

Chapter: # 9 of ‘The Hindus, an Alternative History’ by Wendy Doniger

Chapter Title: “Women and Ogresses in the Ramayana 400 BCE to 200 CE”

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1. Introduction: Wendy Doniger’s Gossip-Tabloid Version of the Ramayana

“*Jennifer Aniston seen without her wedding ring!*” or “*Michelle Obama breaks down while confessing to her adultery in front of the cameras*” – It is very common to see these sleazy, sensational and gossipy headlines screaming out from garishly printed tabloids when one is waiting in the cashier’s line at a grocery store. The tabloids also ‘prove’ their sensational news by incorporating some doctored ‘photographs’ in their narrative. Wendy Doniger’s book is no less graphic, sensationalized and sleazy. But whereas, all sensible minded people know these tabloids to be just what they are – i.e. titillating and cheap gossip, in the field of South Asian Studies (called ‘Indology’ by colonialists), these types of writings are very mainstream. Indeed, several years ago, Rajiv Malhotra wrote about the “Wendy’s Child Syndrome”¹ in an online portal, and a book highlighting this ‘scholarly’ malaise too came out in the year 2007.²

Doniger’s “*The Hindus: An Alternative History*” (2009) is not even a history. It is rather a collection of her own fantasies about alternative sex practices that she superimposes on the Hindu scriptures using the fig leaf of Freudian psychology in which, per her own admission, she has not been trained professionally. Her so called methodology enables her to use ‘free association’ to link completely unrelated facts using the most superficial resemblances, and bandy around words like ‘displacement,’ and ‘beheading’. To bullet proof her book against any criticism, she has claimed at the very onset that her book gives voice to the suppressed sections of the Hindu society (women, lower castes and tribals). The ruse seems to have worked,

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

² 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 <checked on 2nd March 2014>

because the traditionally Hindu hating Marxist professors teaching at some American³ (and Indian) universities have used the book as a textbook in their Hinduism classes, ignoring the hundreds of errors, fantasies masquerading as facts (not even as interpretations) and undisguised racism and hatred for the Hindus. The book actually degrades its 'objects' of study by projecting Hindu women as over-sexed, debauched and violent creatures, by describing the tribals and the lower castes as silent and stupid victims of the tyranny of 'upper-caste' Hindu males. Of course, the narrative is lapped up gleefully by Gungadins,⁴ who willingly bear the white woman's burden.

Doniger also claims that the 'upper-caste Hindu males' have imbibed Victorian prudery from British colonialism, and therefore, they are wrongly offended when she points out the sex that is present in the Hindu scriptures. However, Doniger's argument is largely an attempt to deflect criticism of the shoddiness of her own work. **Hindus have never sanitized our scriptures to strip them of their sexual content. The problem is that Doniger imagines things in them that are not there.**

In many ways, the chapter on Ramayana wins heads down in how Wendy lets her shoddy scholarship run riot. To 'glorify' Sita, she imagines all sorts of character flaws in Rama. But she does not spare Sita either, whom she projects as 'sexual' [e.g. see item 31 below]. Her kitsch psycho-analysis is more a window into Doniger's mind than it is reflective of the character of the characters in the Ramayana. The chapter shows Wendy's penchant for below the belt gossip. Doniger does not mention the numerous glorious women characters in the Ramayana, ostensibly because she could not kink narratives about them into perverse interpretations – like Shabari, Svayamprabha (who transported the Vanaras to the sea shore from where Hanuman leapt towards Lanka), or even Mandodari – the virtuous wife of Ravana.⁵

Words like 'seduction,' 'addiction,' 'sexual,' and 'violence' screech out from the chapter, para after para, making it look like a gossip tabloid retelling of the Ramayana. Much like the doctored photos in these tabloids, Doniger's book abounds with spurious references, wrong translations and fantasies paraded as facts.

Additionally, the chapter suffers from the following methodological errors:

³ See <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/hindus-will-suffer-most-from-the-withdrawal-of-donigers-book/20140226.htm> <checked on 7 March 2014>. Note that Gyan Prakash was a student leader of the Leftist student party at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), considered the ideological Mecca of Indian Communism. The institution has repeatedly churned out Maoist terrorists, including Dr Prachanda, who headed the Maoist insurgency in Nepal for many years.

⁴ To understand who a Gunagadin is, refer to: <http://hindureview.com/2006/01/26/gunga-din-comes-michigan-scholar-america-madhav-deshpande/> <checked on 8th March 2014>

⁵ To understand the role of women in the Ramayana from an academically sound perspective, the following works may be consulted:

A V Subramanian, "Some Women Characters in the Ramayana", pp. 173 – 195 in Bhuvan Chandel and Shubhada Joshi (eds.), *Women in Ancient and Medieval India*, Center for Studies in Civilizations: New Delhi (2009)

B R Modak, "Position and Status of Women in the Ramayana", in I K Tripathi (Ed.), *Position and Status of Women in Ancient India*, vol I, Department of Ancient Indian History Culture and Archaeology: Varanasi (1988), pp. 72-77

G V Bapat, "Position and Status of Women in India as Reflected from the Ramayana, pp.78- 108 in *ibid.*

1. It does not discuss the internal stratification of the text of Valmiki's Ramayana. Numerous scholars have pointed out that significant portions of Book I and the entire book VII of the Ramayana are later additions, and not from the pen of Valmiki.⁶ And yet, Doniger treats all the seven books as one unit, and draws more than half of the narrative of her chapter from these two books of the Ramayana alone. **[See comments on items 21, 25, 33, 41 etc. below]**
2. It practically ignores the retellings of Ramayana in many Indian and non-Indian languages. Wherever they are used sparingly, it is for the purpose of promoting a strained interpretation or some other pernicious agenda. In a later chapter, she refers to the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas in some detail, but even those references are riddled with errors.⁷ **[See criticism 41 and footnote 20 below]**. At one instance, she uses an episode in the Ramacharitmanas that is not in the Ramayana, without telling the reader so, and then falsely psycho-analyzes the relationship between Rama and Lakshmana. This is a very shoddy methodology.
3. The text is situated by Doniger in the historical period of 200 BCE to 200 CE rather artificially. She uses an imaginary historical context to explain the narrative of the Ramayana, but fails miserably because first, her historical facts themselves are wrong and second, because she cherry picks passages from the scripture and fails to correlate it cogently to any worthwhile historical data. **[See items 3-7, 9, 12-13 below]**.
4. Doniger has used the critically constituted text of the Ramayana that was published from Baroda. In this text, the purported interpolated passages are relegated to footnotes or to appendices. It is interesting to see how Doniger uses these interpolated passages selectively only when they serve her narrow purposes. There is no consistent methodology behind Doniger's selection or rejection of these additional or interpolated verses in the Ramayana. **[See items 21, 25, 33 etc. below]**
5. Many a times, Doniger injects episodes into Valmiki's Ramayana when they do not even exist in the text! Or she misreads them and mangles them beyond recognition. **[See items 15, 18, 20, 22, 30, 32, 37, 38 etc. below]**. **We are unsure if these are instances of blatant lying, or of pathetically shoddy scholarship by Wendy Doniger.**
6. She indulges in cherry-picking verses out of their context, and leaving out dozens of verses to weave a fantasy and pursue her hyper-sexual theories in the most shoddy manner. **[See items 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 27, 30, 35 etc. below]**.
7. Understanding the cultural context is a pre-requisite to interpretation of the ancient texts. Doniger does not even make an attempt to understand the Hindu culture, and perceives these scriptures through her idiosyncratic and ethnocentric lens.

Aditi Banerjee had written an excellent criticism⁸ of Doniger's fake interpretations of the Ramayana and I have used the same wherever applicable in this review. For English translations quoted here, I have referred to Robert Goldman et al's translations⁹ of the first six books. For the seventh book, I have consulted the critical Baroda edition of the Ramayana and have translated the verses myself. The list of errors discussed is partial – the chapter is very poorly written like many others in the book.

⁶ See Father Camille Bulcke and Dinesheshwar Prasad (2010), *Ramakatha and Other Essays*, Vani Prakashan: Delhi or even the numerous articles and books of John Brockington that Doniger should have been familiar with.

⁷ See my review of Chapter 20 for these errors.

⁸ Aditi Banerjee, "Oh, but you do get it wrong" available online at <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?262511> <checked on 4th March 2014>.

⁹ Robert P. Goldman et al (2007 -), *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd (New Delhi) in 6 volumes covering Balakanda through Yuddha Kanda.

2. Some Errors in Chapter 12:

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

#	Page #	Para # on the page	Erroneous statement in the book	Comments
1	213	2	Doniger summarizes Ramayana’s own narrative on how the text was composed. One day, while bathing in a river, Valmiki saw a pair of cranes mating. Suddenly, a hunter shot at them with an arrow and killed the male partner. Valmiki saw and heard the piteous cries of the female bird and burst out in a shloka verse spontaneously, criticizing the Nishāda (the hunter) for having killed the bird, and interrupted the couple’s joy. Doniger interprets this event as representative of the central themes of the Ramayana. So what are these central themes of the Hindu scripture according to her? Doniger says: <i>“This vignette that the Ramayana tells about itself weaves together the themes of dangerous sexuality, the violation of Dharma, compassion towards animals, attitudes toward tribal peoples, and the transmutation of animal passions into human culture – all central to the concerns of this chapter.”</i>	As we will show in this chapter review, much of what Doniger describes as the central themes of her chapter or of the Ramayana, especially ‘dangerous sexuality’, ‘attitudes towards tribal peoples, and ‘transmutation of animal passions into human culture,’ are rather are fiction of her own perverse imagination run riot. In her zeal to defame Rama, Lakshmana and even Sita, she has invented passages where they do not exist, has projected her own fantasies as interpretations, and has thoroughly abused the rather discredited field of Freudian psychoanalysis. Overall, this chapter, like the rest of the book very shoddy scholarship. The chapter is very long, and ironically after devoting 40 pages to her faulty interpretation of the Ramayana, Doniger concludes later in the book (on page 662) that <i>“it is a work of fiction.”</i> Doniger accuses the Hindus of having become prudish in sexual matters post Victorian era. First, this is not entirely true. Second, what we Hindus object to is Doniger injecting her own sexual fantasies on Hindu scriptures with gay abandon. Hindus have never sanitized our scriptures to strip them of their sexual content. The problem is that Doniger imagines things in them that are not there.
2	214	2	Doniger contrasts the compassionate concern that the Shaivite and the Vaishnavite traditions have for animals with the animal sacrifices in the Vedas and says, <i>“The attitude to animal sacrifice was also much affected by the rise of the two great male Hindu gods Shiva and Vishnu in sectarian movements that had no use for Vedic ritual.”</i>	Doniger is wrong in stating that Vaishnavism and Shaivism have nothing to do with Vedic ritual. Even today, much of Vedic rituals are carried out by those who are otherwise Vaishnavites and Shaivites. And the same has been true for several centuries now simply for the reason that the scriptures of these two traditions often exhort their followers to continue performing these rites, which are said to be pleasing to both Shiva and

