
Chapter Title: “Working with the Available Light”

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1. Introduction:

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

2. Some Comments on Chapter 1:

Some examples of errors in this chapter are listed below with comments –

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<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>“This book tells the story of Hinduism chronologically and historically and emphasizes the history of marginalized rather than mainstream Hindus.”</td>
<td><strong>Comment:</strong> This statement should be seen not as a reflection of the actual contents of the book, but rather an attempt to situate the book in a politically correct milieu. But who really are these marginalized Hindus? Doniger clubs together in this category all women (50% of...</td>
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Hindus); tribal Hindus (10%); Scheduled Castes or Harijans, now often designated by politicians as Dalits (15%) and Shudras (perhaps another 15%). So that leaves just about 10% of the Hindu population as ‘mainstream Hindus’! Her definition of the ‘mainstream Hindu’ is thus an oxymoron.

From here onwards in the book, it is a downhill ride, with Donger seeing Hindu women primarily as hypersexualized creatures who are (often willingly according to her descriptions) raped, who are seduced by ‘addicted’ upper caste Hindu males. Entire chapters say nothing about the Shudra-Harijan-Vanavasi Hindu males who constitute 80% of the Hindu male population.

In other words, Doniger’s claim is merely a politically motivated statement and her book does not match up to her spurious claims.

Comment: Again, this is just Doniger’s political propaganda because the book refers to their contributions tangentially; and exaggerates and even invents the contributions of other religions to Hinduism. To get a better idea of how women have contributed to Hinduism, there are many better writings available on the net, or in print. Likewise, the important role of tribals in laying the foundation of Hindu traditions, and of lower castes in defining our faith has also been

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1 For an expose of the ideological motivations behind these books, refer to Aditi Banerjee, Krishnan Ramaswamy and Antonio de Nicolas (2007), Invading the Sacred – An Analysis of Hinduism Studies in America, Rupa & Co. (New Delhi). Now available online as a PDF at [http://voiceofdharma.org/books/its/invading_the_sacred.pdf](http://voiceofdharma.org/books/its/invading_the_sacred.pdf) <checked on 2nd March 2014>

2 See our reviews of chapters 16 and 18 where we have called her bluff.

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

4 E.g. Chandrakala Padia (2009), *Women in the Dharmastra*, Rawat Publications (Jaipur)


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


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

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


6 Harish Ramachandran, Dinesh Kashikar and Manikantan Menon (2001), *The Heritage of Dalits*. Vyakti Vikas Kendra (Bangalore)
discussed in many scholarly works. Doniger’s book does not even refer to these works, showing her ignorance of the relevant literature. She demeans these categories of the Hindu society by projecting them as passive victims of ‘seductions’, ‘rapes’, ‘violence’, ‘rapes’, ‘killings’, ‘beheadings’ etc. — words that are used indiscriminately throughout the book.

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

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

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

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<td>“(2) that although a number of things that have been characteristic of many Hindus over the ages (the worship of several gods, reincarnation, karma), none has been true of all Hindus, and the shared factors are overwhelmingly outnumbered by the things that are unique to one group or another; (3) that the greatness of Hinduism – its vitality, its earthiness, its vividness – lies in precisely in many of those indiosyncratic qualities that some Hindus today are ashamed of and would deny;</td>
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sexuality, violence, rapes, subjugation, suppression, beheading, killing and the like. Thanks but no thanks Wendy Doniger.

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

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

Prejudice is rarely expressed explicitly. It is more often demonstrated through creation of stereotypes, through the creation of a hated or a disliked ‘other’, through an excessive and obsessive focus on the negatives of this ‘other’, through half-truths, repeated and deliberate misrepresentation and so on.

Doniger’s “The Hindus: An Alternative History” is a textbook case of stereotyping and prejudice.

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**Comment:** The name ‘Hindu’ itself might be of foreign origin and might not have been used as a self-referent by the Hindus but this does not mean that their faith did not exist. Doniger refers to an article by David Lorenzen but does not really examine his arguments because they run counter to the Jha-Thapar-Doniger thesis that Hinduism does not exist.  

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11 The Hindus, pg. 183  
12 D N Jha himself mentions Romila Thapar’s name along with other Marxist historians, and from the context it is clear that he considers her also a ‘Marxist historian’, although not the best representative of this category. See page 11 of JHA, D. N (1994), *Economy and Society in Early India*, Munshiram Manoharlal (New Delhi)  
Thapar and Jha are quoted as one of the Marxist historians in the entry ‘Hinduism’ of ‘A Dictionary of The Marxist Thought’ (Tom Bottomore et al, 1983, Harvard University Press, p. 204).  
14 One may mention articles like ‘Syndicated Hinduism’, ‘Syndicated Moksha’, ‘The Ramayana Syndrome’ etc., by Romila Thapar where she sermonizes on the ‘true’ nature of Hinduism even though her writings betray her Hinduophobia.  
15 For a recent scholarly work debunking the politically motivated thesis that Hinduism does not and did not exist, see Rajiv Malhotra (2014), *Indra’s Net – Defending Hinduism’s Philosophical Unity*, Harper Collins Publishers India (Noida, India)  
Rajiv Malhotra has been one of her first cogent and high profile critic, but Doniger has doggedly refused to debate or discuss with him.
**foreigners in India tended to put people of different religions into different ideological boxes, did many Indians follow suit, ignoring the diversity of their own thoughts and asking themselves which of the boxes they belong in...**

