



इच्छन्ति देवाः सुन्वन्तं  
न स्वप्नाय स्पृहयन्ति।



The *deva*-s love the performer of yajña,  
not the one who slumbers.

-*Rgveda* 8.2.18

*Swadeshi*  
*Indology*

# **The Science of The Sacred**

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# Summary of (my) Approach

- **notion** of sacred - as defined by western systems of knowledge - religious (abrahamic), (western) secular and (western) scientific are discussed and **juxtaposed** with the dharmic notion of “sacredness”
- **distributed and natural sense** of Indian pavitratā and the centralized, institutionally enforced artificial sense of sacred of the West - **contrasted**.
- flawed understanding of the sense of sacred and the obsession with westernizing (liberating) India - **established** as the root cause of the neo-orientalist obsession with the desacralisation

# Structure of (my) Paper

- Neo-Orientalist Discourse on “Sacredness”
- The Nature of Sacred Discourse (Western)
- The General nature of Western Civilisational Discourse
- The Dharmic Nature of Sacred
- The “TWO” Understandings Juxtaposed
- Implications

# **DeSacralisation**

## **Neo-Orientalist Discourse**

# The Neo-Orientalists

Latest among post-colonial scholarship to deride India and its Civilisational ethos

Attempts at deriding culture and indian ethos very alive and active among all channels of information dissemination

Aims to weaken INDIAN nationhood by weakening the unifying ethos (***dharmā***)

The dharmic sense of sacred is closely tied to the language of Sanskrit and the embedded cultural matrix - TBFS

## **The Neo-Orientalist**

Pollock has attempted to undermine the dharmic civilization via “scholarly” methods during an academic career of more than 30 years.

These “**researches**” postulate various theses - primarily by “theorizing” about the role of the language of Sanskrit.

# **Quotes - The Language of the Gods in the World of Men.**

*This book is an attempt to understand two great moments of transformation in culture and power in pre-modern India.*

*Sanskrit, long a sacred language restricted to religious practice, was reinvented as a code for literary and political expression.*

*The form of power for which this quasi-universal Sanskrit spoke was also meant to extend quasi-universally, “to the ends of the horizons,”*

*Around the beginning of the second millennium, when local speech forms were newly dignified as literary languages and began to challenge Sanskrit for the work of both poetry and polity, and in the end replaced it.*



# The “SLEIGHT”

fundamental “assumption” behind the theorizations is that the “split” between the sacred and the non-sacred was already part of the **Sam̐skṛtic** tradition. Many of Pollock’s theses depend on this assumption - “natively” present **sacred vs non-sacred** dichotomies.

## **CATEGORY MISREPRESENTATION** is PRIMARY SLEIGHT

Used as a “basis” from which to generalize and formulate “divisive” theses.

1. The ***paramarthika*** vs ***vyavaharika*** categories
2. The “***shruti***” vs ***non-shruti*** categories
3. The ***oral*** vs ***written*** traditions
4. The ***sastra*** vs ***kavya*** categories

## **Quotes - The Language of the Gods in the World of Men. - APPLYING WESTERN CONSTRUCTS ON INDIA**

*It is these workaday truths, these certitudes, **that are granted primacy in this book, in the conviction that we cannot understand the past until we grasp how those who made it understood what they were making, and why.***

*In general, then, **there is broad enough agreement on the differentia specifica of literature and non literature to make modern Western distinctions largely unobjectionable for describing the history of South Asian literary cultures.***

# **Quotes - The Language of the Gods in the World of Men - APPLYING WESTERN CONSTRUCTS ON INDIA**

*the Catholic Church's eventual monopolization of Latin is an instructive parallel both historically and structurally*

*For most of the first millennium or more of Sanskrit's existence in South Asia, **we have virtually no indubitable evidence** for its employment in any domain we would call, along with the **mimamsakas**, this-worldly, the realm outside the practices of the sacred and the forms of knowledge necessary for the sacred.*

# TBES

His idea of the transition from Sanskrit to vernacular implies that there was disconnect from the Vedas. Sanskrit as the 'language of the gods' was sidelined in this new context. **This desacralization of literature as part of the de-Saṃskṛtization is very important in Pollock's overall agenda.** [Malhotra, 2016:249]

The epoch that Pollock calls the 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' **is the crucial period in the 'desacralizing' of Sanskrit;** this brings it out of the confines of ritual and into the real world. [Malhotra, 2016:226]