				<p>Vishnu. True, that the Agamas also advocate their own Puja and Temple ceremonies, but they certainly do not do away with Vedic Yajnas.</p> <p>Another mistake that Doniger has done in this sentence is to allege that Vedic rituals always involve animal sacrifice. Even a person who is faintly acquainted with this subject will know that only a small fraction of Vedic ceremonies involve animal sacrifices. In fact, other than during the Ashwamedha Yajna, there is hardly any evidence in the entire Rigveda of animal sacrifices.¹⁰ Even in the other Vedas and their associated scriptures, only a fraction of the Yajnas involve animal sacrifice.</p> <p>And even within the Vedic tradition, there is a hoary tradition of replacing actual animals with wheat flour substitutes as Doniger has noted herself elsewhere in the book.</p>
3	214	3	<p><i>“Rajagriha (in Magadha, the present-day Bihar) and Kashi (Varanasi, in Koshala), which had come to prominence in the time of the Upanishads, remained great centers of power but were now rivalled by Kaushambi in Vatsa.”</i></p>	<p>Doniger has got her history all mixed up. Rajagriha is not mentioned in the Upanishads or even in the Ramayana. And Magadha does not equate to present-day Bihar, which lies on both sides of the Ganga and encompasses several ancient Indian kingdoms (Anga, Magadha, Videha etc.). Magadha was predominantly on the south side of Ganges.</p> <p>In the Ramayana, the region of Magadha is mentioned but no other details are given. In fact, verse 1.31.5 mentions Girivraja and not Pataliputra or Rajagriha, which were later capitals of Magadha. This omission in the Ramayana is quite glaring because in this section, Sage Vishvamitra lists all the prominent towns in that region with the names of Kings who founded them. If Rajagriha and Pataliputra had existed, the Sage would have surely mentioned them.</p> <p>As for Kashi, this kingdom or region is mentioned even in</p>

¹⁰ See, K R Potdar (1953), *Sacrifice in the Rgveda – Its Nature, Influence, Origin and Growth*; Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Bombay

				Atharvaveda (Shaunaka) 6.137.1. Kashi and Koshala were separate kingdoms in the Ramayana and it was only later that Kashi was conquered by Koshala. Doniger makes the same error on page 165 of her book.
4	215	2	<i>"...in 321 bce Pataliputra (the modern Patna), then said to be the world's largest city, with a population of 150,000 to 300,000, became the capital of the first Indian Empire, the Mauryan Empire."</i>	It is debatable if the Mauryan Empire was really the first Indian empire. Pataliputra was also earlier the capital of the Nanda Empire. A look at the map of the kingdom of Mahapadma Nanda indicates that it too merited the designation of 'Empire.' ¹¹
5	215	5	<i>"A story goes that a Brahmin named Chanakya ("chickpea")...."</i>	The explanation of the name Chanakya as 'chickpea' is inadmissible. It simply means 'son of Chanaka.'
6	216	5	<i>"He [Pushyamitra] is alleged to have performed a human sacrifice in the city of Kaushambi."¹⁵</i> ¹⁵ Flood, <i>Introduction</i> , 51	Flood's association of Pushyamitra with human sacrifice is based on an old excavation report of the site by G R Sharma. Subsequent excavations and re-examination of data have resulted in different interpretations. The Syenachiti Altar (associated with the Purushamedha) is dated to mid 2 nd cent. CE and is therefore better attributed to a Sunga king after Pushyamitra. ¹² All available literary references point to Pushyamitra performing only the Vajapeya, Rajasuya, Agnishtoma and Ashwamedha (two of them). Doniger has therefore relied on a secondary source which is itself now outdated.
7	216	4	<i>"A passage in a much later text implies that the Shungas were of low birth,¹⁶ ..."</i> ¹⁶ Bana, <i>Harshacharita</i>	Doniger does not say exactly where Harshacharita implies that Shungas were of low birth. Like many other references and endnotes in her book, this one too is vague and reflects a lack of careful editing or sheer carelessness. No historian takes this reference in Harshacharita (Uchhavaasa 6 or section 6 of the work) literally because Banabhatta is merely

¹¹ This might be checked even online at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magadha#Nanda_dynasty <checked on 07 March 2014> or in Joseph Schwartzberg's *Historical Atlas of South Asia*, page 18 (Plate III.B.4). The atlas is available online at <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/schwartzberg/> <checked on 07 March 2014>

¹² Deo Prakash Sharma (2006), *Archaeology of Lower Ganga Yamuna Doab (1200 BCE to 1200 AD)*, Bharatiya Kala Prakashan: New Delhi. Volume I of the book has extensive discussion on the Syenachiti.

				criticizing Pushyamitra for having murdered his Mauryan King overlord treacherously. All other literary evidence points to the fact that the Sungas were not 'of low birth'.
8	218	3	<i>"The Ramayana and the Mahabharata mark the transition from the corpus of texts known as shruti, the unalterable Vedic canon, to those known as smriti, the human tradition. They are religious texts, which end with the "fruits of hearing" them ("Any woman who hears this will bear strong sons," etc.)...."</i>	Doniger makes it appear that Smritis have fruits of hearing, the (phalashrutis) whereas the Shrutis do not have them. This is not completely true. The 19 th book of Atharvaveda (Shaunakiya) ends with the verse 'stutaa mayaa varadaa vedamaataa....' which is clearly a phalashruti. The Shankahayana Aranyaka chapter XIV is a Phalashruti (followed by a Vamsha). Many of the Upanishads end with a Phalashruti (e.g. the Kaivalya Upanishad and many other stand-alone Upanishads that are not a part of Vedic Shakhas but are considered shruti). And not all Smritis end with a Phalashruti. For example, the Kalpasutras, that are appended to the Shruti but are regarded as Smriti do not have any "fruits of hearing" verses.
9	221	3	<i>"The Ramayana, composed at a time when kingdoms like Videha were becoming powerful in a post-Mauryan era, legitimates monarchy through the version of the golden age of Ram-Raj, Rama's rule."</i>	Again, a laughable claim, not supported by the facts of history. Videha was not a monarchy in the post-Mauryan era, let alone being a kingdom that was 'becoming powerful.' In the Upanishadic times, Videha was a kingdom, but by the time of Buddha, it had become an oligarchy and was eventually absorbed in the Vajji confederacy and then in Magadha. ¹³ Therefore, Doniger's summary of the political situation is quite wrong and grossly anachronistic.
10	222	2	<i>"Hindus in later periods often took the devotion to Rama expressed by Hanuman and Lakshmana as a paradigm for human devotion (bhakti) to a god. Yet in the Ramayana, these relationships lack the passionate, often violent qualities that characterize the fully developed bhakti of the Tamil texts and the Puranas from the 10th Century CE."</i>	Again, a grossly inaccurate generalization. 'Violent qualities' characterize the devotion of Nayanars, but to extrapolate that to all the Shaivites or others (Vaishnavites) of the Tamil speaking regions of that era is quite a stretch. And it appears that Doniger disqualifies the devotion of Lakshmana and Hanuman as being 'fully developed bhakti' because they lacked the 'passionate and often violent qualities' as if these are both an absolute must for a bhakta to be a

¹³ G P Singh (2003); *Republics, Kingdoms, Towns and Cities in Ancient India*; D K Printworld (New Delhi)

				<p>complete bhakta.</p> <p>The later Bhakti scriptures in fact classify the practice of Bhakti into 9 or more types (and every Bhakta does not exhibit all these 9 forms of Bhakti), and that of Hanuman is said to be 'daasya-bhakti'.</p>
11	222	4	<p><i>"...they [both Rama and Krishna] are not only part-time gods but partial or fractional parts of Vishnu, who remains there, fully intact, always a god, while his avatars function on earth, always human."</i></p>	<p>Doniger reflects an inaccurate understanding of Vaishnavism. Most Vaishnavites make a crucial distinction between Rama and Krishna. It is Rama who is an 'amsha avatara' (partial incarnation) whereas Krishna is termed as a 'Poorna Avatara' (complete avatara) of Vishnu. This is captured in the well-known adage, "<i>Krishnastu bhagavan swayam.</i>"</p> <p>Nevertheless, Vishnu still did not cease to exist in Vaikuntha when he incarnated as Rama and Krishna. His entire powers were manifested in Krishna and that is why Krishna is not a 'partial', or a 'fractional' part of Vishnu. Like most of her works, this book of Doniger too indicates that she has not completely understood the subjects that she writes on.</p>
12	223	2	<p><i>"Not only did some of these strands [of the Hindu epics] come from Buddhism and Jainism, but the avatar was an answer to one of the challenges that these religions now posed for Hinduism."</i></p>	<p>Again, this is mere speculation. The critical editions of neither the Ramayana nor the Mahabharata have any reference to the Buddha, Buddhists or their doctrines.¹⁴ There is no hard evidence to link the doctrine of Avatara to the rise of Buddhism and Jainism. The roots of this doctrine probably lie in the pre-Jain/Buddhist Vedic texts.¹⁵</p>
13	223	3	<p><i>"For by this time the Buddha and the Jina had successfully established the paradigm of a religious movement centered upon a human being. But Rama and Krishna beat the Buddhists and the Jainas at their own game of valorizing the human"</i></p>	<p>Again, a meaningless interpretation because the Mahabharata or the Ramayana do not refer to or mention the Buddha/Jina or their followers or practices. In fact, in the early Puranas, Buddha is accepted as an Avatara of Vishnu just like Rama and Krishna.</p>

¹⁴ In this regard, see: Asim Kumar Chatterjee (2007), *A Historical Introduction to the Critical Edition of the Ramayana*, R N Bhattacharya (Kolkata), p. 2-3

¹⁵ For example, see the Vedic references of the Vamana incarnation in the following paper: Ganga Sagar Rai, "Vamana Legend in the Vedas, Epics and Puranas", pp. 102 – 140 in *Purana*, vol. 12, No. 1 (1970)

			<i>form as a locus of superhuman wisdom and power, for Rama and Krishna are humans with a directly line to divinity....”</i>	<p>This fact comes in the way of Doniger’s theory. If anything, it was the triad of Rama, Krishna and Buddha that beat Jina at his game.</p> <p>The early Puranas are dated to the end of the period during which the Mahabharata was given its final form. Therefore, if these epics were upstaging Buddhists and Jains, then why did the Puranas treat the Buddha as an Avatara given that Buddhists were still a threat?¹⁶ To conclude, Doniger’s speculation looks good only in theory (like Marxism or Freudian Psychoanalysis) but real facts do not support it.</p>
14	223	4	<i>“Being human, Rama is vulnerable. Despite his divine reserves, he is tripped up again and again by women – his stepmother Kaikeyi, Ravana’s sister the ogress Shurpanakha, and ultimately, his wife, Sita.”</i>	<p>It is unclear how Rama was tripped by Devi Sita. Doniger does not give any compelling reason, and equates Sita (the virtuous woman) with the evil women Shurpanakha and Kaikeyi in the most casual way.</p>
15	224	1	<i>“For bringing about the sufferings that will overwhelm Kausalya, Sita curses not Kaikeyi but the hunchback [Mantharā]...”</i>	<p>Doniger clearly manages to mangle the text of the Ramayana. Nowhere does Sita curse Mantharā and this is purely her own invention.</p> <p>In another publication,¹⁷ Doniger clarifies that Sita cursed Mantharā when Ravana comes to kill her. This happens in the Sundara Kanda, in Ashoka Vatika and where he threatens to kill her, while Hanuman is watching them, hidden from their sight. However, when the relevant portion of the Sundara Kanda’s critical edition was examined, I did not see any verse there as well wherein Sita cursed the hunchbacked maid.</p> <p>Even in the Yuddhakanda, when Ravana creates an illusion of Rama’s severed head and shows it to Sita, she is overcome with grief but does not curse Mantharā. She only reviles Kaikeyi for</p>

¹⁶ For the description of Buddha in the Puranas, refer: Ram Shankar Bhattacharya, “Buddha as depicted in the Puranas”, pp. 384 – 404 in *Purana* vol. 24, No. 2 (July 1982)

¹⁷ Page 525 in “*On Hinduism*”, OUP (2014).