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| "...there is no Hindu cannon. The books that Euro-Americans privileged (such as the Bhagavad Gita) were not always so highly regarded by “all Hindus,” certainly not before the Euro-Americans began to praise them.” | **Comment:** First, the Hindu imaginary does have a cannon – the Vedas (and some add the Tantras). Doniger’s choice of the Gita as a text that dumb Hindus began to appreciate only when the westerners exalted it is most unfortunate, and repeated from western Indologists like Eric Sharpe and Indian Marxist historians. But what is the reality regarding the Gita?

Arvind SHARMA [2000]\(^{16}\) discusses this idea and explains why it is incorrect. He notes that the Gita was not merely treated as a philosophical text, but it also served as a source of mass devotional-movements in various parts of India. It continued to be commented upon by scholars in different regions, and in different languages throughout the period in which much of India was under the rule of Muslim rulers. The very fact that Wilkins chose to translate indicates that he deemed it a popular or an esteemed text in the eyes of Hindus. No doubt, in the preface of his translation, he mentions how zealously the Brahmins guarded the doctrine of the Gita from even the unsophisticated amongst their own caste. But then, it could be argued that the doctrines of the text were nevertheless communicated to the laity in myriad forms – plays, *hari kathas* and so on. |

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In the Sri Vaishnava community of south India, the Gita has been expounded to people of all castes by the Vaishnava Acharyas after one of their early teachers, Sri Yamunacharya (10th century C.E.) wrote his Gitarthasamgraha on the text. In Maharashtra, the largely low-caste community of Warkaris have been studying the Jnaneswari, a beautiful 700 year old Maharashtri translation of the Gita written by Sant Jnaneshwar around 1290 C.E. The Gita was translated into Braj around 1320 C.E., Malayalam (1400 C.E.), Maithili (1615 C.E.), Gujarati (1620 C.E.), Madhyadeshiya Hindi (1435 C.E.) and into several other vernaculars comprehensible to Hindus of all social strata.17 Outside India, the text was translated into Javanese as early as in 1000 C.E.

Evidence showing the popularity of Gita amongst various sections of the Hindu society in pre-modern times comes from several other diverse sources.18 A European observer, Francis Buchanan, notes in 1812 C.E. that the Gita was expounded to the common pilgrims by Maharashtrian Pandits resident at Gaya in Bihar.19 Another scholar, Dr. Peter G. Friedlander, notes20 that numerous Gurumukhi manuscripts of Hindi translations of Gita from Punjab, dating from the 18th and 19th centuries exist, indicating the popularity of the text in that region before the British rule. And finally, one must not lose sight of the fact that the message of Vedanta and other forms of ‘higher’ Hinduism has always been disseminated among the masses by wandering preachers, dramatists and so on in diverse,

17 For a comprehensive description of various commentaries and translations on the Bhagavadagita down the ages, refer CALLEWAERT, Winand M. and Shilanand Hemraj. 1983. Bhagavadgitanuvada – A Study in Transcultural Translation. Satya Bharati Publication: Ranchi (Bihar)
18 Professor Shrinivas Tilak refers to several issues of the Marathi monthly journal ‘Gitadarshan’ in this regard (http://www.sandiego.edu/theo/risa-l/archive/msg06310.html)
19 This is pointed out by Vijay Pinch at http://www.sandiego.edu/theo/risa-l/archive/msg06304.html. Note that these links are now underground and the discussion list is no longer accessible to the general public after the Indologists found their racist views come under serious criticisms from lay Hiindus.
20 See his on-line remarks at http://www.sandiego.edu/theo/risa-l/archive/msg06302.html
imaginative and interesting ways. What one needs to keep in mind that though the text of the Gita might not have been well known to the masses first hand, its doctrines were fairly disseminated in the Hindu society. Perhaps that is why, BASHAM [1989:82-97] seems to link the Gita with the triumph of Theism in the Indian society.

8 27 1 “Significantly, the definition was needed because different religions have different marriage laws; the horror of miscegenation, always lurking in the Brahmin heart of darkness, was exacerbated by the British legacy within the law code.”

Comment: A clear hate speech against Brahmin Hindus, who are characterized as having a dark heart! What Doniger forgets is that Hindus of all stripes preferred endogamy (but exogamy with respect to Gotra if applicable).

