

Revolving Around India(s)

Revolving Around India(s):

*Alternative Images,
Emerging Perspectives*

Edited by

Juan Ignacio Oliva-Cruz,
Antonia Navarro-Tejero
and Jorge Diego Sánchez

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Revolving Around India(s): Alternative Images, Emerging Perspectives

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and Jorge Diego Sánchez

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INTRODUCTION

MULTIPLE INDIAS: RETELLING TRADITIONS, DISTANCES AND DIFFERENCES

JUAN IGNACIO OLIVA,
ANTONIA NAVARRO-TEJERO,
AND JORGE DIEGO SÁNCHEZ

This book offers new possibilities for writing the plurality of contemporary India and the Indian subcontinent, including the retelling of the many Indian idiosyncrasies, the visions offered by the Indian diasporic community and, especially, the terms of comparison of the actual Indias, old and new, both coexisting and colliding in contemporary society. Divided into three parts, “Revolving around Tradition(s)”, “Revolving around Distance(s)”, and “Revolving around Difference(s)”, *Revolving around India(s)* covers new perspectives that focus on the rewriting of tradition and alternative images from distant temporal and spatial loci, as well as emergent political activisms that act against gender and race differences.

Many national, religious, demographic, gender, sexuality, or caste variables emerge when talking about the political and historical constructions of India. The first part of this book, “Revolving around Tradition(s)”, posits the recurrence of history and stories, mythologies and emergent voices, together with issues of religious control, socio political interests, and cultural rewritings of specific topics. The idea is to dismantle the unitary concept of Indian tradition as a monolithic and artificial niche through stimulating essays that broaden the scope of the term and embrace the plurality of the Subcontinent via a heterogeneous critical framework. Abdul Momin Chowdhury’s “Religious Pluralism in Bengal: A Historical Perspective” examines the issue of religious connivance and multiplicity as the source of cultural and socio-political heterogeneity. Chowdhury’s

article focuses on the Bengal region in order to trace the attitudes of different faiths and philosophies towards the divine. He quotes ancient scriptures together with contemporary figures, such as Sashi Taroor, to recognize the richness that is unveiled by a religious multiplicity and which should be read by governors, current politicians, and writers.

Jayshree Singh's "History and Political Governance of Reservation Policy in India" follows this trend and offers a comprehensive analysis of modern, burning issues in the Subcontinent, by bringing the issue of caste and economic difference into the fore. Singh's article accounts for the trajectory and meaning of Reservation Policies in India by highlighting different opinions and their consequences. Her chapter is not a mere *for* or *against* contribution but an excellent analysis of the historical and political reasons behind the different perspectives on the Reservation Policy in India. She displays the development and recurrence of the birth of the Reservation Quotas and adds a thought-provoking reading on the state of academic education in India, as well as the interference of the corporate world and its liaisons with interests and policies, which are dependent on castes and Reservation legislation.

How stories explain religion and this sort of legislative politics indicates how a specific culture is displayed or regarded in the social and legal sphere of a paradigm such as India. It indicates how storytelling has used, obscured, or praised different motives with regard to tradition in the Subcontinent. This section of the book then continues to gather scholarly works by Simi Malhotra, Meenakshi Malhotra, and S. Asha to trace the presence of old epics and their retellings in the Subcontinent in order to assess historical erasure, religious manipulation, and gender discrimination. Simi Malhotra's "Christianity in Early North-West India: A Multicultural Story Often Untold" analyses the presence of Jesus Christ in different parts of the Subcontinent and its silenced relevance in hegemonic texts. Her analysis of an old apostle's tales and apocryphal narratives reflects on religious communities' manipulations in order to distinguish certain facts and peoples over others. Meenakshi Malhotra's "Subjugated Knowledges, Emergent Voices: Rereading the *Ramayana* in Contemporary India" dwells on this use of selective narratives as a specific political, religious, or cultural endeavor and analyses how the *Ramayana* and its power-play politics and warfare tactics are now read. Her contribution gives a clear idea of both the plurality of this and the many multiform voices that take inspiration from the ancient text. How stories are told, which fragments are (over-)represented, and which characters receive attention are used by Malhotra to discern how the *Ramayana* is rewritten in contemporary India,

as well as which purposes it serves. S. Asha's "Retelling Experiences: Myths from the *Mahabharata*" explores the epic of the *Mahabharata* to show the gender reading and, sometimes, rewriting found in the work by contemporary writers, such as Shashi Deshpande, Mahasweta Devi, and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The significance of how myths are intertwined not only in these narratives but also in daily life in India is the main focus of S. Asha's article. Accordingly, her analysis embraces the poetic voice of her case-study novels and she uses their words to recognize the political commitment of their contemporary revisions.