				<p>ruining the family and bring great sorrow upon Kaushalya.</p> <p>It was also Kaikeyi's own biological son Bharata who curses his mother when he learns of her political machinations (Ramayana 2.67-68). In fact, Bharata says later that the only reason he did not kill her own mother or that Shatrughna should not kill Mantharā for her crime was because Rama would then forsake Bharata for killing their mother, and Shatrughna for killing Mantharā [Ramayana 2.72.21-22].</p>
16	224	4	<p>Quoting Sita's anguish at Rama asking her to prove her innocence after the war, Doniger paraphrases, <i>"You distrust the whole sex because of the way some women behave. If anyone touched my body, it was by force."</i></p>	<p>Quite typically, Doniger cherry picks just 2 verses [Ramayana 6.104.7-8] out of the entire beautiful address of Sita to Rama and chooses words carefully so as to give a vulgar caricature of the episode. Sita's address covers verses 5-16 of that chapter, and it shows the deep love that she had for Rama. Then, she asks Lakshmana herself to set a pyre to undergo the fire ordeal so that she can die rather than live bereft of the love and trust of her husband.</p> <p>Let us give Goldman's translation of the verse cited by Doniger: "You harbor suspicion against all women because of the conduct of the vulgar ones. If you really knew me, you would abandon your suspicion. If I came into contact with another's body against my will, lord, I had no choice in this matter. It is fate that was to blame here." [Ramayana 6.104.7-8]</p> <p>It is interesting here that Doniger chooses to insert the word 'sex' in lieu of 'all women', or 'gender'. Her choice follows a certain penchant for preferring words like 'seduction', 'addiction', 'rape', 'violent sex', 'violence' etc. just like gossip-tabloids written by juveniles for juveniles.</p> <p>In fact, it is not out of context to quote a few more verses hereafter that show the beauty of Sita's character:</p> <p>"My heart, which I do control, was always devoted to you. But I could not control my body, which was in the power of</p>

				<p>another. What could I have done? If, my love, you do not truly know me despite our long-nurtured love and intimacy, then surely I am lost forever.” [Ramayana 6.104.9-10]</p> <p>How beautifully, Sita here establishes <u>mutual trust and love</u> as the basis of a long lasting and successful marriage. But perhaps, Doniger does not understand these human emotions because her own marriage broke down and she abandoned her spouse (or he did it to her).¹⁸ And that is why, she sees all human relationships only through one orifice – that of sex.</p> <p>What follows later in the Ramayana is also a lesson for all of us. It is not that all women who are kidnapped must undergo Agni Pariksha. Rather, Agni Devata, in the presence of all the Devatas, appeals to Rama to accept Sita because she never turned her mind and heart away from Rama, even though she was forcibly carried off by Ravana. [Ramayana 6.106.4-9].</p> <p>Far from degrading women, these words actually teach us that women who are violated physically against their will are pure because their minds have not strayed. But Doniger is perhaps one of those who believe that women should enjoy their rape if they are subjected to it forcibly!</p>
17	225	1-2	After Sita emerges unscathed from Agni Pareeksha, Rama expresses his relief. Doniger quotes Rama as saying that he was worried that if he would have accepted Sita without the fire	Rama refers to himself as ‘Dasharatha’s son’ hundreds of times in the Ramayana out of regard and love for his father. But Doniger would like us to believe that Rama uses this phrase with a sense of shame by cherry-picking and distorting 2 verses out

¹⁸ In her autobiographical account [Wendy Doniger, “From the Great Neck to Swift Hall: Confessions of a Reluctant Historian of Religions”, pp. 36-57 in *The Craft of Religious Studies*, ed. by Jon R Stone, St. Martin Press, New York (1998)], she describes (page 44) how her husband dumped her although she had earlier made sacrifices for him – “In 1975 I gave up tenure in London and followed my husband to Berkeley.....Berkeley, like most Sanskrit departments at that time, divided the world into two groups: white men, who taught courses about Ideas and were tenured, and women of color, sometimes married to the white men in the first group and informally referred to as ‘pillow dictionaries’, who taught Languages and were untenured. As a white woman with Ideas, I was....dirt...

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

		<p>ordeal, people would have said, “<i>That Rama, Dasharatha’s son, is certainly lustful and childish.</i>” Then, Doniger remarks, “<i>Dashratha’s son is certainly lustful</i>” is a key phrase. Rama knows all too well what people said about Dashratha; when Lakshmana learns that Rama has been exiled, he says, “<i>The king is perverse, old, and addicted to sex, driven by lust (Ramayana 2.18.3).</i>”</p>	<p>the more than 20000 shlokas in the Ramayana!</p> <p>Doniger’s perverse interpretations have been refuted by Aditi Banerjee in the following words:</p> <p>[QUOTE] According to Doniger, the concept of a “sex-addict” is introduced into the <i>Valmiki Ramayana</i> by Lakshmana calling Dasaratha <i>kama-sakta</i>, which she defines as “hopelessly attached to lust.”</p> <p>It is not clear where Doniger picks up the term ‘<i>kama-sakta</i>’—the term does not appear upon a search of the text of the <i>Valmiki Ramayana</i> as given in the Titus online database, which is based on the following version of the text: G.H. Bhatt e.a., <i>The Valmiki Ramayana</i>, (Baroda 1960-1975), prepared by Muneo Tokunaga, March 12, 1993 (adaptations by John D. Smith, Cambridge, 1995.)</p> <p>Further, neither the term nor its variants appear in the most logical place where Lakshmana would have used the words to describe Dasaratha, the passage in Book 2 (<i>Ayodhya Kanda</i>) when Lakshmana disparages the character of Dasaratha for banishing Rama. The relevant phrases that Lakshmana uses here are the following: <i>nripah viparitasheha</i> (king with perverted mind), <i>pradharshhitaH vishhayaiH</i> (who is outraged by sensual enjoyments) and <i>samanimadhaH</i> (who is possessed of passion). [5] None of these terms translates even remotely as “sex addict / addiction”. Addiction is something more than just being overcome by lust: addiction is a “compulsive need for and use of a habit-forming substance...characterized by tolerance and by well-defined physiological symptoms upon withdrawal.” [6]</p> <p>However, for the sake of argument, I will give the benefit of the doubt to Doniger and assume that the term <i>kama-sakta</i> has been used by Lakshmana to describe Dasaratha in the <i>Valmiki-Ramayana</i>. That in and of itself does not imply that Dasaratha was “hopelessly addicted to lust.” <i>Kama-sakta</i> simply means an attachment (<i>sakta</i>) to desire (<i>kama</i>). <i>Kama</i> does not itself necessarily refer to sexual desire, or even erotic or romantic desire. Dasaratha’s reluctance to allow Rama to serve as guard over Vishwamitra’s <i>yajna</i>, for example, or Lakshmana’s unwillingness to be parted from Rama, could equally be characterized as <i>kama-sakta</i>. To assume it to mean “attachment to lust” is another in a pattern of Doniger’s ex-cathedra translations in variance with traditional Sanskrit <i>nirukta</i> (etymology) for which she has been repudiated before.</p> <p>It has been brought to my attention that, subsequent to the original</p>
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				<p>interview, as published in print and on this website, Doniger's statements were corrected to carry the following version of Doniger's quote on October 20: "Lakshman is the one who actually says it. He says the king is hopelessly attached to sensual objects. But Rama himself says (at 2.47.8) that the king is kama-atma, entirely consumed by kama." The deletion of the term <i>kama-sakta</i> and the addition of the new reference is not explained, other than as a "typo".</p> <p>To offer Doniger leeway that she almost never offers her critics, I will accept the "corrected" statement—but her argument still fails. The relevant reference—found in <i>Sarga</i> 53 of the Gita Press, Gorakhpur version and in <i>Sarga</i> 47 of the Titus database version (mentioned above)—is part of a scene where Rama reminisces about his father to Lakshmana during the first night of his banishment from Ayodhya. Here is the exact reference:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>anaathaH caiva vRiddhaH ca mayaa caiva vinaakRitaH kim kariSyati kaama aatmaa kaikeyyaa vasham aagataH </i></p> <p>vRiddhascha (aged); anaathascha ((and therefore) helpless); mayaarinaacha (deprived of my presence); kim karishhyati (what will he do); kRitaH (dominated as he is); kaamaatmaa (by his passion (for Kaikeyi)); aagataH (and who has fallen); kaikeyivasham (into clutches of Kaikeyi).</p> <p>"Aged and (therefore) helpless, deprived of my presence, what will he do, dominated as he is by his passion for Kaikeyi and who has fallen into the clutches of Kaikeyi."</p> <p>As with the phrases described above (uttered by Lakshmana in anger), <i>Kama-atma</i> does not necessarily mean "entirely consumed by kama." For example, the illustrious commentary on the <i>Ramayana</i> by Sivasahaya, <i>Raamayana Siromani</i>, gives the following example of using the term <i>kama-atma</i> in a non-sexual context: <i>kaama aathmaa: kaama - abhishEka vishayiNi ichchhaa</i> (desiring the matter of crowning) <i>aathmaa - aathmani manasyEva yasya sah</i> (one who had this in mind)—i.e., "the king who desired in his mind the crowning [of Rama]." [7]</p> <p>Falling prey to love (Rama's description) or being overcome by lust (Lakshmana's description) does not make one a sex addict; if it did, then any of us could be accused of the same! Sex was explicitly discussed and celebrated in ancient Indian / Hindu texts, as an accepted integral part of life—discussions of being overcome by desire, therefore, do not automatically translate into one being characterized or condemned as a</p>
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				<p>sex-addict. These epithets were uttered in anger and anguish by Dasaratha's sons at the time of their separation from their family and kingdom—the epithets are indicative of their pain and anger and are not meant to be psychoanalytical judgements of Dasaratha's character, particularly in a socio-cultural context where intense sexual enjoyment was not viewed as a vice—c.f., the accounts of Karadama <i>rishi</i> and Devahuti in the <i>Srimad Bhagavatam</i>, Yayati and Sarmishta in the <i>Mahabharata</i>, and Kacha and Devyani in the <i>Mahabharata</i>, where long periods of intense sexual union were described without any condemnation or sense of shame.</p> <p>[5] <i>Srimad Valmiki-Ramayana</i> Book 2, Canto 21, Verse 3. [6] See the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition at http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/addiction. [7] 'See Sivasahaya, <i>Raamayana Siromani</i>, Parimal Publications, New Delhi, Volume 2, p. 722.</p> <p>[UNQUOTE]</p>
18	225	2	<p>Thereafter, Doniger alleges that Rama's description of his father was no more charitable. Narrating a conversation that Rama had with Lakshmana after they had left Ayodhya, Doniger says, "<i>Rama says as much himself. The king has lost his mind. I think sex (kama) is much more potent than either artha or dharma. For what man, even an idiot like father, would give up a good son like me for the sake of a pretty woman? (Ramayana 2.47.8-10).</i>"</p>	<p>Doniger once again paraphrases the Ramayana verses to create a sensational gossip by claiming that Rama called his father an idiot who had lost his mind.</p> <p>Let us quote the exact translation of the verses, wherein Rama says that even a fool (let alone his father) would not give up a good son:</p> <p>Rama said to Lakshmana: "And being old and defenseless and parted from me what will he [Dasharatha] do? Such is his desire for Kaikeyi that he is completely in her power. Reflecting on this calamity and how the king so utterly changed his mind, I have come to the conclusion that the urgings of desire far outweigh both statecraft and righteousness. For what man, even a fool, would forsake his own son – a son who ever bowed to his will – on account of a woman, as father forsook me, Lakshmana?" [Ramayana 2.47.8-10].</p> <p>Rama then continues the dialogue and its purpose becomes clear when he asks Lakshmana to return to Ayodhya. In other words, Rama's intention of speaking these words was his love and concern for his brother as well as his mother Kaushalya that he wanted to convince Lakshmana to return to Ayodhya</p>

