



*Reclaiming Sanskrit Studies - 7*

# Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism

*Proceedings of Swadeshi Indology Conference Series*

Editors

Dr. K. S. Kannan  
and

Dr. H. R. Meera

Infinity Foundation India

The seventh in the series of the Proceedings of the Swadeshi Indology Conferences, this volume takes up the issue of Indian Chronology and a few other issues against the background of Neo-Orientalist approaches.

Military superiority has deluded the West into an unending narcissism if not an incurable megalomania, an easy consequence of which is systematically underrating others, underplaying their successes, and undermining their accomplishments, essentially by way of adjudging others through applying inapposite frameworks. The tendency therefore to drag all India-related events to dates as late as possible is writ large in their endeavours, as too, driving wedges and creating unwarranted fission, as between Hinduism and Buddhism, for example.

Much-needed antidotes to these pernicious tendencies are provided in this volume of ten papers—contributed mostly by young scholars coming from varied backgrounds—which deal with these issues. As in the previous volumes, the object of analyses is the writings of Prof. Sheldon Pollock, made out in Western Indological circles as a polymath who has no parallel.



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**Infinity Foundation India**  
**2021**

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*Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*  
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# International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST)

a	अ	ā	आ	i	इ	ī	ई
u	उ	ū	ऊ	r	ऋ	ī	ऋ
lṛ	ଲ୍ର						
e	ए	ai	ऐ	o	ओ	au	औ
ṁ	ମ୍ବ	h	:				

k	କ୍	kh	ଖ୍	g	ଗ୍	gh	ଘ୍	ṅ	ଙ୍ଗ୍
c	ଚ୍	ch	ଛ୍	j	ଜ୍	jh	ଝ୍	ñ	ଙ୍ଚ୍
t̪	ତ୍	ṭh	ତ୍ତ୍	ḍ	ଢ୍	ḍh	ଢ୍ହ୍	ṇ	ଣ୍ଣ୍
t	ତ୍	th	ଥ୍	d	ଦ୍	dh	ଧ୍	n	ନ୍
p	ପ୍	ph	ଫ୍	b	ବ୍	bh	ଭ୍	m	ମ୍

y	ଯ୍	r	ର୍	l	ଲ୍	v	ବ୍
ś	ଶ୍	ṣ	ଷ୍	s	ସ୍	h	ହ୍
kṣa	କ୍ଷ	jñā	ଜ୍ଞା				

Shown in **bold** in this chart are letters that require diacritics, and the few that are confusibles (owing to popular spelling).

# About Infinity Foundation India



॥ इच्छन्ति देवाः सुन्वन्तं  
न स्वप्नाय स्पृहयन्ति ॥

“The *deva*-s love the performer of *yajña*,  
not the one who slumbers” — ***Rgveda*** 8.2.18

Infinity Foundation (IF), USA, has a 25-year track record of mapping the Kurukshetra in the field of Indology, and producing game-changing original research *using the Indian lens* to study India and the world.

One of the goals of **Infinity Foundation India (IFI)**, an offspring of IF, in organising Swadeshi Indology Conference Series is — to develop, fund, and groom scholars who can methodically respond to the Western worldview of Indology.

We are proud to say that within one year of the birth of the Swadeshi Indology Conference Series, we have conducted two high impact conferences with quality output for publications, as well as two impressive monographs. These monographs will be published and distributed in academia worldwide. They will be used in platforms for academic debate by our scholars.

We have begun to build a team of young scholars with *swadeshi drishti*. Our mission is to build a home team of 108 scholars who will form the basis for developing a civilizational grand narrative of India.

## Our Key Partners

The organisers of the conference are indebted to the various institutions and individuals for the invaluable help rendered by them, without which this work would just not have been possible. It is a pleasure to thank them heartily for the same.

We are indebted to our individual and institutional sponsors: Sri Mohandas Pai and Foundation for Indian Civilization Studies, Sri MV Subbiah and Vellayan Chettiar Trust, Sri J K Jhaver, Sri Kiron Shah, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), Sri Rakesh Bhandari, and Sri Nagesh Bhandari and Indus University. Without all their financial support and help we would not have been able to attract the high level of scholarship that has contributed to this volume.

