debate and create rather than solve problems.

To be sure, there are commendable attempts within disciplines such as Comparative Philosophy and Intercultural

Philosophy to engage in so-called cross-cultural understanding.[35] Unfortunately though, these attempts are also often met with much disapproval.[36] However, in this essay I am focusing on the academic discipline of Philosophy of Religion. The attempts here at so-called Global Philosophy of Religion are in my opinion generally overly concerned with traditional western questions and problems transferred to the global arena.[37]

Conclusion

I have in this article argued that the concept of religion presupposed in most current academic Philosophy of Religion is problematic when it comes to understanding religious diversity. The concept has largely developed from Enlightenment thought and Christian theology and is therefore inadequate when applied to religious phenomena worldwide. Likewise the concept of worldview is a constitutive cultural factor.

If Philosophy of Religion is to be helpful in dealing with religious phenomena globally, a rethinking is necessary where diversity is conceived of in a different way. Diversity should not be understood primarily as a diversity of truth claims (that contradict each other) but rather as a diversity of kinds of religiousness, of attitudes to life and forms of life. The importance and the nature of truth claims within these various forms of life vary to a great extent and must therefore not be understood as conforming to an inadequately constructed concept of religion. This demands a constructive activity for the Philosophy of Religion, where new concepts and categories have to be developed from religious phenomena as they actually appear in human life.

So-called Global Philosophy of Religion, or Cross-cultural Philosophy of Religion, has generally been too much focused on the scriptures of various religious traditions and of interpreting these scriptures in line with certain western philosophical, especially metaphysical and epistemological, presuppositions.

[1] King 1999: 244.

[2] The term "God" stands in this context for various conceptions of what is often referred to as "the Ultimate", "ultimate reality", "Reality", "the Real" et cetera.

[3] Yandell 1999.

[4] See for example Runzo 1993.

[5] See for example Alston 1991 and Plantinga 2000.

[6] See for example Hick 1989. The great world religions are in Hick's account all true in the sense that they foster a transformation from self-centredness to reality-centredness, but their doctrines are not literally true.

[7] Kant 1929.

[8] See for example Alston 1991: 274.

[9] Surin 1990: 200.

[10] See for example Cupitt 1997.

[11] See for example Milbank 1990b.

[12] Smith 1963.

[13] Smith 1963: 39, 230–231.

[14] Smith 1963: 40.

[15] Smith 1963: 40–43, 231–235.

[16] See for example Feuerbach 1967.

[17] Smith 1963: 44–47, 240–244.

[18] John Milbank uses this strategy when comparing the Christian discourse to all others, religious as well as secular (Milbank 1990a: 382–388). Christianity becomes extremely idealised in his presentation, whereas for example his notion of Hinduism (Milbank 1990b: 176) is gathered from a rather derogatory work of Nirad Chaudhuri with the ambition to "give a description and interpretation of the religion of the Hindus as practiced..." (Chaudhuri 1979: xi).

[19] Smith 1963: 48–49.

[20] Smith 1963: 50.

[21] Subaltern Studies gives attention to those without a voice in the public sphere.

[22] King 2002: 40.

[23] Dasa 1999: 17–19. King 2002: 123.

[24] For a comprehensive account of the "construction" of modern Hinduism, see King 2002, specifically ch. 4–6.

[25] Radhakrishnan 1988: 18.

[26] King 2002: 105, 117, 213

[27] The following conversation can be seen as an example of this. It is a conversation between the German writer and a Balinese Hindu: A young Balinese became my primary teacher. One day I asked him if he believed that the history of Prince Rama — one of the holy books of the Hindus — is true.Without hesitation, he answered it with 'Yes'.
'So you believe that the Prince Rama lived somewhere and somewhen?'
'I do not know if he lived', he said.
'Then it is a story?'
'Yes, it is a story.'
'Then someone wrote this story — I mean: a human being wrote it?'
'Certainly some human being wrote it', he said.
'Then some human being could have also invented it', I answered and felt triumphant, when I thought I had convinced him.
But he said: 'It is quite possible that somebody invented this story. But true it is, in any case.'
'Then it is the case that Prince Rama did not live on this earth?'
'What is it that you want to know?' he asked. 'Do you want to know whether the story is true, or merely whether it occurred?'
'The Christians believe that their God Jesus Christ was also on earth', I said, 'in the New Testament, it has been described by human beings. But the Christians believe that this is a description of the reality. Their God was also really on Earth.' My Balinese friend thought this over and said: 'I had been already so informed. I do not understand why it is important that your God was on Earth, but it does strike me that the Europeans are not pious. Is that correct?'
'Yes it is', I said. (Balagangadhara 1994: 409.).

[28] Balagangadhara 1994: 507.

[29] King 2002: ch. 5–7. Smith 1963: ch. 3.

[30] D. Z. Phillips has written several books touching on this issue. See for example Phillips 1993.

[31] Clayton 1994.

[32] Clayton 1994: 59.

[33] Chakrabarty 2000: 253.

[34] Feyerabend 1975: 218–219.

[35] Se for example Bahm 1995, Deutsch & Bontekoe 1997 and Mall 1995.

[36] Se for example Richard Rorty's critical attitude presented in Balslev 1991 and analysed in Zhang 2006.

[37] Se for example Kessler 1999 and Runzo 2001.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jenny Berglund is senior lecturer and research fellow in the Study of Religions at Södertörn University in Stockholm, Sweden. She has published mainly within the fields of Islamic Religous Education. Among other things her thesis: *Teaching Islam, Islamic Religous Education at Three Muslim Schools in Sweden* (Uppsala University 2009).

Anna Karlström is a PhD candidate at the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, Uppsala University, Sweden. Her primary research interests include heritage studies in general. Her studies are based on experience of working in Laos over the last ten years. She also has experience from heritage management projects in Sweden.

Shraddha Kumbhojkar heads the post-graduate department of History at the Tilak Maharashtra University, Pune, India. She has researched the plurality of interpretations of ancient Indian history and is presently working on caste and gender discriminatory practices in contemporary India. Her ongoing project examines how textbooks of history are received by teenage students. Her latest publication (Sugawa 2008) is *Nationalism, Literature and Creation of Memory: Maharashtra 1885-1929.*

Willy Pfändtner is a philosopher of religion and lecturer in the Study of Religions at Södertörn University, Stockholm. His research interests are primarily global philosophy of religion and East-West dialogue. His doctorial thesis is an investigation into the phenomenon of religious diversity: *Understanding Religious Diversity: a Contribution to Interreligious Dialogue from the Viewpoint of Existential Philosophy* (Uppsala 2005).

Anna-Pya Sjödin is a research fellow in Philosophy at Södertörn University and presently working on the conceptualisation of cognition and knowledge in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. She attained her PhD in Indology at Uppsala University with the thesis: *The Happening of Tradition: Vallabha on Anumāna in Nyāyalīlāvatī*, South Asian Studies 1, 2006 Uppsala: ACTA.

David Thurfjell is senior lecturer and research fellow in the Study of Religions at Södertörn University. He has published mainly within the fields of Iranian and Islamic studies. Among other things the monography: *Living Shi'ism: Instances of Ritualisation among Islamist Men in Contemporary Iran* (Brill 2006). Presently he is working with a research project on Pentecostal revivalism among the Roma.

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