				[Ramayana 2.47.17-25].
19	225	2	Commenting on Rama's motivation behind banishing Sita after a citizen of Ayodhya casts aspersion on her character, Doniger remarks, <i>"Rama thinks that sex is putting him in political danger (keeping his allegedly unchaste wife will make the people revolt), but in fact he has it backward: Politics is driving Rama to make a sexual and religious mistake; public concerns make him banish the wife he loves."</i>	<p>It is Doniger's own fantasy (and a circular argument) that Rama is scared of being termed as a sex addict by people. In fact, Rama's reason for banishing Sita was solely his pursuit of Rājadharmā – the duty of a King who puts the trust of his subjects over and above the love for his own family.</p> <p>But Doniger first weaves a yarn about how Rama believes that his father is hypersexual, and then imagines that Rama too is scared of becoming hypersexual. The entire chapter is replete with these types of sleazy, sensational, gossip tabloid level interpretations.</p> <p>Interestingly, while Doniger accuses Rama of being scared of his own sexuality (again, her own imagination), everyone around him actually thinks that Rama will never commit adultery. Sita says herself that he will never lust after anyone's wife [Ramayana 3.8.4] and so does even Kaikeyi [Ramayana 2.66.40]. Of course, Doniger does not mention all these facts.</p> <p>And this kind of questionable and sleazy gossip is considered scholarship in Hinduism/South Asian/Indological scholarship these days!</p>
20	225	2	<i>"Significantly, the moment when Rama kicks Sita out for a second time comes directly after a long passage when Rama makes love to Sita passionately, drinking wine with her, for many days on end; the banishment comes as a direct reaction against sensual indulgence (Ramayana 7.41)."</i>	<p>First, note that this event is from Kanda VII of Ramayana that is regarded as an interpolation by scholars.</p> <p>Doniger seems to imply that Rama's banishment of Sita was due to his fear that like his father, he too was becoming a slave of passion. To argue her point, she says that Rama banished Sita directly after he made love to her.</p> <p>What is truth of the matter? First, even if two events occur in succession to each other does not imply a cause and effect relationship, as Doniger expresses in her shoddy and gossipy scholarship. I will reproduce Aditi Banerjee's criticism here:</p>

				<p>[QUOTE]: Note the internal contradiction in Doniger's position—her characterization of Rama hinges on a passage found in Book 7 (<i>Uttara Kanda</i>), and she has elsewhere in the interview dismissed that same Book 7 as a later interpolation!</p> <p>In any event, the passage describing Rama and Sita's "indulgence" is from <i>Sarga</i> 42 of Book 7 (<i>Uttara Kanda</i>), where Rama and Sita are enjoying their reunion after Sita's abduction. As described therein, during this period of two winters (<i>i.e.</i>, two years, although in some versions, an additional half-<i>shloka</i> is included providing that this interlude lasted 10,000 years), Rama and Sita would spend the second half of every day together in Rama's Ashoka-grove, enjoying heavenly music and dance and partaking of gourmet food and intoxicating drinks. Rama and Sita are compared to other divine couples:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Taking in his hand the pure nectar of flowers as intoxicating as the Maireyaka wine, Sri Rama ... made Sri Sita drink it, just as Indra does Sachi ... Seated in the company of the celebrated Sita, [Rama] shone with splendour like Vasishta seated along with Arundhati. Sri Rama, steeped in joy like gods, afforded delight thus day after day to ... Sita, who resembled a divine damsel. [8]</p> <p>Doniger conveniently leaves out the fact that it is in this chapter that Rama discovers that Sita is pregnant. Delighted at this revelation, Rama asks her to tell him which desire of hers he should fulfil. This is Sita's response: "O Raghava! I wish to visit the holy penance-groves and to stay, O Lord!, at the feet of sages ... living on the banks of the Ganga ... This is my greatest wish that I should stay even for one night in the penance-grove of those who live only on fruits and (edible) roots." [9] Rama readily acquiesces to this wish, promising that she will be taken for a visit there the very next day.</p> <p>Doniger claims that "in the very next chapter [Rama] says [to Sita] I've got to throw you out." This is another totally false statement by Doniger. It is in <i>Sarga</i> 45 (after two intervening <i>sargas</i> / chapters, wherein Rama learns of the negative gossip surrounding Sita and thus decides to banish her) that Rama orders Lakshmana to take Sita to the forest and leave her there. This is just one more instance of Doniger's casual disregard of the facts, unbecoming of a distinguished professor with a named chair at the University of Chicago.</p> <p>Of course, it is the two <i>sargas</i> / chapters that Doniger skips over in her</p>
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				<p>“alternative” narrative that provide the reason for Rama banishing Sita: Rama is informed that he is being rebuked by the people of Ayodhya as follows: “Why does not Sri Rama censure [Sita], who formerly had been forcibly carried away by Ravana? ... Such conduct of our wives shall have to be suffered by us also, since whatever a king does, the subjects follow.” [10] The pernicious rumours are about Sita’s chastity / purity, not about Rama’s excessive lust.</p> <p>When this gossip is confirmed by others, Rama summons his brothers to him, and informs them of his decision to leave Sita, providing the following explanation for his decision: “As long as the word of infamy circulates, so long one does fall in the lower regions (hell). Infamy is censured even by the gods and fame gains credence in the world.” [11] It is the fear of losing his good name (as the result of the infamy surrounding Sita’s chastity by the gossip-mongers of Ayodhya) that impels Rama, not fear of being chastised as a sex-addict.</p> <p>Nowhere is it mentioned that Rama feared he might fall victim to the “vice” of sex and that he therefore abandoned Sita – this again appears to be an example of the kind of fanciful creation for which Doniger and many of her students, now academicians at leading American universities, have become well-known. <i>There is no connotation of illicit or excessive indulgence in the description of Rama and Sita’s blissful interlude together in Sarga 42—to the contrary, Rama and Sita are depicted as a divine couple with the dignity and radiance of Indra and Sachi, Vasishtha and Arundhati.</i> Rama is full of tenderness for Sita upon discovering her pregnancy. It clearly breaks his heart to send Sita away—after giving Lakshmana the command, “[Rama] the noble one with His eyes closed, taking leave of His brothers, entered His own apartment, with his heart agitated by sorrow, deeply sighed as an elephant.” [12]</p> <p>In Doniger’s own words, she is “taking pieces of the Ramayana and putting them together” to come up with this far-fetched explanation. But, one cannot play connect-the-dots with various scenes from a vast text such as the <i>Valmiki Ramayana</i>, stripping out the proper sequence and removing the contextual background of the critical passages, and then call it a valid textual interpretation.</p> <p>Even if Doniger is reading into the text certain psychological motivations she wants to attribute to the characters, her characterization appears to be illogical—if Rama sent Sita away simply because he didn’t want to become / be characterized as a sex addict, why did he not make arrangements to claim his future heir(s), whom he knew Sita carried in</p>
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				<p>her womb?</p> <p>[8] See <i>Srimad Valmiki-Ramayana (With Sanskrit Text and English Translation)</i>, Gita Press, Gorakhpur (Sixth Edition 2001), Book 7, Canto 42, Verse 19 and 24, (Volume 2, p. 819).</p> <p>[9] <i>Ibid</i>, Verses 33-34, (Volume 2, p. 820).</p> <p>[10] <i>Id.</i>, Canto 43, (Volume 2, p. 821).</p> <p>[11] <i>Id.</i>, Canto 45, Verse 13 (Volume 2, p. 825).</p> <p>[12] <i>Id.</i> Canto 45, Verse 24-25 (Volume 2, p. 825).</p> <p>[UNQUOTE]</p>
21	227	1	<p>Describing the scene when Luv and Kusha come to Ayodhya, and their appearance is identical to that of their father Rama, Doniger says, “<i>Yet Rama pointedly recognizes them* as “Sita’s sons” but not necessarily his own (Ramayana 7.86.2). This is an essential episode, for male identity and female fidelity are the defining desiderata for each human gender in these texts; no one is interested in female identity or male fidelity.....</i>”</p> <p>*Did Rama know that Sita was pregnant when he banished her? He seems to allude to her pregnancy in one verse (7.41.22), but as there is no further reference to what would surely have been a very important event, and since some manuscripts omit this verse, it seems unlikely that Rama did know.</p>	<p>Doniger distorts the verse of the text to force-fit her own interpretation. The verse 7.86.2 reads: “When the recital (of Rama’s story) was going on and Rama learned that Kusha and Lava were Sita’s sons, he made an address in that regard in the midst of the assembly.”</p> <p>So it is not Rama who ‘recognizes them’ as Sita’s sons, rather he is told that they are Sita’s sons.</p> <p>And Doniger distorts the evidence of the apparatus of the critical edition (to prove that he might have been unaware of Sita’s pregnancy when he sent her to the forest) which shows that out of the dozens of manuscripts used, only 1 omits verse 7.41.22 and another uses the word ‘apoorva’ in lieu of ‘apatya (child).’ Considering that a third of verses of each recension of the Ramayana are unique, this verse has rightly been included in the critically constituted text by the editors because of the overwhelming manuscript evidence in its favor. If we start using Doniger’s ideologically motivated loose methodology, then anything can be proved from critically constituted texts.</p> <p>Moreover, as Aditi Banerjee describes above, Sita’s request to visit the hermitages of ascetics is very consistent with the couple’s knowledge that they will become parents soon. In the Hindu culture, these acts of Dharma are believed to have a</p>