The last contributions in the first section dwell on how tradition is retold anew in contemporary texts and performances. Manfred Draudt's "The Cultural Assimilation of Shakespeare: Intertextuality in Kalyan Ray's Postcolonial Novel *Eastwards*" deals with Kalyan Ray's *Eastwards* (2004) and succinctly explores the references made to Shakespeare's texts. The study is not a mere account of symbolic correspondences but a complete survey of why specific characters in Ray's novel impersonate figures from Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. The agency of contemporary issues, such as colonization, slavery, and nature, are used as a lens through which to see these old narratives anew. Laura Viñas Valle and Blanca M^a Lara González's "Bollywoodizing Brontë: Tamasha's *Wuthering Heights*" scrutinizes the British theatre company, Tamasha's, retelling of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Their article discusses how the story is moved into an Indian context and how it is informed by elements from Bollywood. The "Bollywoodizing" and transportation of characters to an Indian setting serve to critique the economic and cultural implications of Bollywood itself, as well as the images and representations of tradition(s) it offers.

The second segment of the book, entitled "Revolving around Distance(s)", deals with diaspora and analyzes the dissemination of cultures and traditions from the Subcontinent and how these emerging new discourses revolve back to and around the homelands. How roots, routes, voices, and visions of the Subcontinent are interwoven into the fabric of contemporary culture is the main focus of this section. This segment considers which elements are taken from the tradition(s) analyzed in the first part of the book and how they allow Indianness to be (re)written and (re)read throughout the diaspora.

Uma Parameswaran's "Forty-Five Years of Diasporic Life and Writings" offers a tremendously valuable testimony of a person, academic, and writer, who is a pioneer in her writings from and about diaspora. Her

chapter, told in first person, traces the roots of her own trajectory of diaspora, providing personal and professional anecdotes that give so much detail about how traditions and identities are built in the dispersal of people. She informs us about contemporary writers as well as emerging authors from the Indo-Canadian diaspora, who are writing about Canada, as well as the notion of Indianness.

How distance is told, perceived, and used to create a new identity and culture is the main interest of contemporary fiction dealing with the Indian diaspora. María Jesús Llarena Ascanio's "Other Indias as a Third Space in Canada: Aging Anxiety and Bodily Corruption in Rohinton Mistry's Work" discusses Rohinton Mistry's works. Llarena Ascanio's analysis of age and bodily corruption in Mistry's narrative helps us to understand Parameswaran's writings, as well as the new categories of hyphenated identities unveiled through diaspora. Lucía García Magaldi's "Other Indias: Sujata Bhatt Reinvents the Stinking Rose" adds further context to the experience of living at a distance from one's homeland and the resulting in-betweenness. She shows how Sujata Bhatt, an Indian writer who studied in the US and now lives in Germany, re-appropriates the image of the rose in order to examine its traditional meanings and the oppositional discourses constructed through references to its opposing symbols, such as garlic.

Stereotypes and the political and socio-economic use of cultural elements, such as clothes, are studied in Noemí Pereira-Ares' "'Other Indians, Other Clothes': Subversive Dress in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*". Her sartorial analysis demonstrates how discourses of otherness and difference are entrenched, as well as challenged, in popular culture. Pereira-Ares' study is relevant because of its consideration of dress, the current recurrence of the cultural and visual categories that define Indianness and Britishness, and the imbricated nature of concepts of belonging.

This concept of fitting or being a part of how a nation is created or dismantled is the focus of Bandana Chakrabarty's "Dividing the Nation: Dislocation and Relocation", where she describes narratives and counter-narratives written about the Indian Partition (1947). Distance is hereby deconstructed in order to understand it as a composite that is both imposed and unreal. Drawing upon the theoretical analyses and anthologies by Urvashi Butalia, Chakrabarty recognizes the different voices that have narrated the conflict from various religious and cultural backgrounds in order to examine a nation's limits, as well as its dislocation and its

relocation. Urmil Talwar's "Perspectives of Traveling Cultures and Traveling Technologies in *The Hungry Tide*" details the research carried out by Gosh that reveals both the history and counter-history of the Sunderbans (Bengal). It discusses the many perspectives that should be acknowledged when telling history through stories. Talwar's reading of Gosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) reconsiders the concept of India and reads the questions of distance and travelling through a multi-dimensional trajectory where both the center and the periphery are (re)negotiated.