9 29 4sqq. Arguing that the Hindus have no universally shared beliefs and practices, Doniger says, “The actual beliefs and practices of Hindus – renunciation, devotion, sacrifice and many more – are peripheries that the imaginary Brahmin center cannot hold.”

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

10 34 1 “Not only did southern ideas go north, and vice versa, and not only did Tamil flow into Sanskrit and Sanskrit into Tamil, but Tamil went North, and Sanskrit south”.

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

Indian scholar Vishvanath Khaire has been advocating the linguistic bridge “Sam-Ma-Ta,” signifying “Sanskrit-Marathi-Tamil” in reference to this back and forth infusion of words into Sanskrit.

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language and from Sanskrit into Marathi and Tamil language for more than two decades and he has a host of articles and books to his credit. Wendy with access to well-equipped library at her Department in University of Chicago could not have missed his writings. She prefers to ignore scholars like him possibly because their views go against her stand of a) Aryan invasion/migration theory and b) their dating of Rig Veda much earlier than 1200 BCE (P 9).

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

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

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<td>Wendy states proudly, “I have labored all my adult life in the paddy field of Sanskrit, and since I know ancient India best, I have lingered in the past in this book longer than an anthropologist might have done, and even when dealing with the present, I have focused on the elements that resonate with the past, so that the book is driven from the past, back-wheel-powered” \textbf{Comment:} Wendy is known for her collecting vast amount of information and not for her knowledge or depth of insight or even comprehension of the foreign culture she claims to study and write about) from the ancient texts since long. However, her understanding has not come up to the level of command over the Sanskrit language. She makes gross mistakes in interpreting those texts and drawing untenable conclusions. In the Vedic literature her ambit is limited only to the Rig Veda. Even there her scholarship is doubtful. The chapter-wise reviews of her book will reveal many of these glaring errors that</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td><em>...the women were forbidden to study the most ancient sacred texts, the Vedas.</em>**</td>
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<td><strong>Comment:</strong> This is not true. For a refutation of this view, refer to our critique on chapter 05 of this book.</td>
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<td><em>&quot;If the motto of Watergate was 'Follow the money', the motto of the history of Hinduism could well be 'Follow the monkey', or more often, 'Follow the horse.'</em>**</td>
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<td><strong>Comment:</strong> This statement is as derogatory to the Hindus as a white supremacist comparing President Obama to a monkey. Doniger’s supporters claim that there is nothing demeaning in this racist remark because she is referring to Hanuman. This defense is dishonest and disingenuous because nowhere does the context of this remark refer to Hanuman. In fact, on pages 468-469, Doniger says - <em>“Mosques also provided a valuable contrast with temples within the landscape of India….The mosque, whose serene calligraphic and geometric contrasts with the perpetual motion of the figures depicted on the temple, makes a stand against the chaos of India, creating enforced vacuums that India cannot rush into with all its monkeys and peoples and colors and the smells of the bazaar and, at the same time, providing a flattering frame to offset that very chaos.”</em> Doniger’s comment is quite racist and orientalist. It is simply unbelievable that even in this age, a scholar can essentialize the Hindu Main St. of sultanate India as “monkeys and peoples, colors and smells, and chaos” – just a variant of the cow, caste and curry stereotype of India and Hindus.</td>
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<td>Consistent with her theme of projecting Hinduism as violent and intolerant, Doniger claims, “<em>People have been killed in India because they did or did not sacrifice animals, or had sex with the wrong women, or disregarded the Vedas, or even made use of the wrong sacred texts, but no one was impaled (the Hindu equivalent of burning at the stake) for saying that god was like this rather than like that.”</em>**</td>
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<td><strong>Comment:</strong> How many Hindus have been killed for sacrificing or not sacrificing animals, or for disregarding the Vedas, or for using the wrong sacred texts? Doniger forcibly superimposes European crusades, inquisitions, Catholic-Protestant civil wars on the history of Hindus without providing a shred of evidence. There is simply no evidence that any significant number of Hindus or non-Hindus were killed for the above reasons. This is just a deliberate attempt to project the Hindus as intolerant. Throughout the book, we see repeated attempts by Doniger to depict the Hindus (even women like Sita) as violent.</td>
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<td><em>&quot;The Parsis did not in fact dissolve into Islam</em>**</td>
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|      |       | **Comment:** Rather than crediting the proverbial Hindu tolerance for
and Hinduism; they remained Parsis and indeed were often caught in the crossfire during the riots that followed the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947.”

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

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For any questions and corrections, please write to the reviewers Vishal Agarwal [vishalsagarwal@gmail.com](mailto:vishalsagarwal@gmail.com) or Dr Pramod Pathak [drpvpathak@yahoo.co.in](mailto:drpvpathak@yahoo.co.in)
3. PostScript on the Chapter

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