				<p>beneficial effect on the fetus.</p> <p>Doniger exhibits her ethnocentrism in not understanding that it is very common in the Indian culture to refer to children by their mother's name even when their father is well know because a mother is considered more exalted in the Hindu tradition relative to the father.</p> <p>There was no restriction in the ancient Hindu society that sons must always be named after their father. Numerous heroes of Hindu tradition are frequently addressed as sons of their mother. For instance, Arjuna, the greatest warrior of the Hindu Epic of Mahabharata, is often addressed as 'Kaunteya' (son of Queen Kunti) in the text. Lord Krishna is likewise addressed as 'Devakiputra' (son of mother Devaki) in the Chhandogya Upanishad and elsewhere. The Aitareya Upanishad, one of the 10 major Upanishads (texts of Hindu spirituality), is named after Sage Aitareya Mahidasa, whose name derives from his mother Itarā. Likewise, the greatest Sanskrit grammarian Panini is also called Daakshiputra, or the son of Daakshi. The name of his father is unknown.</p>
22	228	3	<p><i>"When Rama tries to prevent her from coming to the forest with him, she says: "What could my father have had in mind when he married me to you. Rama, a woman in the body of a man? What are you afraid of? Don't you believe that I am faithful to you? If you take me with you, I wouldn't dream of any man but you – I'm not like some women who do that sort of thing. But you're like a procurer, Rama, handing me to other people, though I came to you as a virgin and have been faithful to you all this long time." Rama then insists that he had said she couldn't come with him only</i></p>	<p>It is really sad that Doniger ignores the fairly long and multifaceted speech that Sita gives to Rama to convince him that he should take her also along with him to the forest, and chooses just these verses. The beautiful qualities of character that Sita come out eloquently in these chapters wherein she addresses Rama, but all that Doniger could quote was that Sita accused Rama of being a woman in a man's body!</p> <p>And moreover, Doniger's claim that Rama said that <i>"he had said she couldn't come with him only in order to test her (2.27.3-8,</i></p>

			<p><i>in order to test her (2.27.3-8, 26). Yeah, sure; she will hear that “testing” line again.”</i></p>	<p>26)” is a blatant lie because the text does not say so at all. Let me give the translation of the relevant verses: Rama said to Sita: “If its price were your sorrow, my lady, I would refuse heaven itself. No, I am not afraid of anything, any more than is the Self-existent Brahma. But without knowing your true feelings, my lovely, I could not consent to your living in the wilderness, though I am perfectly capable of protecting you. Since you are determined to live with me in the forest, Maithili, I could no sooner abandon you than a self-respecting man his reputation.” [Ramayana 2.27.25-27]. The entire section when read, hardly sounds like a ‘test’ as Doniger puts it.</p>
23	228	4	<p><i>“In an impassioned discourse against violence and that simply carrying weapons will put wicked thoughts in his mind (3.8.1-29). Even the ogress Shurpanakha echoes Sita’s concerns by querying Rama’s apparent commitment to the conflicting dharmas of asceticism and married life [3.16.11]).</i></p>	<p>Doniger, in highlighting the ‘impassioned discourse’ forgets that the very first verse of this chapter says that Sita spoke to Rama in ‘an affectionate tone of voice’ [Ramayana 3.8.1]. But, she makes it appear that Sita’s discourse to Rama was more of the nature of an admonition. The next chapter in the Ramayana has Rama’s response wherein he says that in the Dandaka forest, the ascetics, who are the refuge of the society, have themselves taken refuge in him (Rama) as they are being troubled and terrorized by the Rakshasas. Due to this, he (Rama) has taken a vow to free them of their torment. Far from Doniger’s insinuations, Rama actually appreciates Sita’s advice because he concludes his response with these beautiful words to her, “Still, I am deeply gratified by what you have said, Sita, in your affection for me and your goodness of heart. No woman offers guidance to a man she does not love. It was worthy of you, my lovely wife, and becoming to one of your House.” [Ramayana 3.10.20]. How many women would not want to be addressed lovingly like this by their husbands? What is a dialogue full of love, respect, and understanding, is converted by Doniger into an impassioned</p>

				<p>appeal by Sita to Rama to present a strained interpretation that Rama was addicted to violence and hunting.</p> <p>And then, Doniger seems to <u>equate</u> the loving counsel of Sita, with the lust-laden and devious words of Shurpanakha who wants to seduce Rama and have him dump Sita. Is this how one should read the poetry of Valmiki?</p> <p>It is again worthwhile to reproduce the reply that Rama gave to Shurpanakha, “I was compelled to come to live in the forest by command of my mother and my father, the lord of men, and I wanted to do what is right, for doing right has always been my chief concern.” [Ramayana 3.17.15]</p>
24	230	2	<p>Doniger accuses Sita also being violent! She says, <i>“At the end of Ramayana, when Sita keeps disappearing and reappearing in a series of epiphanies, she is scorned and insulted until she commits two acts of violence that prove both her purity and her divinity.”</i></p>	<p>And what exactly are Sita’s two acts of ‘violence’? According to Doniger, these are that she <i>‘walks out on Rama’</i> (page 230, para 4) and leaves him alone their twin boys to console him (page 230, para 2).</p> <p>If Sita disappearing into the earth and Rama being left alone with his children are termed as Sita’s ‘acts of violence’, then Doniger’s tirades against the Hindus in her book can be justifiably called ‘terrorism against the Hindus’, and her sexualization of innocuous scenes involving Hindu women can be termed as her “rape of Hindu women.” To my mind, Doniger is indulging in gossip-tabloid language.</p>
25	230	3	<p>After accusing Sita of being ‘violent’ towards Rama, Doniger now accuses Rama of being abusive towards other women even before his incarnation!</p> <p>Doniger says, <i>“...Long ago in a battle of gods against antigods, the wife of the sage Bhrigu kept reviving the antigods as fast as the gods could kill</i></p>	<p>Firstly, this episode is also from the later Uttarakanda of Ramayana. Second, how is Rama abusive towards women when all he did was to have killed a lady who was protecting the enemy in a war?</p> <p>If the United States goes to war against the Palestinians and Wendy Doniger behaves like the Jihad Jane¹⁹ and is caught</p>

¹⁹ See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/06/jihad-jane-sentenced-10-years_n_4549438.html <checked on 10th March 2014>

			<p>them; Vishnu killed her, and Bhṛigu cursed Vishnu, saying, "Because you killed a woman, you will be born in the world of men and live separated from your wife for many years (7.51)." So Rama has a previous conviction of abusing women even before he is born on earth."</p>	<p>laundering money overseas to enable the Palestinians to buy weapons for use against the US, she can surely be tried for treason and be given capital punishment. That will not make the United States 'an abuser' of women.</p>
26	231	2	<p>Doniger quotes Sita's argument to Ravana as to why she cannot marry him, ""A mortal woman cannot become the wife of an ogre (5.22.3, 5.23.3)" (a remark that could be read as a warning against inter-caste marriage)."</p>	<p>Doniger's interpretation of Sita's comment as a warning against inter-caste marriage is laughable, given the fact that Ravana was descended from a Brahmana! The verse should therefore be read for what it is and not subjected to an over-interpretation.</p>
27	231	3	<p>"...Rama insists (when he claims that he knew all along that Sita was chaste and that he made her go through the fire only to prove it to everyone else), "Ravana could not even think of raping Sita, for she was protected by her own energy (6.106.15-16)." Yet, that very verb meaning "to rape, violate, or assault," is used when Ravana grabs Sita by the hair (3.50.9), a violation from which her chastity does not in fact protect her."</p>	<p>First, it was not Rama who made her undergo the fire ordeal. It is she herself who asked Lakshmana to set alight the stack of burning logs because she was so distraught that she wanted to immolate herself [Ramayana 6.104.18-19].</p> <p>And, so what if the same verb is used in two different contexts? The fact is that every word has a semantic range and the exact meaning is determined by the context. The meaning 'assault' is more appropriate in the verse 3.50.9 (as Goldman too translates), whereas 'violated' is more appropriate in verse 6.106.16. And this is clear from the description in verses 3.50.8 where Ravana seizes her by hair, and verse 3.50.12 describes how he forcibly lifted her and flew into the air with his chariot.</p> <p>I fail to understand the point that Doniger is trying to make. Surely, Rama knows that Sita was kidnapped forcibly. Therefore, when he uses the same verb here, it could not have meant 'assaulted' (because that is a given or a known fact), and must have meant only 'violated' or 'broken mentally into accepting Ravana as her husband'.</p> <p>Interestingly, in an interview, Doniger alleged that Ravana was</p>