Felicity Hand's "Mapping Indianness in Mauritius" examines the Indian diaspora from the perspective of a place that was under both French and British control. Her analysis of different writers and perspectives enables us to understand how different stories of Indianness from the homelands can intersect and complement each other. Hand's study focuses on narratives by Deepchand Beeharry and Chaya Parmessur, and evaluates how narratives from the indentured past are still brought to the fore.

Difference and plurality are always at the core of any book dealing with India. The previous sections have offered different perspectives of tradition and distance, while this part provides analysis of cultural constructs that revolve around topics such as gender, sexualities, regions, religions, and caste. Luz González Rodríguez and Juan Ignacio Oliva's "'Cultural Schizophrenia' in Some Diasporic Indian Women Writers, and Their Quest for Unity" extensively surveys the representation of color, race, and gender in the Canadian Indian population with a focus on works by Meena Alexander, Uma Parasmewaran, Sherazad Jamal, Surjeet Kalsey, and Himani Bannerji. They study issues of self-representation in autobiography; how self-identity is composed through travelling narratives; how Indian women in Canada experienced a double colonization; how the coexistence of languages affects postcolonial subjects and societies; and how homesickness is created, narrated, and fragmented. Their comparative method details difference as a construct in culture and nation building.

Sex and gender are explored in Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri's "Re-Articulating Desire, Re-Claiming Identity: Mahesh Dattani's Representation of the Third Gender" and Antonia Navarro-Tejero's "Abjection to Decode Sexism, Nationalism, and Homophobia in Three Anglo-Indian Texts". Chaudhuri discusses the Hijra community and how desire can be a source of identity (as well repulsion and rejection). She focuses on Mahesh Dattani's plays and how they grant a space for the third gender to be acknowledged and represented beyond stereotypes. She examines the decolonization and re-articulation of a binary gender norm that has been imposed from a Western

perspective. Navarro-Tejero decodes the cultural, political, and socioeconomic impositions that lie behind sexism, nationalism, and homophobia in India. She uses Julia Kristeva's concept of the abject (1982) as a way to read difference in Shobha De's *Strange Obsession* (1992), Gita Hariharan's *The Art of Dying* (1993), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1996). She researches how these three texts portray sexism, nationalism, and homophobia. She argues that these attitudes are exploited by the state in order to mark them as other in order to control them. She then details how the concept of the abject can challenge these practices.

How religion can be used to limit and ostracize is the focus of Rosalía Martínez de Miguel's "Contesting Terror through Poetry: Agha Shahid Ali's *The Country without a Post Office*" and Elena Oliete's "Indian Muslims in British Cinema: Identification and Denial". Poetry by Agha Shahid Ali and his representation of Kashmir and Kashmiri identities are explored by Martínez de Miguel, who uses trauma theory to examine how regional difference is included (or obviated) when narrating a historical moment. She considers how region is constructed or ignored in Ali's poetry and how terror is created. Oliete's chapter also deals with religion in connection with the presence, absence, and stereotyping of Muslim characters. Oliete provides a comparative study of Vikas Swarup's *Q&A* (2005) and its Oscar-winning British version, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), which was directed by Danny Boyle. Oliete traces the history of British cinematographic representations of Indianness and the construction of Muslim stereotypes in order to then examine their portrayals in these two texts.

Dolores Herrero and Jorge Diego Sánchez further contextualize ambiguity in the construction of difference with reference to both religion and caste. Herrero's "Deepa Mehta's *Earth*: The Figure of the Indian Muslim as the Ambiguous and Threatening Other" studies how Mehta's reading of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy Man* (1988) reveals the subtle stereotypes of Muslims that pervade Mehta's film. Herrero carefully dissects the differences between different types of Muslim in the movie; this leads her to conclude that the use of these stereotypes reframes the figure of the Muslim as Other. Diego Sánchez's chapter introduces idea that the act of writing can be used to recognize differences, as well as multiple versions of India, by studying how Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) offers an opportunity for those at the bottom or outside of the caste system to tell their own history and to, therefore, (re)visit their identity. The act of writing is constructed as facilitating the ability to oppose, denounce,

contest, and transform not only history but also the many systems that construct it.

These theoretical angles and readings provide a range of emerging perspectives that help to define the reality of multiple India(s) and its different traditions, geographies, and differences. India is then understood as a composite of many Indias.

