

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

*By Bharat Gupt*

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

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

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

Myths or stories are many and in many versions. Do they mean to burden us with a past to be carried as a cross or are they meant to liberate us from ignorance and illusion that we ourselves create? Or, are myths are to be interpreted as 'narratives' that aim to make a people, Hindus specially, uncomfortable, dislocated and even ashamed of their own heritage in order to make them yield to predatory cultures? These are some of the questions that come to mind while reading Doniger's massive volume.

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

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

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

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

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

The reader is disappointed after reading the next few lines. Doniger informs us that ideas of Hindu religion are shaped by the political and economic events including the frequent foreign intrusions. In other words, history is shaping religion. Now, if this old wine was to be served, if this well known Marxist materialist notion about religion being a product of social needs and environmental imperatives was to be reiterated, why was a profound Hindu symbol of *linga-yoni* invoked? Nowhere through her bulky book, has Doniger showed how Hindu religious concepts have shaped India’s history. She is at a loss in pointing out how material culture is also a product/manifestation of sustained systems of Hindu thought indigenous and original. She has maintained the standard theory that Hinduism was being constructed (including its very name) by economic and material changes and above all changes made by the cultures of foreign occupants. The *linga-yoni* paradigm thus, fails to illustrate Doniger’s narrative of Hindu religion versus Hindu history. The *linga-yoni* symbol is not just a division into the duality of man and woman or mind and matter but is more than anything else, a sign of consciousness and its manifestations. That Hindu philosophy or *darshana* has also shaped the civilization of the subcontinent is not Doniger’s concern. Doniger’s ‘*linga-yoni*’ are thus no more than a catchy phrase, as she ends up writing neither an account of Hindu beliefs nor of Hindu history.

### ***Jacketed in Distortion***

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

Krishna says to *gopikas* in the *Shrimadbhagvatam*, or what he says to Radha in the *Gitagovindam*. The mistake made in the beginning of the book about *linga-yoni* symbol in representing it as mind versus matter is repeated here as psyche versus soma duality.

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

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

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

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

Her conclusion is clear, Hindu ideals are largely self tortuous and delusionary. “The Hindu sages dreamed of non-violence as people who live all their lives in the desert dream of oasis.” (p11). In the creation of this dichotomy between Sanskrit and the Prakrits, Doniger totally overlooks the fact that throughout in pre-colonial India, the performing arts, temples, rituals, pilgrimages and sacred

sites (*tirthas*), and wandering sermonizers were disseminating the ideas contained in Sanskrit texts to the people in a big way. Hence the divide of the Indian population into Sanskrit and its Other is unhistorical.

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

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

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

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

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

Doniger is still living in the world of make belief that by persistent and continuous repetition through the agency of some academics in US and Leftist admirers (now no longer *jholawallas* (cotton shopping bags) but now limousine owners of rich NGOs) in India, she would be able to sustain the Aryan Invasion/Migration Theory as a historical fact. The vast research that had been published by 2005 about the discovery of the Saraswati River and thousands of archeological sites discovered on its banks have been slighted by her as that more than anything else demolishes the myth of Aryan invasion/migration. The title of the chapter, 'Civilization in the Indus Valley' makes it clear that she cannot admit Saraswati to rename the civilization as it would result in marking the total change of attitude about that civilization.

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

blokes?" (73). Though she does feel this is not just a daily life scene she is not willing to admit that it is an obvious case of Indian snake worship!! Her list of dethroning the deities is long.