				<p>projected as a lustful guy only later. Let us reproduce her distortion and Aditi Banerjee’s refutation of the same to expose Doniger’s penchant for sensationalism:</p> <p>[QUOTE] According to Doniger:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Things were added on in Ramayana’s first and seventh book later on. For instance, in the seventh book we have a story long before the story of Rama and Sita about how Ravana raped one of the great apsaras, Rambha ... [Her husband] curses Ravana that if he ever touches a woman against her will, his head will shatter into a thousand pieces. So that story is then told in the Ramayana to explain why Ravana didn’t force himself on Sita despite keeping her in his house all those years. In the earlier Ramayana, there’s nothing about this ... This is a later idea that creeps in.”</p> <p>It is incorrect for Doniger to say that the curse upon Ravana was a “later idea that [crept in]” to explain Ravana’s unwillingness to rape Sita. The relevant incident is found in Book 6 (<i>Yuddha Kanda</i>), almost universally recognized as part of the original <i>Valmiki Ramayana</i>. (It is the first part of Book 1 (<i>Bala Kanda</i>) and all of Book 7 (<i>Uttara Kanda</i>) that are, debatably, later interpolations.)</p> <p>The account is given by Ravana in <i>Sarga</i> (Canto) 13 of Book 6 (<i>Yuddha Kanda</i>):</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Once I beheld (a celestial nymph) Punjikasthala (by name) ... She was stripped of her garment and ravished by me. She then reached the abode of Brahma ... Highly enraged, the creator forthwith addressed the following words to me: “If you (happen to) violate any other</p>
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				<p>woman hence forward, your head will be forthwith split into a hundred pieces; there is no doubt about it." Hence, afraid (as I am) of his curse, I do not violently put Sita, a princess of the Videha territory, on my charming bed by force. [3]</p> <p>There is an account of Ravana's rape of Rambha in Book 7 (<i>Uttara Kanda</i>)—but it is the incident recounted in Book 6 (accepted as part of the original <i>Valmiki Ramayana</i>) that is explicitly offered as the reason why Ravana did not rape Sita. The effect of the rape of Rambha is more generic: "[Ravana] felt inclined no more to copulate with women who were unwilling to approach him." [4]</p> <p>This is not mere nitpicking—the citation of the rape of Punjikasthala in Book 6 discredits Doniger's contention that the curse on Ravana was a later interpolation interjected to conveniently explain why Ravana never raped Sita.</p> <p>[3] See <i>Srimad Valmiki-Ramayana (With Sanskrit Text and English Translation)</i>, Gita Press, Gorakhpur (Sixth Edition 2001), Book Six, Canto 13, verses 4-15, (Volume 2, pp. 266-267).</p> <p>[4] <i>Srimad Valmiki-Ramayana (With Sanskrit Text and English Translation)</i>, Gita Press, Gorakhpur (Sixth Edition 2001), Book 7, Canto 26, Verse 58 (Volume 2, p. 769).</p> <p>[UNQUOTE]</p> <p>Hopefully that makes it clear the intent of Rama's statement to Doniger and her academic progeny.</p>
28	232	1	<p>Elaborating further on Sita's 'vulnerability', Doniger says -</p> <p><i>"So while Rama ultimately yields to the addiction of hunting, following the deer farther and farther than he knows he should, Sita falls for two illusions</i></p>	<p>Doniger makes these comments to 'prove' that Rama and Sita were not perfect or invulnerable but were ordinary humans like us. This means, that Hindus should not worship them as divine. First, let us set the record straight. Rama was not addicted to</p>

		<p><i>(the deer and the ascetic) that make her vulnerable to Ravana and, for many years, lost to Rama.”</i></p>	<p>hunting – this is just a fantasy of Doniger, born of her hatred for Rama.</p> <p>Perhaps, Doniger has failed to understand the entire concept of Avatara. Really speaking, Bhagavan has no need to take an Avatara to banish evil because He/She is all pervading. Rather, to quote Swami Bhaskarananda, the Avatara’s purpose is as follows -</p> <p>“God incarnates on earth to fulfill two purposes: (1) to inspire and (2) to liberate. He inspires mankind through example. He willingly takes upon Himself human limitations. Then through intense spiritual practice He goes beyond them and manifests His spiritual perfection. It should be understood here that as He is perfect from His very birth, the Divine Incarnation does not really need any spiritual practice to attain perfection. Nevertheless, to inspire others He goes through various spiritual disciplines and thereby manifests His perfection to set an example for mankind. Just as a hen, which itself is not hungry, may pick at and gobble up birdseed to teach its young ones how to eat, so also a Divine Incarnation, for the sake of mankind, goes through various spiritual austerities to teach them how to attain perfection through spiritual practice.”²⁰</p> <p>So even if Rama and Sita showed vulnerabilities, their lives teach us how they coped with them, thereby setting an example for all</p>
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²⁰ Swami Bhaskarananda, 2002. *Essentials of Hinduism*. Viveka Press: Seattle (US); pp. 77-78

				<p>human beings. And herein lies their greatness, and their divine nature.</p> <p>Unfortunately, all that Doniger learns from the Ramayana is dangerous sex, rape, violence, addiction, seduction etc. That is her choice, but we too have the choice of calling her a pervert.</p>
29	232	2	<p>Doniger continues to sexualize the Sita, and refers to her as “<i>passionate, sexual Sita.</i>” (p. 232). Then, she alleges that Valmiki Ramayana suppressed this true Sita, and depicted her only as a subservient wife.</p> <p>Presto, Doniger’s conclusion is, “<i>The Valmiki Ramayana thus sowed the seeds both for the oppression of women in the dharmashastric tradition and for the resistance against that oppression in other Hindu traditions.</i>”</p> <p>The ‘other traditions’ referred to by Doniger are “<i>other Sanskrit texts as well as many vernacular versions of the Ramayana.</i>” (ibid).</p>	<p>Doniger fails to establish a cause and effect relationship between Valmiki’s work and the two disparate traditions of Hinduism.</p> <p>She is completely wrong in alleging that the dharmashastric tradition uniformly oppresses women, and that the other traditions promote women’s resistance. In fact, the Dharmashastras often have beautiful verses on the rights of women, while the folk traditions often stereotype women.²¹</p> <p>It should be asked if those Hindus who oppress women derive their inspiration from the Dharmashastras, when they have never even heard about them, much less read them. In other words, Doniger’s claim is naïve from a historiographical perspective.</p>
30	233	2-3	<p>After defaming and demeaning Rama and Sita violently, Doniger takes aim at Lakshmana. She goes on –</p> <p><i>“Lakshmana cuts off the nose and breasts and ears of Ayomukhi (“Iron Mouth”) after she suggests to him, “Let us make love (3.65.7),” and he cuts off the nose and ears of Shurpanakha when she similarly propositions Rama (3.16-17).”</i></p> <p>However, in just the very next paragraph, Doniger</p>	<p>Doniger first claims that Lakshmana attacked Shurpanakha when she propositioned to Rama, and then claims that he attacked her when Rama advised Shurpanakha to marry Lakshmana! How can both be true at the same time? Likewise, Doniger’s reference to Ayomukhi is also wrong –it is just another instance of the 100s of typos in the book.</p> <p>What does the Ramayana actually say? As anyone in India who has a faint familiarity with the Ramayana knows, both of Doniger’s alternatives are false or misrepresentations.</p>

²¹ The following work gives a comprehensive, non-political overview of the matter (unlike the politically motivated views of Marxists like Romila Thapar, Mandakranta Bose or of Hindu haters like Stephanie Jamison): Chandrakala Padia (ed.), 2009, *Women in Dharmasastras*, Rawat Publications: Jaipur

		<p>describes a different moment at which Lakshmana mutilates Shurpanakha, meanwhile also taking a violent aim at Rama,</p> <p><i>“When she [Shurpanakha] attempts to seduce Rama, he teases her cruelly: “I am already married and couldn’t stand the rivalry between co-wives. But Lakshmana is chaste, full of vigor, and has not yet experienced the joys of a wife’s company; he needs a consort. You can enjoy him and you won’t have any rival (3.17.1-5).” That’s when Lakshmana cuts off her nose.”*</i></p> <p>*Rama’s mistreatment of Shurpanakha looks even worse if we compare it with the reception that in the Mahabharata (3.13), Bhima (with the support of his family) gives to the ogress Hidimbi when she declares her love for him; He marries her, and she bears him a son.</p>	<p>Lakshmana attached and mutilated Shurpanakha when she plunged at Sita to kill her and get rid of her so that Rama can no longer say that he is married, as a reason for refusing Shurpanakha’s sexual advances. In her hatred for Rama, Doniger leaves out the vital detail that Shurpanakha was mutilated when she plunged to kill Sita.</p> <p>Let us quote the relevant verses:</p> <p>“[Shurpanakha said:] “It is on account of this misshapen slut, this hideous wife with her pinched waist, that you [Rama] care so little for me. I am going to devour this human female at once, before your very eyes, free of any rival, I shall live happily with you.” And with this, she flew into a rage, and with eyes flashing like firebrands she shot toward the fawn-eyed princess [Sita], like a giant meteor toward the star Rohini.” [Ramayana 3.17.15-17]</p> <p>This is when Rama shielded Sita, restrained Shurpanakha and asked Lakshmana to mutilate her.</p> <p>So quite clearly, Doniger believes that Rama would have been just to Shurpanakha only if he had responded favorably to her booty call. Doniger is perhaps upset at Rama for having turned down Shurpanakha because that has deprived her of an opportunity to go into another frenzy of gossip-tabloid Indology; and because Rama refused to take Doniger’s bait so as to be accused of being an unfaithful polygamist. Rama is damned if he does it, and damned if he does not do it!</p> <p>And Doniger distorts the Ramayana, which does not describe the episode the way Doniger depicts. Rama <u>does not</u> say that he</p>
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				<p>couldn't withstand the rivalry of cowives. What he says is, "I am already married, my lady, and I love my wife. And for women such as you, to have a rival wife is a source of bitter sorrow." [Ramayana 3.17.2]</p> <p>And Doniger has clearly revealed her own penchant for free sex by praising Bheema (who married Hidimbi) and comparing him favorably to Rama, who is held as an exemplar of fidelity to one wife by the Hindus. She leaves out crucial details of the differences between the two situations, in her pervert zeal to indulge in Freudian free-association. The five Pandava brothers (including Bhima) had shared a single wife, whereas Rama had a wife to himself. Hidimbi's brother had sent her to spy on the Pandavas and assist in killing them. In the ensuing fight, he is the one who gets killed. Hidimbi is in love with Bheema and aids him in killing her own brother. She does not attack the Pandavas' wife Draupadi whereas Shurpanakha tries to kill Sita and also refuses to marry Lakshmana who was available.</p>
31	233	3	<p>And now Doniger is at her pornographic best, when she tries to downgrade Sita by comparing Shurpanakha favorably to her: <i>"Shurpanakha's attempt to replace Sita in Rama's bed, which Rama and Lakshmana mock, exposes a deep resemblance between the two women and a deep ambiguity in the text's attitude to Sita's sexuality. On the one hand, Sita is the epitome of female chastity. On the other hand, she is, like Shurpanakha, a highly sexual woman, a quality that may explain not only why Ravana desires her but also why he is able to carry her off."</i></p>	<p>Doniger is effectively blaming Sita, the victim, for getting kidnapped by Ravana! This is like shaming the raped woman as if it were her own fault. So much for Doniger's feminism and support for woman's rights!</p> <p>To allege that Sita could be kidnapped by Ravana because she was highly sexual is blasphemous to the Hindus. And to see parallels between Sita and Shurpanakha is just so ridiculous that even Freud would be turning in his grave. He advocated free association, not free sex as Doniger seems to recommend.</p>
32	234	3	<p>Moving along, Doniger now insinuates that Rama was a sinner. She says – <i>"Years later, after Rama has banished Sita, he</i></p>	<p>Again, Doniger completely distorts the account of the Uttarakanda of Ramayana, because she wants to give a</p>