I-

REVOLVING AROUND TRADITION(S)

CHAPTER 1

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN BENGAL: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

ABDUL MOMIN CHOWDHURY

There is no doubt that religion is one of the important ingredients of the richness of Indian multiplicity, which is further enhanced by its practices, acceptances, actions, and reactions in the different regions of the vast subcontinent. Sashi Tharoor summarized this idea when he stated, “No other country in the world embraces the extraordinary mixture of ethnic groups, the profusion of mutually incomprehensible languages, the varieties of topography and climate, the diversity of religious cultural practices, and the range of levels of economic development that India does” (2007: 7). It is also worth noticing that the Indian mind, which might have never been a single unity in the myriad of regional and cultural variations, has been shaped by remarkably diverse forces: myths and scriptures from ancient Hindu tradition, Buddhist thought and philosophy, and the impact of Islam and Christianity, as well as the two centuries spent under British colonial rule. As Tharoor also recognizes, “The result is unique, not just because of the variety of contemporary influences available in India, but because of diversity of its heritage” (9). This diversity of heritage is apparently visible in different regions of the vast country (in a historical sense), thereby emerging from its geography, which leads Tharoor to state, “India was made for pluralism” (13).

This article is a very modest attempt at throwing some light on the historical perspective of the socio-religious and cultural life of the Bengalese.¹ It is nowadays believed or professed that in their long

¹ Here, Bengal has been taken in the historical sense of comprising the present independent state of Bangladesh and the Indian province of Paschim Vanga (West Bengal). Bengal (as it was before 1947) can conveniently be termed a region, as defined by geographers, or, more accurately, a cultural region that refers to an area

historical experience with various religions the Bengalese have developed a sort of social behavior which very nearly approaches the concept of Religious Pluralism in its modern sense. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to examine the validity of the previous remark and to justify it.

It is necessary to clarify the concept of religious pluralism, as it is a modern concept commonly used in social sciences to negate the concept of religious extremism. The term is easy to express, but difficult to define. Broadly, it refers to peaceful relations among different religions, but it also has wider implications:

- a. It may describe the worldview that one's religion is not the sole and exclusive source of truth and so it recognizes that some level of truth and value exist in some other religions.
- b. It is often used as a synonym for *ecumenism*, which means the promotion of unity, co-operation, or improved understanding between different religions or denominations within the same religion.
- c. It is used as a synonym for religious tolerance, which is a condition of harmonious co-existence between adherents of different religions or religious denominations.
- d. 17th century philosophers have already expressed their ideas of religious pluralism. In 1689, John Locke wrote his *Letter Concerning Toleration*, where he argued against Hobbes (who, in *Leviathan* [1651] expressed that civil peace was possible only when there was only one religion in society) and defended the idea of the need to accept religious plurality. He tried to make a distinction between the authority of the state and that of the Church: the state must manage the diversity of its citizens by protecting their freedom, whilst the Church must "tolerate" other religions within civil society and recognize their individual freedom. Locke, Voltaire, and all the philosophers of the Enlightenment laid the first landmarks of resistance and called upon the Church and the State to be tolerant (Ramadan, 2010: 40).

that is well defined in terms of boundaries and which has fundamental unity in its composition, arrangement, and integration of significant traits that distinguish it from other cultural regions. India is a mosaic of cultural regions.

All of the above may give us some idea about what I mean by Religious Pluralism. Co-operation and improved understanding between religions have paved the way towards what has been termed a syncretistic tradition (Roy, 1993).

It has been assumed that pluralism in the positive sense of the term has led to a syncretism among the different religions. From respect, grew closeness, and from closeness came an understanding which helped create a mutual give-and-take situation. Since religion is a socio-cultural phenomenon, its connections are a natural consequence of the existence of pluralism over a very long period of time. Though the course of such amalgams has often seen interruptions throughout human history, they do prove the validity of the hypothesis of pluralism and amalgam.

With this brief preamble, let us now dwell on the historical process through which the life of the Bengalese people has passed through for more than a millennium. I shall limit this study to just the socio-religious culture. A brief generalized statement may be acceptable at this point to guide my later explanations: the indigenous pre-Brahmanic, or even pre-Muslim modes of religious life, have survived in varying degrees combined with some degree of accommodation to either the Brahmanic Hindu or orthodox Muslim religion, society, and culture. This accommodation is so obvious that historians have discerned special features in both the Brahmanic (later called Hindu) and Islamic faiths.

Niharranjan Roy (1993: "Chapter XII", "Chapter XV") has provided a very scholarly discourse on the Brahmanic (Hindu) religion by considering the Bengalese people's deep-rooted pre-Brahmanic beliefs and faiths. It has also been asserted that Bengalese Muslims (specially the vast population of rural Muslims) form a distinct community and, in their social and cultural life, they are closer to the non-Muslim population of this region than to Muslims living elsewhere in the subcontinent. It has also been said that they were closer to their Hindu neighbors than urban Muslims (mostly immigrants). This led scholars to coin new terms, such as folk-Islam, rural Islam, and popular Islam. These terms definitely hint at rural Muslims' deep connection with their pre-Muslim past. Blending of indigenous elements with those brought from outside created these distinctive characteristics in local people's practice of Islam (Ahmed, 1981: "Chapter II", "Chapter III"). Jawhar Sircar (2005) has emphasized the role of the popular cults in the construction of the Hindu identity in Medieval Western Bengal.