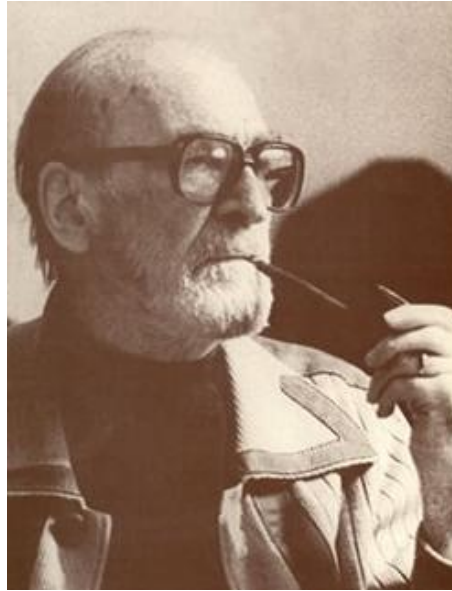
# **THE (western) SACRED Discourse**



# IS the SACRED a UNIVERSAL ?

Is the notion of “sacred” universal? Western anthropological and sociological approaches (western-universalist discourse) to this question have yielded many “theses” over the past few centuries.

pre-supposes a “*without-centric*” nature of “sacred” - in contrast to the “*within-centric*” formulation of the dharmic conceptualizations.



# Mircea Eliade

February 24, 1907 – April 22, 1986

Leading interpreter of religious experience, who established paradigms in religious studies that persist to this day.



# Mircea Eliade

Leading interpreter of religious experience, who established paradigms in religious studies that persist to this day.

His theory that **hierophanies** form the basis of religion, splitting the human experience of reality into sacred and profane space and time, has proved influential

**hierophany** - to connote the manifestation of the divine, inherent to the nature of anything “sacred”.

# Mircea Eliade - Quotes

*Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane.*

*The modern Occidental experiences certain uneasiness before many manifestations of the sacred.*

*The sacred is saturated with being. Sacred power means reality and at the same time enduringness and efficacy. The polarity sacred-profane is often expressed as an opposition between real and unreal or pseudo real. Thus it is easy to understand that religious man deeply desires to be, to participate in reality to be saturated with power.*

[Eliade,1959]

# THE ABYSS

*The abyss that divides the two modalities of experience — sacred and profane— will be apparent when we come to describe sacred space and the ritual building of the human habitation, or the varieties of the religious experience of time, or the relations of religious man to nature and the world of tools, or the consecration of human life itself, the sacrality with which man's vital functions (food, sex, work and so on) can be charged. [Eliade,1959:14]*

# Modernity

*For modern consciousness, a physiological act — eating, sex, and so on — is in sum **only an organic phenomenon**, however much it may still be encumbered by tabus (imposing, for example, particular rules for “eating properly” or forbidding some sexual behavior disapproved by social morality).*

[Eliade,1959:14]

# SUMMARY

*sacred and pro-fane are two modes of being in the world, **two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history.***

*In the last analysis, **the sacred and profane modes of being depend upon the different positions that man has conquered in the cosmos;** hence they are of concern both to the philosopher and to anyone seeking to discover the possible dimensions of human existence. [Eliade,1959]*



## **S N Balagangadhara**

His central area of inquiry has been the study of Western culture against the background of Indian culture.

*K.K. Bergmann*



THE  
HEATHEN IN HIS  
BLINDNESS.."

*Asia, the West and the Dynamics of Religion*

# From a “Review” - 1

For the last few hundred years, **academic contexts have been dominated by questions Europe has asked.** This way of asking questions means that it has not asked questions in other ways. Whether adopted by Western intellectuals or non-Western intellectuals, who parasitically formulate problems according to it, that way is tied to Western culture. Only by understanding this can we discover how Indians can ask different questions, and what contribution Indian culture can make. Speaking a Western language does not mean we understand what it is.

[Shah, 2014]



## From a “Review” - 2

*He persuasively shows that there is a discontinuity of epistemology between Western culture and the pagan cultures of Greece, Rome, and India. **It is the kind of epistemological discontinuity that depends on very different configurations of learning.***

*Religion is an explanatory intelligible account of itself and the cosmos. **As such, religion fuses a causal and an intentional account.** The reason why the universe came about is because God intended it to be so. God’s intention is also the reason why religion came about. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam share such a claim, which is why they are the only instances of religion we have.*

# **The Notion of “religion” is WESTERN**

*As the West explored, colonized, and expanded, religions were found elsewhere. This did not depend on empirical investigation; Westerners found what they already expected to find. The dominant configuration of learning meant that no society was permitted to be without religion, although different kinds of religion could be admitted*

## **Whither Swadeshi Indology ?**

*"Orientalism cannot be corrected by adducing factual evidence because the basis of its structuring enterprise lies elsewhere. **Doing better studies of Hinduism will not disrupt it, but merely decorate it"***

## KEY INSIGHT

EUROPE

*A provincial experience of a small segment of humanity does not become universal by decree.*

Macaulay  
Putras

*Nor does a **specific group** become ‘**the universal audience**’ by merely pretending to be one.*

# **Configurations of LEARNING**

*In the West, a root model of order brings about a configuration of learning. **This root model is religion**, which configures learning processes by structuring the experience of the world. Typically, this specific way of learning is a “knowing about”. It produces a culture-specific knowledge, a species of knowledge, viz. **theoretical knowledge**, that we call sciences.*