We are grateful to IIT-Madras and IGNCA, New Delhi for organizing the Swadeshi Indology Conferences 1 and 2 respectively. In particular, we are thankful to Prof. Devendra Jalihal and his colleagues at IITM, Sri Ram Bahadur Rai, Chairman IGNCA, Sri Sachchidanand Joshi, Member Secretary IGNCA, Sri Aravinda Rao, Smt. Sonal Mansingh and their team at IGNCA. The teams at these institutions put in enormous efforts to make the conferences a success and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude for the same.

## Acknowledgements

Our conferences could not have happened without the active support and participation of our volunteers and well-wishers.

We wish to thank Sri Udaykumar and his team from the Vande Mataram Student Circle at IIT-Madras for their help in making full arrangements for the first conference at Chennai. Sri Jithu Aravamudhan and Smt. Lakshmi Sarma of the IFI group of volunteers also deserve our hearty thanks for their active participation. Ms. Ruchi Sood and her team of volunteers as also Smt. Shilpa Memani, Sri Abhishek Jalan, Sri Roushan Rajput and Sri Divyanshu Bawa made no small efforts in making the New Delhi conference a success.

Our gratitude is due to Sri Ramnik Khurana, Sri Sanjeev Chhibber, and Sri Chetan Handa who have kindly offered to bear the expenses of bringing out these volumes in print. We wish to thank Sri Sunil Sheoran who has been a long-time supporter of our work. His help in coordinating the printing of these volumes is deeply appreciated.

We are grateful to all the paper-presenters and the keen audience for maintaining a high academic standard and decorum at the conference. There of course are many more who have helped us and guided us behind the screen and deserve our thanks.

**IFI Team**

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## Series Editorial

It is a tragedy that many among even the conscientious Hindu scholars of Sanskrit and Hinduism still harp on Macaulay, and ignore others while accounting for the ills of the current Indian education system, and the consequent erosion of Hindu values in the Indian psyche. Of course, the machinating Macaulay brazenly declared that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India, and sought accordingly to create “a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect” by means of his education system – which the system did achieve.

An important example of what is being ignored by most Indian scholars is the current American Orientalism. They have failed to counter it on any significant scale.

It was Edward Said (1935-2003) an American professor at Columbia University who called the bluff of “the European interest in studying Eastern culture and civilization” (in his book *Orientalism* (1978)) by showing it to be an inherently political interest; he laid bare the subtle, hence virulent, Eurocentric prejudice aimed at twin ends – one, justifying the European colonial aspirations and two, insidiously endeavouring to distort and delude the intellectual objectivity of even those who could be deemed to be culturally considerate towards other civilisations. Much earlier, Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) had shown the resounding hollowness of the *leitmotif* of the “White Man’s Burden.”

But it was given to Rajiv Malhotra, a leading public intellectual in America, to expose the Western conspiracy on an unprecedented scale, unearthing the *modus operandi* behind the unrelenting and

unhindered program for nearly two centuries now of the sabotage of our ancient civilisation yet with hardly any note of compunction. One has only to look into Malhotra's seminal writings – *Breaking India* (2011), *Being Different* (2011), *Indra's Net* (2014), *The Battle for Sanskrit* (2016), and *The Academic Hinduphobia* (2016) – for fuller details.

This pentad – preceded by *Invading the Sacred* (2007) behind which, too, he was the main driving force – goes to show the intellectual penetration of the West, into even the remotest corners (spatial/temporal/thematic) of our hoary heritage. There is a mixed motive in the latest Occidental enterprise, ostensibly being carried out with pure academic concerns. For the American Orientalist doing his “South Asian Studies” (his new term for “Indology Studies”), Sanskrit is inherently oppressive – especially of Dalits, Muslims and women; and as an antidote, therefore, the goal of Sanskrit studies henceforth should be, according to him, to “exhume and exorcise the barbarism” of social hierarchies and oppression of women happening ever since the inception of Sanskrit – which language itself came, rather, from outside India. Another important agenda is to infuse/intensify animosities between/among votaries of Sanskrit and votaries of vernacular languages in India. A significant instrument towards this end is to influence mainstream media so that the populace is constantly fed ideas inimical to the Hindu heritage. The tools being deployed for this are the trained army of “intellectuals” – of leftist leanings and “secular” credentials.