I have taken the liberty of this digression from the main theme in order to create the proper setting for my hypothesis that Bengal's original inhabitants, with their strong pre-Brahmanic socio-religious culture, survived right until the medieval period and their pluralistic attitude may have helped them endure all the onslaughts that they encountered. At the same time, their attitude of accommodation helped continue their link with the past. There was only silent assimilation, which resulted in what we may conveniently term "near pluralism", which in turn resulted in syncretism.

In order to elaborate on the historical perspective of the points raised so far, let me take a chronological view of pre-colonial Bengal's socio-religious culture. Looking back to the pre-Muslim age, we may very safely arrive at two salient points:

- a. The formation of a social pattern and cultural heritage from the confrontation of indigenous elements with Brahmanic socio-religious ones.
- b. Buddhism's tolerant attitude, particularly of the ruling classes.

The pre-Brahmanic tradition of Bengal, due to a lack of adequate sources, has generally been accepted in the rest of India. It is now generally held that the *Nishadas* or Austric-speaking people founded the foundation of civilization and its agriculture-based village life (Majumdar, 1971: 17).

Archaeological discoveries during the last half a century have provided evidence of a comparatively advanced civilization, even in such a remote period as the beginning of the first millennium BC, and perhaps even earlier; in any case, this was long before the Brahmanic incursion into Bengal, which was hitherto regarded as the beginning of a "higher" culture and civilization (Sur, 1964; Das Gupta, 1966). It can be said with a fair amount of certainty that there was a highly developed culture in Bengal (both material and spiritual) before the Brahmanic period.

In the subsequent centuries of Brahmanic domination, which lasted about a thousand years, certain characteristics that were typically Bengali can be discerned. In this context, reference can be made to the evolution of the Proto-Bengali dialect and alphabet, the special preference of goddesses representing female energy culminating in the worship of Durga as a national festival, the growth of Tantricism, the absence of headdresses, the use of fish and meat as food, and, lastly, the particular laws of inheritance

codified by Jimutavahana, which differed in essential respect from those in force in other parts of India (Majumdar, 1971: 413–468; Roy, 1993: 477).

The pre-Brahmanic legacy had a far reaching and profound influence on the religious life of the Bengali people under the Brahmanic Vedic religion. The relative importance of prominent religious sects, such as Vaisnavism, Saivism, Buddhism, and Jainism, must have varied at times. But the special preference for Vishnu (the most humane of all the Hindu Gods) is definite proof of their preference for humanitarian social behavior, which was similar to the concept of religious pluralism. Barrie M. Morrison (1970), out of an analysis of the donations recorded in the Bengal epigraphs from the 5th century through to the 13th century AD, has shown that of all the donations made to institutions most were given to temples and shrines of the various manifestations of Vishnu and were distributed through the northern, central, and eastern parts of Bengal. Morrison has gone so far as to say, “the testimony of the inscriptions suggested that Vaisnavism, rather than Buddhism was the religion which was most popular with the rulers of the Delta (Bengal)” (1). It may be pointed out that majority of land grants (engraved on copper plates) analyzed by Morrison were created by Buddhist kings for the benefit of Hindu religious institutions, Brahmins, and the performance of religious acts, where the predominant preference for Vishnu is apparent.

This proves the Buddhist rulers’ religious pluralism and the dominant humanitarian socio-religious aptitude of the Bengali Hindu population. Their love for humanism must have created an atmosphere of mutual co-existence with their Buddhist neighbors, and a culture of toleration and accommodation must have grown in their socio-religious life. The medieval poet Chandidasa very loudly sounds this feeling of love for humanity when he declares,

Śunaha māṇuṣa bhāi
Sabār upare manuṣa satya
tāhār upore nāi.

[Listen brethren: Human beings are at the top of all truths; there is none above them] (my translation).

Niharranjan Roy (1993: 720–723) has lauded this love, respect, and extreme eagerness for humanism in Bengal’s personality and has gone so far as to say that “this character and philosophy of life were the chief elements in the legacy of the ancient Bengalis handed over to their medieval counterparts” (Hood, 1994: 556).