# **SCIENCE as (western) RELIGION**

*This way of learning, seeking knowledge about, has generated theoretical knowledge: the natural sciences – a species of knowledge that grew out of a religious culture. If you are willing to entertain these suggestions, we can take a further step in characterizing ‘religion’ or worldview as the root model of order, which forms a way of learning that produces a specific kind of knowledge, viz. **Theoretical knowledge.***

# Science depends on Religion

*Religion was a necessary condition for the development of scientific thinking and, as I suggest now, religion generates a culturally-specific way of learning.*

*what one **calls a ‘scientific’ attitude today is continuous with the religious attitude.** Religion formed it, nurtured it, and gave birth to science as a result. **In its absence, as I have suggested, there would have been no science.** Religion, then, provides us with the basic model, the most fundamental one in fact, of what it is for something to be an explanation.*

# ALTERNATE ROOT MODEL OF ORDER

*We survive as a species by developing ways of learning that not only give birth to our cultures but also sustain them. In this sense, we could see **configurations of learning as cultural answers to the biological problem of our survival**. That is, they answer the question: **‘How to live ?’***

*Another answer to the question treats it as a problem of **how to go-about in the world**. That is, both the question and the answer become **performative** in nature.*



# **PRACTICAL - RITUAL NATURE**

*Ritual, just like religion, brings about a **culturally specific way of going-about in the world**. In a configuration of learning generated by it, **performative learning dominates**. **Learning to do rituals is performative**; the way in which members of this culture go-about in the world is itself recognisably ritualised. Finally, the **configuration of learning generated by ritual is stable because the ritual structure is a recursive structure**.*

# The 2 LEARNING CONFIGURATIONS

## 1. WEST

- a. Religious
- b. Theoretical
- c. Textual

## 2. INDIA

- a. Ritual
- b. Practical
- c. Performative

***“Dharmic”* nature of  
Sacred**

# Axiomatically SACRED

The vedic civilization - built on the fundamental basis of the “vedah” – oral-signified chants of divine origin that encapsulate “vibrational” basis of cosmological existence.

Currently around 1% - 12 branches (śākhās) of 1131 branches are extant.

The *śastras and srauta* literature form the basis of the shruti - and are of divine origin.

The smṛti genre of interpretive literature, the darśana texts and meta-texts also describe the “sacred” in variegated dimensionality.

# Axiomatically SACRED

All of the *upasana* genres (strotra and mantras) of literature are experiential entry points to the sacred dimension.

all-encompassing sacrality of the dharmic nature of knowledge and its vast literatures is unquestionable to anyone living in this land

The deeply “practical” culture of learning and embodied living that is unique to dharmic living has at its core - **the sacred**.

**To deny this essence is neither groundbreaking  
nor innovative scholarship.**

# Sociological Critiques of Dharma

critical discursive dimension of the desacralisation narrative is to focus on the “social” ills of society and attribute them to the “core tenets” of the dharmic society.

Poverty, Illness, Colonization, Social stratification etc. - all of these are generally attributed to the nature of dharma. This discourse normally entails –that dharma and its sense of sacred - makes society weak.

**The “stronger” way for a society is violence and conquest – the western way.**

# Neo-Orientalist Motives

The philological methods of Sheldon Pollock aim at **excavating (via political philology) sociological ills** through creative analysis of texts.

A prescriptive application (via liberation philology) of western sociological constructs is presented as **“solution” to these ills**. This in short - is the essence of the neo-orientalist discourse.

# JUXTAPOSITION (summary)

## 1. WESTERN notion of SACRED

- a. DRIVEN BY RELIGION
- b. CENTRALLY CONTROLLED AND SANCTIONED
- c. THEORETICAL IN NATURE
- d. LEARNING driven by THEORY - Theorising ( as seen in math and sciences)
- e. Sense of SACRED not important to learning culture

**MOTIVES OF  
WESTERN  
SCHOLARSHIP**

## 2. INDIC notion of SACRED

- a. DRIVEN by RITUAL and PERFORMANCE
- b. DISTRIBUTED - NO CENTRAL CONTROL
- c. PRACTICAL
- d. LEARNING driven by PRACTICE - Experiential (*sastra , agama , srauta , ...*)
- e. Sense of SACRED is **central** to learning culture

**DeSacralisation** of Indian  
Knowledge Systems &  
Practices BECOME  
essential to CONTROL  
and WESTERNISE India





# AfterWord

# IMPLICATIONS

This theoretical discourse and the resulting “practical” process of desacralisation will continue - it is part of the proselytizing nature of the western root model of order.

**Scholarship** - which acknowledges these realities and **provides coherent narratives - based on dharmic root models of order, practice-centric configurations of learning and the dharmic ethos, are essential.**

**There can be no compromise.**

**THANK YOU**