Infinity Foundation (IF), the brainchild of Rajiv Malhotra, started 25 years ago in the US, spearheaded the movement of unmasking the “catholicity” (- and what a euphemistic word it is!) of Western academia. The profound insights provided by the ideas of “Digestion” and the “U-Turn Theory” propounded by him remain unparalleled.

It goes without saying that it is ultimately *the Hindus in India who ought to be the real caretakers of their own heritage*; and with this end in view, **Infinity Foundation India (IFI)** was started in India in 2016. IFI has been holding a series of Swadeshi Indology Conferences.

Held twice a year on an average, these conferences focus on select themes and even select Indologists of the West (sometimes of even the East), and seek to offer refutations of mischievous and misleading misreportages/misinterpretations bounteously brought out by these Indologists – by way of either raising red flags at, or giving intellectual responses to, malfeasances inspired in fine by them. To employ

Sanskrit terminology, the typical secessionist misrepresentations presented by the West are treated here as *pūrva-pakṣa*, and our own responses/rebuttals/rectifications as *uttara-pakṣa* or *siddhānta*.

The first two conferences focussed on the writings of Prof. Sheldon Pollock, the outstanding American Orientalist (also of Columbia University, ironically) and considered the most formidable and influential scholar of today. There can always be deeper/stronger responses than the ones that have been presented in these two conferences, or more insightful perspectives; future conferences, therefore, could also be open in general to papers on themes of prior conferences.

Vijayadaśamī  
Hemalamba Sarīvatsara  
Date 30-09-2017

**Dr. K S Kannan**  
Academic Director  
and  
General Editor of the Series

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## Volume Editorial

*The military superiority of Europe to Asia is not an eternal law of nature, as we are tempted to think, and our superiority in civilisation is a mere delusion.*

- **Bertrand Russell**

*Cynics are only happy in making the world as barren for others as they have made for themselves.*

- **George Meredith**

*The learned tradition is not concerned with truth, but with the learned adjustment of learned statements of antecedent learned people.*

- **A. N. Whitehead**

It is a pleasure to write a few words by way of the Volume Editorial for this 7th Volume of the SI Series. The volume has ten papers contributed mostly by youngsters. The first two papers deal with issues of chronology in Prof. Sheldon Pollock's writings, bringing out the lapses and deficiencies in his approach and analysis. The next four deal with Hinduism and Buddhism in their various aspects, handling his comments on their relation. The final four papers deal with the issues - of Sanskrit Cosmopolis, of Nazism, of Rasa theory, and of casteism and population genetics.

The opening paper (**Ch.1**) by **Manogna Sastry and Megh Kalyana-sundaram** is entitled “*A Pūrvapakṣa of Sheldon Pollock's Use of Chronology*”. Chronology is “central to comparative intellectual-historical practice” asserts Pollock. But the “facts” and “evidence” that have been made available so as to assist in any reconstruction of Indian history - are all the ones that were methodically constructed by Westerners in their overbearing concern for the perpetuation of colonial

rule. The time has come when the very “facts” need to be examined. All along, the colonialists scuttled several indigenous voices; and the European voices that evinced some positive taste for the Indian heritage are but objects of disdain for Pollock. Brimming with *parti pris*, his writings occupy themselves with driving a wedge between Hinduism and Buddhism here, or Sanskrit and the regional languages there; or depicting the Mohammedan marauders as veritable savers of Sanskrit and temples, pitting them against indigenous rulers who are portrayed as working to the contrary!