The *Antyajjas*, the bottom rung of the Hindu society, were also referred to as autochthones: the marginal and marginalized masses. The *Sahajayanas* built up a society where there were no caste or class distinctions, and which was based on the lofty ideal of equality (Sanyal, 1991: 11–12). Such noble concepts and ideals had emanated from a profound belief in religious pluralism. It was on these ideals of humanity and equality that medieval Bengal's most profound religious and social revolution was founded: the socio-religious movement of Sri Chaitanya. This humanism may have given rise to what has been termed as "Catholicity" and a tolerant spirit (Majumdar, 1971: 533).

Dharmapala, the second ruler of the Pala dynasty, declared in his son, Devapala's, copper plate that he was "conversant with precepts of the *Sastras*" and he made "the castes conform to their proper tenets" (Mukherji and Maity, 1967: 116–121).² One of the later Pala kings, Vighrapala III, was said to provide the "shelter of the four castes".³ Evidence of Buddhist kings professing pluralism in the form of granting lands to the Hindu shrines and Brahmanas are too numerous to need elaboration. A look at the genealogy of the ruling Buddhist dynasties' copper plates would convince even a casual investigator that though they were Buddhists, the court poets, ministers, and officials were predominantly Hindus. The *Prasastis* of the Buddhist kings are replete with Puranic imageries and references to Hindu mythology and this has led some scholars to think that the last two Buddhist Chandra kings gave up Buddhism and adhered to the Hindu faith instead (Tarafdar, 2008: 222).

The entire social scenario observed in the pre-Muslim period is that of religious harmony and the mutual co-existence of different faiths without any apparent antagonism. Varieties of different concepts of Religious Pluralism existed in ancient Bengal. This peaceful co-existence of Buddhism

² The 5th verse of the Mungher Copper-plate of the Pala king Devapala records:

Śāstr-ārth-bhājā chhalato-nuśāsyā
Varṇṇān –pratishṭhāpayatā sva-dharmme|
Śrī Dharmmapālena sutena so-bhūt-
svarga-sṭhitānām-aṅṅinah- piṭṭinām||

Translation: "His son Dharmapala, scrupulously following the Sastric injunctions and engaging the different erring castes in their respective duties by commands, he (Gopala) became free from debt payable to his departed forefathers [who are in heaven]" (my translation).

³ Refers to the *Chaturvarṇa-samāśraya* (verse 13 of *Amgachi Grant of Vighrapala III*) in the Pali version.

and Hinduism produced “an amalgam”. This is noticed in the emergence of Tantric philosophy, which is a syncretistic form of both the religions. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya, in his Preface to Taranatha’s *History of Buddhism in India* (1970), has touched on the condition of Buddhism during the later Pala period. On the basis of Taranatha, he writes that he (Taranatha) left us,

Clear indications of the factors that contributed to the decline of Buddhism in India, for it had almost completely surrendered precisely to those beliefs and practices, as a rejection of which the Buddha himself had preached his original creed [...] it bowed down to all these [magical] beliefs and practices, and thus become practically indistinguishable from popular Hinduism so called [...] being an elaborate worship of all sorts of Gods and Goddesses of the popular pantheon [...], and indulging in all sorts of ritual practices for which the Buddha himself expressed his unambiguous repulsion (Chattapadhyaya, 1970: *Preface*).

R. C. Majumdar (1971: 605–609) believes that the decline of Buddhism was provoked by a change in its character to mystic forms generally referred to as *Vajrayana* and *Tantrayana*. He adds that the withdrawal of patronage by the Sena dynasty also played an important role.

The Senas, coming from conservative and orthodox Deccan, were unlikely to practice the form of social liberalism that the Bengalese were familiar with. Religious pluralism, which had created a social equilibrium, was disturbed and so facilitated the process of “Islamization” in Bengal after the Turkish conquest (Chowdhury, 1990). The idea of religious pluralism, loudly voiced in the Asokan Edicts,⁴ may have pervaded throughout his

⁴ For example,

A. “The Beloved of the Gods, the king Piyadassi, wishes that all sects may dwell in all places” (7th. Major Rock Edict).

B. “The Beloved of the Gods, the King Piyadassi, honours all sects [...] But the Beloved of the Gods do not consider gifts or honour to be as important as the advancement of the essential doctrine of all sects [...] Its (progress of doctrines of all sects) basis is the control of one’s speech, so as not to extol one’s own sect or disparage another’s [...] On each occasion one should honour another man’s sect, for by doing so one increases the influence of one’s own sect [...] Again whosoever honours his own sect or disparages that of another man [...] harms his own sect even more seriously. Therefore, *concord* is to be commended, so that men may hear one another’s principles and obey them [...] The beloved of the Gods does not consider gifts or honour to be as important as the progress of the essential doctrine of all sects” (12th Major Rock Edict) (Thapar, 1977: 253, 255; my emphasis).

empire (Bengal, or a part of Bengal formed a part of his empire) and its practices may have been a tradition that the Buddhist rulers of Bengal must have inherited from the earlier period. Asoka's *Edicts* contain very clear declaration of religious harmony and mutual tolerance. The instance of Sasanka's persecution of the Buddhists (Majumdar, 1971: 56-57), if Huen Tsang's testimony is believed, or the Sena rulers' insistence on the strict orthodoxy of the Brahmanical religion are episodic in nature and can be considered as exceptions, which strengthen and prove our hypothesis.