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

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

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

### *Vedas are Nomadic Songs*

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

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

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

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

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

The image of the Vedic people as cowboy nomads on horsebacks is strongly etched on Doniger's mind. It was on the saddle on which the Rigveda mantras in their great variety of meters were composed. It was the saddle on which the eight kinds of *vrikritis*, the most complicated system of preserving the mantras, the hundreds of schools of Vedic recitation, the grammar, the music of Sama Veda, and the hundred string harps, were developed. Therefore, the fifth guess that the Rigveda was conceived prior to Harappans in India, and so, does not mention bricks etc. would be a ridiculously Hindu nationalist posture for Doniger. It cannot be pre-Harappan as the horse is missing on Harappan seals.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In tracing the history of the karma theory Doniger first blunders in defining the Vedic notion of death merely as return to the five elements. For her there is no vision of a quest for immortality, or a clear theory of reincarnation in the Vedic *samhitas* as they believed in doing karma or ritual for happiness of the life here and now. “Their primary concerns were vedic: family, offspring, sons, the lineage of the flesh” (p178). Hence the notion of karma could not be larger than the immediate material well being. What would these untutored nomads want beyond their daily bread? By the Upanishadic times, however, she recognizes that karma has six meanings: action, ritual action, moral action, action with consequences, portion/ *praarabdha* (I am a product of I have been doing), a package of action that can be transferred to others. But the reader is surprised to know that very soon the inheritors of the Vedas developed a sense of disgust with the crowded areas of the new life of commerce and prosperity and harking back to the simple days on saddlebags, they glorified the lives of the people who renounced all the good things and went into the forest. Their desire to escape was so great that an idea of no return or no rebirth or liberation was also developed so that the Gangetic plains would become less crowded. There is no great Indian thought that Doniger does not trivialize.

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

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

“Hinduism was violent not only in its sensuality but in its reaction against that sensuality ----- violent, that is, both in its addiction and in the measures that it took to curb those addictions sensuality but in the measures it took to curb those sensuality (acknowledging , like Dr. Johnson, that it is easier to abstain than to be moderate” (p194). While the urges of *bhoga* and *yoga* are seemingly contrary,

the great success of the Indian systems has been to provide an immense variety of paths to transit smoothly from one to another. Doniger denigrates the whole cultural achievement of these *sadhana* traditions by calling them violent. She had only to read the *shatakas* of Bhartrihari to see the contemplative mode and moral control that leaves no room for untutored violence in such matters. She does not want to admit the finest achievement of Indian systems, namely that *pravritti* and *vishaya bhoga* graduates to *nivritti* after a satiation of the former. The higher joys of spiritual life come after a stable *vairagya* or turning away from the limited pleasures of the world. The hall marks of all pursuits, material and spiritual in the Hindu world are *rasa* (taste) and *ananda* (joy). Doniger ignores them both, deliberately with an agenda. Doniger makes a St. Augustine out the Hindu seeker.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

It is well known that since the infiltration of Mr. Nurul Hasan as the education minister into Indira Gandhi's cabinet in the early 70's, the history and sociology departments of Indian universities were gradually permeated by Marxist teachers who raised a generation of students who painted ancient India as a primitively feudal society which was only culturally enriched and not plundered by the Islamic invaders from Central Asia. The great antagonism that occurred between in medieval times between the ancient Hindu way of life and the values of Islamic invading classes was underplayed or totally negated by the writings of these historians. The inheritance of that rift so tragically agonic to the modern times was laid at the door of the British colonizers by portraying them as the great dividers.

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

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

So much of this book is repeating the same ideas from one end to another that the reader begins to suspect Doniger relies like Brahmins (and Goebbels) on the power of mantras. One can imagine that as a teacher giving courses on Hinduism (a subject distant, quaint and mysterious and sometimes repulsive to the monotheism indoctrinated Christian majority of her students), she has developed a style that makes Hinduism entertaining to their mindset by frequent digressions and startling comparisons with American life or modern ideas. But while in a class some things are meant to go unrecorded, in a book they are neither appropriate nor seemly. On the contrary, for a book

meant to be widely circulated in India, such antics make a disaster in cross cultural studies and international relations. In the short run they become tiresome as most of this book is. In the long run, such personalized and heavily politicized arguments about Hinduism, set a trend of writing which is unhealthy for Indology studies.

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

### ***No Itihasa, Darshana or DrishTi, but a ShrishTi of the Torn Apart Hindu***

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

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