The focus of the paper is an examination of the historical veracity of the the first of “the two great moments in the career of Sanskrit” when, from its primary status as no more than a religious language, Sanskrit is supposed to have “reinvented itself as a code for literary and political expression” around the beginning of the Common Era (while in the second one, situated at the beginning of the second millennium, local languages supposedly came to replace it). Our authors have scoured two key writings of Pollock, to tabulate the various dates assigned by him to various authors/rulers/dynasties/events in India and elsewhere (nearly 70 items). They have pointed out how there are many among those items simply lacking any sources/references whatsoever, and how several inconsistencies even within and among themselves abound. In his 2003 publication, Pollock says the Śātavāhana-s did not support Sanskrit, and in the 2006 one, he refers to the same dynasty as both willing and able to use Sanskrit for its public records: Śātavāhana-s have changed so much within three years! In the former publication their date is cited as 100 BCE to 250 CE, and in the latter as 250 BCE to 200 CE! In just three years, their start recedes by 150 years! - and of course, no grounds need to be provided - either for the earlier date or the latter: my will be done, and it is done! That's Pollock for you.

Pollock is inconsistent in his dates of Kātyāyana/Vararuci and Patañjali, again between his 2003 and 2006 publications. “The date of the Buddha is the one key point for fixing Indian chronology”. A gap of eleven centuries separates the Indus Valley Civilization and the date of the Buddha, with no historical points in between, even though there is a fairly large body of literature for this period. The brazen title of the 1820 publication of Cambridge viz. *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus... to Facilitate the Progress of Christianity in Hindustan...* (underlining ours) betrays what the Indologists then were up to, and gives away

equally well, a clue to what the Neo-Orientalists of today are up to. Contrary to his own claims, Pollock has hardly critiqued, or even cited, a host of important insider sources on issues of the identity or date of Candragupta or the Buddha.

Reckoning the irresponsible strides of Pollock who says his 2006 item could have an alternate subtitle viz. “A study of Big Structures, Large Processes, and Huge Comparisons,” the authors aptly remark that a more apt subtitle would be “A Study of Unsound Structures, Illogical Processes and Inaccurate Comparisons”. In his overriding anxiety to adjust facts to his fancied theories, he asserts the simultaneity of the production of *kāvya* and invention of writing, but the edicts of Aśoka go back to 320-150 BCE as per his own admission - so he is either overlooking or ignoring the incongruity therein. It is the overbearing prejudice and anxiety that makes Pollock posit a post-Buddhist date for Jaimini. His facile equation of Sanskrit - as little more, or little else, than the sacerdotal in the pre-Christian era, and the preeminently profane in the post-Christian era - also stands exposed. He attempts to give political colour to Buddhism’s early rejection of Sanskrit, and subsequent capitulation with Sanskrit - all remaining inexplicable for him, or indeed needing nothing but convoluted explanations, or better sophisticated concoctions. His imagination is fertile: “freedom” of Sanskrit from its sacerdotal shackles, and its ensuant politicisation, were all subsequent to - and by implication, consequent to - the influence of Western Asian and Central Asian peoples. *Rāmāyaṇa* must - for him - be post-literate. His claim of Sanskrit grammar as a tool of monopolisation and political manipulation is absurd, to say the least. It may be stated in conclusion that what we find in Pollock’s writings is fantastically conceived exuberance of theories accompanied by a frantic search for the rare select factoids that can somehow be made to fit his pet theories.

The next paper (**Ch.2**) by **Nilesh Oak** is entitled “**Astronomy and Epic Chronology**”. Basing on the dates of the earliest manuscripts/inscriptions, Pollock assigns 200BCE to 400CE as the possible date for the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Pollock assumes AIT (Aryan Invasion Theory) ignoring many pieces of evidence to the contrary. Seeing that the arguments of Pollock betray his biases and lack scientific rigour, Oak dwells first on issues and concepts of a proper and sound scientific methodology. He opts for an examination of possible objective evidences for the lower/upper limits

with respect to the chronology of events in, or time of the composition of, the texts of the *Rāmāyaṇa/Mahābhārata*, and suggests testability as a key criterion of scientific evidences. All relevant evidence must be evaluated and tested. Astronomical/geological/hydrological evidences must all be looked into in the the case of the dating of the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa*. One can thus look for corroboration from multiple disciplines.