			<p><i>resolves to perform a ceremony of royal consecration, but Lakshmana tactfully persuades him to perform instead, a horse sacrifice, "which removes all sins and is an infallible means of purification (7.84.2-3)." To persuade him Lakshmana tells him stories of two people who were restored by a horse sacrifice: Indra was purged of Brahminicide after killing a Brahmin antigod, and a king who had been cursed to become a woman regained his manhood. Thus Rama performs the ceremony to expiate his sins, which are never mentioned, but which surely include his killing of Ravana.....and the banishing of Sita, a sin against a woman that corresponds, roughly, to the error of the king who became a woman." [Emphasis added].</i></p>	<p>'conspiracy theory' twist to the episode.</p> <p>Rama has a discussion with Bharata and Lakshmana (Ramayana 7.83) and proposes that he performs the Rājasūya Yajna. However, Bharata advises against it and says that the performance of this Yajna angers all the kings and will lead to bloodshed. Rama agrees to Bharata and drops the idea of performing the Rājasūya because he does not want to cause hurt to anyone.</p> <p>Thereafter, Lakshmana proposes that Rama should perform Ashwamedha Yajna which removes all sins. Then he narrates the story of Brahminicide by Indra and how Indra was purged of it by performing an Ashwamedha. The reason for the narration of this story is not necessarily to remind Rama of the killing of Ravana, but the fact that the killing of a Brahmin is considered the highest evil and Ashwamedha is said to purge the doer of even that evil deed.</p> <p>Thereafter, Doniger is wrong in claiming that Lakshmana narrates the story of a king who loses his manhood, and weaves/insinuates a fantasy that Lakshmana wants to remind Rama that having banished Sita, Rama too has lost his manhood. The claim is fake and the interpretation is nonsense, because this story is not narrated by Lakshmana to Rama, but by Rama to Bharata and Lakshmana! [see Ramayana 7.87].</p> <p>It appears that Wendy Doniger will stop at nothing to distort the Ramayana and indulge in sexual fantasies.</p>
33	235	fn	<p><i>"Only after the horse sacrifice are we told of subsequent sacrifices, "He did not choose any wife other than Sita, for a golden image of Janaka's daughter appeared in every sacrifice, fulfilling the purpose of a wife (7.89.4)."</i></p>	<p>Now this is another of her perverse and sensational interpretation in line with others in the shoddily written book. A simpler and straightforward explanation is that the Uttarkanda (again, note that she uses the interpolated book of Ramayana)</p>

			<p>Doniger’s insinuation is that Sita was missed in this Yajna only because she was needed to lie next to the dead horse for a night whereas she might not have been needed for the other Yajnas (page 236, para 1). By implication, since the other Yajnas did not require Sita to lie with a dead horse, she was dispensable.</p>	<p>does not mention Rama having performed any Yajna earlier! So obviously, the absence of Sita will be felt the first time during the horse sacrifice.</p> <p>Once again, Doniger indulges in sensationalizing a straightforward narrative and converts a molehill into a mountain</p>
34	236	1	<p>After describing the dilemma of Hanuman as to which language he should address Sita in, when he saw her in Lanka, Doniger says, <i>“He finally does address her in Sanskrit.....and she is suitably impressed. She does not scream...”</i></p>	<p>Throughout the book, Doniger has repeated the claim that in ancient India, women spoke in Prakrits or in vernaculars but not in Sanskrit. While that might have been true after Sanskrit ceased to be a spoken language, this one instance proves that in the remote past, women did understand and speak this language. So it is quite strange that Doniger does not point this out.</p>
35	237	3-4	<p>Once again resorting to kitsch psychoanalysis that is totally lacking in rigor, Doniger alleges that Rama killed Valin because the latter had usurped his own brother Sugreeva’s wife. Likewise, Rama was scared that Lakshmana would one day steal his wife Sita from him.</p> <p>The gossip queen of Indology then says, <i>“Valin also takes on the displaced force of Rama’s suspicions of another half brother, Lakshmana. The text suggests that Rama might fear that Lakshmana might replace him in bed with Sita; it keeps insisting that Lakshmana will not sleep with Sita. It doth protest too much. (Recall that when Rama kicks Sita out for the first time and bitterly challenges her to go with some other guy, he lists Lakshmana first of all). The tension between the two half brothers, over Sita, is a major motivation for the plot.”</i></p>	<p>Again, this is a fantasy of Doniger. The text does not ‘keep repeating’ that Lakshmana might replace Rama in the bed with Sita. The Ramayana is a text of more than 20000 verses. Doniger picks half a dozen, twists them and then creates this fantasy that there was ‘sexual tension’ between the two brothers. The sexual tension is in her mind, not in the text, and perhaps represents her own auto-erotic fantasies. Reading her penchant for gossip, it is not difficult to understand why gossip tabloids like the National Enquirer sell well. After all, there are readers like Doniger and her followers.</p> <p>Now, as to Doniger’s pointing out that Lakshmana was the first guy who Rama lists to Sita as someone she could turn to [Ramayana 6.103.22], Rama is damned if he suggests Lakshmana, and damned if he suggests someone else first. Doniger of course forgets to mention the others whom Rama mentions – Bharata, Sugreeva and then Vibhishana.</p>

			<p>If Rama had mentioned Bharata first, Doniger would have speculated, "Rama bypassed Lakshmana because there was sexual tension between him and Lakshmana." If he had named Sugreeva first, she would have speculated, "Rama empathized with Sugreeva because his brother too had stolen his wife Tara from him. Similarly, Rama was afraid of his own half-brother Lakshmana stealing Sita, and wanted Sita to preferably to go to Sugreeva, his own alter -ego."</p> <p>And if Rama had mentioned Vibhishana first, Doniger would have said, "Rama believed that Ravana had violated Sita, and therefore he proposed sending her to Ravana's brother Vibhishana as an 'in your face' insult to her."</p> <p>The point is that Doniger follows no credible or academically sound methodology except that of writing pornographic fiction.</p> <p>Doniger's methodology reminds one of the couch sessions of psychoanalysis, where the shrink knows the end point (because he has already decided it) and the starting point (because his patient told him so), and then does a lot of unscientific and loose free associations to somehow arrive from the first point to the end point, giving the appearance of a scientific methodology when it is in reality the entire process is a sham.</p> <p>Turning Doniger's sleazy gossip on its head, a more straightforward explanation is that Rama proposed Lakshmana as the first alternative because 1) She was most familiar with Lakshmana, having spent more than 12 years in the forest with Rama and Lakshmana due to which he was the natural choice, and 2) Rama loved Sita and was very sure that Lakshmana would</p>
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				take good care of her, because he trusted Lakshmana a lot.
36	237	4sqq	<p>In continuing with the allegation that Lakshmana had hots for Sita, Doniger then refers to the incident in which Rama goes to hunt the golden deer on her insistence. When the deer is shot fatally, he mimics Rama's voice and lets out a cry for help. Sita hears the cry and believes that Rama is in mortal danger.</p> <p>She asks Lakshmana to hurry to help his brother, but Lakshmana refuses saying that Rama is strong enough to ward off any danger himself, and that the cry is a hoax. Sita is desperate and anguished. Fearing that she is losing her husband, she accuses Lakshmana of wishing that Rama dies, so that he can have her. Lakshmana is aghast, and rushes to catch up with Rama.</p> <p>According to Doniger, Lakshmana <i>"stalks off, leaving Sita totally undefended..."</i> (page 238, para 1).</p> <p>When he catches up with Rama, he narrates Sita's taunt to him. Rama says that he should not have left Sita succumbing to her anger.</p> <p>After all this, Doniger then makes a gossip tabloid style claim, <i>"But why would Sita have said such a thing if she didn't fear it on some level? And why would it have made Lakshmana so mad if he did not fear it too?"</i></p>	<p>Doniger's aspersions on the characters of Sita and Lakshmana are truly pathetic.</p> <p>Now here is a devoted and loving wife, Sita, who is in genuine fear that her husband has been overpowered in the forest and is dying, and the only person who can rescue him is her brother in law Lakshmana. Lakshmana has full faith in his brother's prowess and knows that the cries that they have heard are fake. But, Sita is desperate to make Lakshmana leave her and go to save her husband's life at any cost. Let us quote the relevant verses: "Now when Sita heard that cry of distress in her husband's own voice, coming from the forest, she said to Lakshmana, "Go and find out what has happened to Raghava. My heart – my very life – is jarred from its place by the sound of his crying in deep distress that I heard so clearly. You must rescue your brother, who cries out in the forest. Run to your brother at once, for he needs help! The Rakshasas have him in their power like a bull fallen among lions." So she spoke, But Lakshmana, heeding his brother's command, did not go." [Ramayana 3.43.1-4]</p> <p>This is a very painful and an emotional situation for a wife who believes that her husband's life is in danger, which perhaps Doniger cannot fathom as her world view is driven solely by sex, not love. To suggest that Sita feared that Lakshmana had hots for her is a reflection of Doniger's own perverse mindset.</p>

				<p>And to blame 'Lakshmana' that he left her undefended is laughable.²² What else could he have done? Had he not left her, Doniger would have said, "Lakshmana was inwardly happy believing that Rama was killed by the Rakshasas. But now when he saw Rama return unharmed, his hopes of marrying Sita were dashed."</p> <p>So, these are the deliberately demeaning and shoddy interpretations of a perverse mind and it is unfortunate that this type of sleazy gossip passes as 'scholarship' in Hinduism studies.</p>
37	238	2	<p>Doniger then continues with her 'proof' that Lakshmana had hots on Sita, "<i>When Rama, hunting for Sita, finds the cloak and jewels that she dropped as Ravana abducted her, he says to Lakshmana, "Do you recognize any of this?" And Lakshmana replies, "I have never looked at any part of Sita but her feet, so I recognize the anklets, but not the rest of her things." Yet evidently, Rama had expected him to recognize the jewels that had adorned higher parts of Sita's body.</i>"</p>	<p>Doniger has the same interpretation of this episode as had 'Acharya' Rajneesh, who advocated free sex, drugs, booze and nudity. In her zeal to defame the love between Rama and Lakshmana, Doniger <u>invents</u> Rama's request to Lakshmana to recognize the jewels and cloak, when in fact the Ramayana of Valmiki has no such verses!²³ No wonder, Doniger does not give the address of these verses. The request of Rama to Lakshmana are a part of the other traditions, that want to emphasize the respect that Lakshmana had for his elder sister-in-law and this is how this episode (not found in the critical edition of the Ramayana of Valmiki) is universally interpreted.</p>

²² As usual, she carefully omits to mention the Lakshmana Rekha episode that is a part of the Hindu folklore although not found in the Ramayana of Valmiki (critical edition). So much for her claim that her history is 'alternative.' She picks these alternative traditions only when it can be fit into her gossip level interpretations.

²³ This detail is found in the Ramacharitmanas, but of course Doniger does not mention that and makes it appear that it is in Valmiki's Ramayana. In fact, she has done the same mistake in her other publications on Valmiki's Ramayana too. Let the reader judge – is it academically sound to judge the relationship of Rama and Lakshmana by combining a text from 2000 years with a text that was written 500 years ago?