It is difficult to believe that the abortive attempts of just a few decades of Sena-sponsored Brahmanism actually managed to attract the mainly autochthonous masses from their Buddhist and folk deities.⁵ R. M. Eaton (1994) states that the conversion of many Bengalis to Islam may have taken place from the different shades of popular religion, and not from any recognizable Hindu condition. Without entering into the difficult domain of what the religious affiliations of the *antyajas* actually were in early medieval Bengal, it is possible to generalize that the new entrants into Islam came not only from the lower rungs of the local society but also from the upper classes. The followers of heterogeneous indigenous religions also embraced Islam for economic reasons (Sircar, 2005: 15).

During the Muslim period the atmosphere of tolerance and co-existence was boosted during the two hundred years of Independent Sultanate in Bengal (1338–1538 AD). During these two hundred years, the rulers, having completely severed their connection with Delhi, were obliged to seek the support of local people. The Sultans opened the door of employment and bestowed patronage on local people in all spheres of their life. They even financed the translation of Hindu religious texts, as well as other works, such as the *Mangal Kavyas* and Vaisnava literature in both Sanskrit and Bangla.

Sultan Alauddin Hosain Shah's very liberal treatment of Sri Chaitanya (Tarafdar, 1999: Chapter II, Chapter V, and Chapter VII) epitomizes the religious pluralism of the Muslim rulers towards their non-Muslim subjects. Bearing in mind that Chaitanya's propagation of Neo-Vaisnavism was an attempt to save Hinduism, Husain Shah was liberal enough to offer all facilities at the cost of the state. The non-imposition of

⁵ Bhattacharyya (1998: 12–15) believes the four and a half centuries of Buddhist rule in Bengal created a whole range of indigenous popular deities where the influence of Mahayana Buddhism was quite evident.

Jiziya tax was clearly an act of religious pluralism that ignored the ancient Islamic practice.

The “Islamization” process carried out by Sultans, Sufis, and Ulama was helped by the tolerant policy and liberal administration, although it must be admitted that the political exigencies of the time demanded this liberalism in order to befriend local people. However, at the same time, it must be said that the legacy inherited from the pre-Muslim period was further carried forward during the Independent Sultans period. Could it also be postulated that the Sufis’ religious liberalism helped the process?

A passage from *Chaitanya Bhagavat* illustrates the result of this liberalism and syncretistic tradition:

Listen; oh my children, all people have the one and the same God. The Hindus and the Muslims make difference only in His name. The Quran and the Purana aim at one Ultimate Reality. One faultless, indivisible, unending, eternal being fills up everybody’s heart (qtd. in Tarafdar, 1999: 243).

It is interesting to note that one of the five traditional divisions of Bengal, the Radha, became a decisive Hindu-majority area, while all the others remained predominantly Muslim. Jawhar Sircar (2005: 27) lists three unique reasons for this:

- (1) The wave of egalitarian enthusiasm triggered by Chaitanya;
- (2) The appearance of *Mangal Kavya*, which appeared as vehicle of campaign. The significance of this lies in the widespread acceptance of the subaltern masses’ popular deities into the Hindu mainstream.
- (3) The relatively late “peasantization” of various *antyaja* caste groups in Radha and their acceptance of Hinduism.

These three reasons are based on the love of humanity, which is a definite result of religious pluralism. Sircar is correct in his assertion that Chaitanya’s movement and the *Mangal Kavyas* survived in West Bengal to become “the fountain head of a host of new casteless cult and sects that kept surfacing for centuries together” (50). It brought about what has been termed by Sircar as “accommodative Brahmanism”: a Sanskrit tradition brought to the *antyaja* masses. But is this one aspect of religious pluralism?