Restrictive evidences - the ones which rule out certain possibilities - are the ones that are to be valued the more, as they can help make our estimates narrower. The *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* provide many astronomical/chronological markers. The natural cycles - of 26000 years, of 72 years, and of 1000 years, to speak of but a few - figure in the reckoning of what constitutes the North Pole of the particular era/times (owing, for example, to the precession of the equinoxes); so too the *nakṣatra*- frame of reference with respect to the timing of the Winter Solstice, and the cardinal points - which follow certain cycles. Instances such as the reference to the movement of Arundhatī and Vasiṣṭha asterisms, are reckoned and handled by but a handful among over a century of research scholars in this regard. Similar is the Yuddha Kāṇḍa astronomical reference in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

We find in Pollock neither the sensitivity to issues such as these, nor the integral understanding of a massive work such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* which is what makes him suspect whether there is unity in even the two adjacent sections of the *Rāmāyaṇa* viz. the Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa and the Aranya Kāṇḍa which appear for him “but a congeries of utterly distinct and unrelated materials”. All his concern is towards sabotaging the poem of Vālmīki as a unitary work - precisely because it is considered by the Hindu tradition as, to press into service his very words, “the first and greatest poem venerated as such for two thousand years”.

Ravi Joshi's article (**Ch.3**) “**Hindu-Buddhist Framework: Detonator of Western Indology**” shows how the West deploys utterly incongruent frameworks while assessing Eastern cultures: religion as a category may well suit Abrahamic faiths, but it ill serves the Eastern value-systems. Pollock reads tropes that fit Western history such as “Catholic vs. Protestant” into the Eastern as “Theistic Hierarchical Hinduism” vs. “Protestant Egalitarian Secular Buddhism”, or “Spiritualistic Evangelistic Buddhism” vs. “Ritualistic Escapist Hinduism”! Westerners are never tired of harping on some kind of Hinduism-

Buddhism divide or the other. McKim Marriot, A K Ramanujan, and Rajiv Malhotra have shown the applicability of the Dharmic framework rather than at all of “religion” for the Indic systems. The equation of *dharma* and religion has wrought havoc on no small a scale, and for more than a century.

Even when it comes to fixing dates, the Biblical exigencies are inviolable for a typical Westerner. Indologists - Western brand as well as their Eastern moulds - have typically, or rather systematically and relentlessly, white-washed the endless and ruthless devastation wrought by the Islamic invaders of India right from Bakhtiar Khilji. All current academic frameworks are Western defaults. Given that the West’s first exposure to Buddhism is from the Far East (rather than from India), and that it appears coherent and stable, as against Hinduism which must loom as but constructed and chimerical. India has been, on the whole, dethroned from the status of an exotic mother civilization to a colony of defeated kingdoms.

There is hardly anything indeed in Buddhism to mark it as any radical social revolution - including that of its evaluation of the *varṇa-jāti* system, the role of which is in no wise subdued or sabotaged, or questioned overtly or covertly by the Buddha. The Buddha maintains silence with respect to many issues - but the same cannot be claimed to amount to any categorical denial of theism. The Buddhist categories and terminologies are little else than close kins of and easy derivatives of their Hindu counterparts. The clearly discernible motive for German Indology was to demonise and displace the sound and strong traditional Brahminical scholarship, and the intellectual intrigue was ultimately aimed at usurping the same. The Axial hypothesis is yet another attempt to construct a new grand narrative of world history - but in no way disbanding the Western Indologists’ hackneyed premises and prejudices. For Pollock, all religion is essentially a cover for politics! Though Buddhist texts unabashedly declare that the Buddha learnt meditation from *yogin*-s, Pollock fantasises that Buddhist meditation is a precursor to all meditation systems - a rare “intellectual” temerity indeed! The writings of Staal can indeed show how Pollock’s vile attempts at misrepresenting the concept, or practice, of *yajña*, are all baseless. Pollock’s endeavour - of somehow showing Buddhism as civilizational disrupter of the Indian heritage - simply falls flat in the light of the abundance of facts to the contrary.