				<p>Either way, Doniger betrays her ethnocentrism while interpreting this episode and seems not to understand the Hindu culture. In the American culture, people are expected to see each other in the eye while communicating. Not doing so is interpreted in the US to mean that the person who is not seeing in the eye is hiding something, or is insincere. In contrast, in India even today, people lower their gaze out of respect while talking to their elders, teachers etc. It is considered a sign of disrespect to look into the eyes of respected people blatantly. Also, in the Hindu tradition, one's elder sister in law is like one's mother. Lakshmana duly followed these cultural norms (in the version of Tulsidas) that are prevalent even today, and were even more prevalent in earlier times – but Wendy seems not to understand this. So much for her 'scholarship.'</p> <p>What Wendy seems to ignore is that even in the later version, Rama himself would have been able to recognize the jewels and the cloak of Sita, but so distraught he was on losing his wife and the circumstance of the recovery of these items that he could have just passed them on to Lakshmana to recognize them. Anyone can read the 100s of verses to see the heart rending sorrow of Rama at the disappearance of Sita. In that time of great emotional distress of having lost his beloved wife (and not even knowing if she were dead or alive), Doniger still expects the husband Rama to scheme and plot against his brother! Normal people do not behave the way Wendy makes it out to be. But we must thank Doniger for her little mercies – at least she does not accuse Lakshmana of having a foot fetish!</p> <p>And what does the Ramayana of Valmiki actually say? It says that Rama himself recognized the jewels and the shawl of Sita!</p>
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				<p>Once again, we see Doniger lying about what really does not exist in the original critically edited text. So let us reproduce the relevant verses here:</p> <p>“Then, as Rama took that garment and the bright ornaments, tears covered his face as mist covers the moon. His face was stained with the tears that he shed for love of Sita. Crying, “Ah, beloved!” he lost his composure and fell to the ground. Repeatedly, he pressed those fine ornaments to his heart and sighed deeply like an angry snake in its borrow. Through an unbroken stream of tears, Rama saw Saumitri [= Lakshmana] by his side and began to lament piteously: “Look, Lakshmana, here are the shawl and ornaments that Vaidehi let fall from her body to the ground as she was being carried away. As she was being carried off, Sita must surely have dropped these ornaments onto the grassy ground, and that is why they look like this.” [Ramayana 4.6.14-19]. In other words, in the Valmiki Ramayana, Rama never asks Lakshmana to recognize these items. This evaporates Wendy Doniger’s fantasies about ‘sexual tension’ between the two brothers.</p>
38	238	3sqq.	<p>Doniger now weaves more of her perverse yarns and accuses Rama of desiring to kill Lakshmana. Talking about how Lakshmana left Rama, she says, <i>“Death makes Rama promise to kill anyone who interrupts them; Lakshmana guards the door. An ascetic arrives and threatens to destroy the world if Lakshmana won’t let him see Rama; Lakshmana, caught between a rock and a hard place, chooses the lesser of two evils, his own death rather than the destruction of the world. He interrupts Rama and Death, whereupon Rama says that for</i></p>	<p>Again, Doniger takes an episode from the interpolated Uttarakanda. It is strange that with Sita long gone, Doniger should still think that Rama wishes his brother to die! Lakshmana is damned when Sita lives (because then he is accused of desiring her) and is also damned when she is gone (here, Rama is accused of desiring to kill Lakshmana anyway)! This is a particularly low IQ gossip from Doniger, which passes as scholarship in Hinduism studies in the US these days.</p> <p>But again, what does the Ramayana really say? Rama is initially</p>

			<p><i>Lakshmana, being separated from him (Rama) would be so terrible that it would be the equivalent of death, and so he satisfies the curse by merely banishing Lakshmana, who then commits suicide. Does this episode represent a displaced, suppressed desire of Rama to kill Lakshmana?"</i></p>	<p>shown as deeply troubled and he does not lift his weapon nor does he banish Lakshmana. It is Lakshmana who asks Rama to kill him [Ramayana 7.105.2-4] to keep his vow.</p> <p>Rama is still disturbed and he consults his Guru Rishi Vashishtha. And it is the Rishi who advises Rama to forsake Lakshmana [Ramayana 7.106.8-11].</p> <p>Rama accepts his Guru's advice and then says to Lakshmana that he is exiled because banishment and death are equivalent [Ramayana 7.106.13].</p> <p>So how does the Ramayana 'represent a displaced suppressed desire of Rama to kill Lakshmana?' Doniger's methodology is merely spinning yarns of fantasy, like a gossip tabloid article.</p>
39	241	3sq.	<p>Referring to the story of Kaikeyi's father who could understand the language of birds, Doniger gives a silly commentary, <i>"This is in keeping with the underlying misogyny of the Sanskrit mythological texts that depict men as more gifted with special powers than women; it may also reflect the sociological fact that men in India were allowed to read and speak Sanskrit, while in general women were not, as well as the custom of patrilocal marriage, so that a woman often did not speak the language of her husband's family..."</i></p>	<p>Doniger's comment that due to patrilocal marriages (wherein the wife lives with her husband in his family home alone with her inlaws) often resulted in the wife not knowing the language of her husband's family is silly. Down to our present times, Hindus marry their daughters outside their gotra but within the same larger community that speaks the same language and has similar customs and traditions. It is only recently that Hindus have been intermarrying with families with a different mother tongue to any significant scale.</p>
40	242	1	<p>In the Ramayana, we read of the touching episode of Jatayu, the vulture, who fights with Ravana in his attempt at rescuing Sita from his clutches. Ravana inflicts fatal wounds on Jatayu. When Rama finally encounters Jatayu while he is breathing his last, the bird tells Rama where Ravana has taken Sita. And then, Jatayu dies. Doniger summarizes Rama's attitude towards Jatayu in the following words – <i>"Rama says that</i></p>	<p>Once again, Doniger's speculations about Rama's 'indirect dig at Dasharatha' is nothing but cheap gossip. Rama is clearly expressing his gratitude and respect for the vulture, whereas Doniger speculates that in doing so, he is lowering the esteem of his father down to the level of a vulture! Her interpretation is certainly a result of her hatred for the Hindus and for Rama because even when he expresses his respect and gratitude for</p>

			<i>he holds the old vulture, Jatayus, in the same esteem that he holds Dasharatha (3.64.26) (which may also be a back-handed indirect dig at Dasharatha), and he buries him with the full royal obsequies as for a father.”</i>	an aged creature, she sees an ‘indirect’ dig against his father. This is how gossip tabloids are written, not scholarly works. Throughout the Ramayana, Rama and Sita show respect for Dasharatha and there is no hint of even bitterness at what his father did to them.
41	248-249		Doniger repeats the Shambuka story.	Again, Doniger has relied on one more episode from the interpolated Uttarakanda. She makes much out of it whereas the Hindu tradition itself ignores it by and large. So much for Doniger’s claim that she is presenting the non-mainstream, alternative version of Hinduism. If she were following what she claimed to preach, she would have ignored this episode as it is not narrated in the non-mainstream retellings of the Ramayana. ²⁴ Thus, it is absent in the Adhyatma Ramayana (Sanskrit) and in the retellings of Ramayana in Kashmiri, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Assamese, Bengali, Marathi, Oriya, Nepali, Gujarati, Hindi etc. It is found only in the Ananda Ramayana (where the plot of the story is quite different) and in a Maithili version (where Lakshmana beheads Shambuka at the command of Rama). The retellings of the Ramayana in all the Puranas, and in the Mahabharata too omit this episode. ²⁵ As a rule, Doniger ignores the vernacular versions of the Ramayana (with the exception of Tulsi’s Ramcharitmanas, because it is available in English translation!) and mentions just a few of them very cursorily. How can she then claim that her book is a work of ‘alternative history?’
43	249-25-	3	Doniger also insinuates that Rama was a casteist because he refused the food offered by Guha. She	Doniger of course does not mention in this chapter that Rama did eat food offered by the tribal woman Shabari.

²⁴ See, Balraj Sharma (2000), “Shambuka Vadha Prasanga ki Pramanikta”, pp. 17-20 in *Vedavani*, volume 53, issue 8 (in Hindi).

²⁵ The Mahabharata does not include the Uttarakanda in its Ramopakhyana episode, but mentions the beheading of Shambuka once later on. Apparently, the Uttarakanda, even though an interpolation, is still quite ancient (and the same conclusion may be drawn from other pieces of evidence too, but it is beyond the scope of the present review).

		<p>says – <i>“Rama also had an uncomfortable relationship with the Nishadas, including a hunter named Guha, chief of the Nishadas. When Rama came into the jungle, Guha met him and offered him things to eat and drink; Rama declined for himself, arguing that as an ascetic he could not accept gifts and ate only fruit and roots (an assertion directly contradicted by the fact that after killing the ogre Maricha in the form of a deer, he killed another deer and took home the meat [3.42.21]).....There are too many excuses, and conflicting excuses at that, to explain why Rama will not eat Guha’s food, and the commentaries on this episode are troubled by it.”</i></p> <p>Thereafter, Doniger meanders off into the episode of Trishanku which again occurs in the interpolated Uttarakanda.</p>	<p>Contrary to how Doniger puts it, the commentaries are not troubled by the episode. They explain the difference between Rama accepting food from Shabari (because she is a Bhakta) versus not taking it from Guha (because he is a vassal, and technically, a dependent of Rama, as indicated in Ramayana 2.44.14). Moreover, Rama did not want to accept favors unnecessarily from Guha whom he also regarded as a friend. But he does not hesitate to take grass for the horses of the chariot that brought them there [Ramayana 2.44.21] as Doniger herself points out. Bharata however can take food from Guha because he considers himself as a vassal of Rama (having refused to fulfill Kaikeyi’s wish) and therefore at par with Guha. Moreover, Bharata was travelling with an army that had to be fed too! Rama accepts food from the Vanaras because they are friends (with no vassalage to Rama), and from Rishis because refusing them would be disrespectful per the etiquette. There is no ‘discomfort’ in the relationship between Rama and Guha, which is said to be of love, respect and deep friendship [Ramayana 2.44.9, 16-18]. It is again all Doniger’s own imagination.</p> <p>The situation in Dandaka forest where Rama killed Marichi was very different from that on the banks of Ganga, where he met Guha. There is nothing confusing about the episode, and there are no conflicting excuses given by the commentaries. One just needs to know and understand Hindu culture and etiquette, which an ethnocentric person like Doniger does not.</p>
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Post Script: Doniger accuses all her critics of being ‘Hindu Nationalists’ or ‘Victorian Prudes.’ Perhaps, the above review will dispel her ethically unacceptable, and academically shoddy stereotypical statements about critics like me. The fact is, that her scholarship is extremely poor, she follows no sound methodology,

and indulges in gossip, strained interpretations and considerable faking of data. She might be defended by her students (Laurie Patton, David Shulman, Bruce Sullivan, Brian Smith, Jeffrey Kripal and so on) or by Hindu hating Communists/Marxists like D N Jha, Romila Thapar, Anaya Vajpeyi (aka Arun Vajapeyi), but the objective and knowledgeable reader knows better.

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