In the medieval period, the emergence of many minor cults, such as *Dharma Thakur*,⁶ was a clear manifestation of the release of the cast ridden Hindu society from its orthodox path. Indigenous religious beliefs, which had been held for a long time by autochthones, eventually came to be recognized, if not throughout Bengal, at least in its western part. This situation impacted on the demographic pattern and had very far-reaching consequences. The northern, eastern, southern, and southeastern parts of Bengal have become predominantly Muslim areas. This led to divisive colonial policies and the emergence of Muslim separatism. But the religious harmony in the Muslim majority areas was not disturbed until the use of communal division for the political benefit of the colonial powers and local gentries, both Hindu and Muslim. The creation of Pakistan manifested the initial success of this communal trend, but the emergence of Bangladesh to some extent nullified that trend and saw the reemergence of the historical forces of pluralism, tolerance, and freedom from communal fears. But we must also admit that the phenomenon of communal atrocities have often been used for political benefits in Bangladesh as well.

Let me end this discourse with Niharranjan Roy's remark:

The historian is a social being; he lives in a particular time in a particular social milieu. His aim is to look back and tell the real meaning of the past without prejudice and malice. As a social being, this real meaning of the past gives him the insight to understand the contemporary society, which would in turn create the inspiration to imagine and create the social milieu in the future. This insight and inspiration help him to understand the past and its real meaning (1993: 723–24).

This is my humble attempt to express this great historian's wish.

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⁶ “Jajpura dehara bandiba ekman/Seikhane avatar haila yavan/Brahma hailo Mohammad Visnu haila pegambar/Mahesh haila Baba Adam/Dekhia Chandika devi teha hailo Haya Bibi (*Sunya Purana* qtd. in Chattopadhyaya, 1970: 39–40).

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CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORY AND POLITICAL GOVERNANCE OF THE RESERVATION POLICY IN INDIA

JAYSHREE SINGH

Introduction: The History of Casteism in India

The roots of casteism can be dated back to the post-Vedic period. Hindu society was separated into *Varna Vyavasta*: a categorical division of people on the basis of their work and their family's position. The ancestors of sweepers, gardeners, hairdressers, or scavengers (called *Shudras*) were considered to be lowest level of the groups identified in the society and there was no way to escape this position, even across the generations. Intermingling with other caste groups or with other categories of society, such as the warrior class (*Kshatriya*), the teacher or guide/priest class (*Brahman*), and the business class (*Vaishya*), was regarded as an offence.

When India became enslaved and subjugated, this division of people on the basis of their work deteriorated into the division of people on the basis of their birth. This division was extended through social, economic, and cultural contexts. At the time of India's freedom struggle, freedom fighters, nationalist leaders, and reformers uplifted the lowest classes. However, the system of segregation continued and they were termed as Untouchables by the upper caste. They were also termed the scheduled caste in the Indian Constitution; they were called *Harijans* (the sons of God) by the Father of the Indian Nation, Mahatma Gandhi; they were also known as *Shudras* in the olden days of Indian history; and, later, they emerged as Dalits in the pre-independent history of India.

After India's independence, Dalits were included in the reserved category to acknowledge their equal status in society. But, paradoxically, it suggested they were also marginalized and in a minority. Politicians later used this to procure votes and it continued to be counter-productively used by those who used the reservation criteria for their emancipation. This fact

has instigated the general category of Hindus to review their crisis in post-modern times because of the globalization and liberalization policies in the economic and political system.

The general categories of Hindus have become wary of this sort of political governance of reservation policy in India. When they get into the system of governance through reservation, they try to pamper to their own caste group. Another important advance is that minority groups in India, such as women, other religious groups, and sub-castes groups are more represented in politics. Therefore, this paper contests the history and political governance of reservation policy in the contemporary context of India as a nation, which is heading from a developing to a developed nation on the world stage.

Objectives

I will attempt to focus on social justice, social equality, and social legitimacy within the context of all human beings. Secondly, it aims to debate the issue of how far the quota system is used to modify the concept of equality. Thirdly, this paper discusses why the reservation has negatively affected the caste system at educational campuses and in workplaces. Fourthly, I will explain whether reservation is effective at eliminating discrimination. The discussion will conclude with the positive recommendations to resolve the crisis of reservation.

Analysis

The execution of reservation policy in the 1950s to 1970s aimed to elevate the social standard of backward classes. The following questions will be asked: Why is it cutting edge? Why is it garnering votes? Why is it the victim of malfunctioned politics? Why are Indian citizens unaware of caste anarchy? Why they are into internal agitation? And why they are bound to express their external agitation in the form of civil war?

The Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution in 1950s stated that reservation intended to strengthen the emancipation and empowerment of the socially backward and under-represented classes. It was meant to extend social diversity, social responsibility, and social mobility in a caste-ridden and caste-biased society. By 1980s and 1990s, the poor and depressed class was considered to be a minority made up of SCs, STs, and OBCs. They measured opportunity in educational campuses