**M. V. Sunil's article (Ch.4) “The Upaniṣad-s: The Source of the Buddha’s Teachings”** exposes the distortions of Hinduism wrought by Western academicians - who, it must be cautioned, are neither its practitioners nor insiders. Mixing up the *vyāvahārika* and the *pāramārthika* is one of their handy tools. One cannot afford to ignore the commonality of philosophical approaches in lieu of the divergences in some of the external rituals in each case. The Buddha introduced but a new terminology, while handling more or less the self-same categories of thought. Hinduism and Judaism could perhaps be labelled as the original religions, and the rest are all their offsprings: Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism are thus mere offshoots of Hinduism. Advaita and Buddhism alike negate the idea of the individual self. While Pollock seeks to make out that the core conception of the Upaniṣad-s were cancelled in early Buddhism, such suppositions/presuppositions are anticipated and annulled by authentic and more authoritative writers such as Rhys Davids. The concept of *Nirvāṇa* is after all akin to the Upaniṣadic *Brahman*. Common are the epithets and descriptors used for *Nirvāṇa* on the one hand, and for the *Ātman/Paramātman/Self* on the other. The last words of the Buddha were “Let the Self be your light and shelter” - which is but the entity within oneself, not outside. The Buddha was of course concerned with the dilution and decline in the ethical standards of some of the custodians of the *Veda*-s. A survey of the above and related ideas shows that there are no foundational differences between the Vedic and the Buddhist traditions.

**Rajath Vasudevamurthy's “Vedic Roots of Buddhism” (Ch.5)** starts with an assessment of the motives of Western Indologists. Differences of opinion or approach are only common in philosophical discussions in India as elsewhere, but the Western Indologists are seen exploiting the same for petty political gains - and to serve which nonexistent differences are projected, and even magnified at the outset. Modern/Western lenses are systematically used in analysing ancient/Eastern societies and thought systems. While Max Muller asserts that all the faculties of ancient Indians were devoted to the inward life of the soul, Pollock fancies the opposite extreme viz. that the very language (Sanskrit), even its grammar, and too, its poetry - are all politically oriented! Pollock involves the Axial Theory, which as per Jaspers, its propounder, involves a new sociopolitical formation - a like of which, however, never occurred in India, at least prior to

the 20th century. Pollock concedes on the one hand that Sanskrit literary culture spread from Afghanistan to Java, and the trans-local empire; yet at the same time asserts that Buddhist thinkers produced one such moment in early South Asia; but again, that nothing like an Axial Age occurred in India prior to the 20th century. Pollock is a past master not only in cherry-picking but also blowing hot in one breath and blowing cold in another - or rather in the same, breath. If, as Aiyaswami Sastri says, the pre-Buddhist Jains and Ājīvikas already showed the characteristics Buddhism displays, where then is any question of speaking of Buddhism as a breakthrough? If Pollock speaks of "a lay community of co-religionists (*upāsaka-s*)" as a development brought about by Buddhism, the *Mahābhārata* exemplifies Vidura and Dharmavyādha as prominent teachers of Vedānta - such as is fit to be, and was, venerated by even those knowledgeable in the *Veda-s* - despite the fact that the "lower" classes were denied access to the *Veda-s*. (Ignoring time-scales, the) *Veda-s* and the Buddha present a parallel: oral-teaching for a long time followed latterly - by committing the teachings to writing. If the Buddha criticised the sacrificial act of slaying an animal, we already have a superior archetype in the *Veda* itself (in the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad*). The Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* ("non-self") is but a continuation of the "*neti neti*" of the *Upaniṣad-s*. While Pollock attempts to pit Pali against Sanskrit, A. N. Upadhye had shown how the two coexisted for long, and betrayed little mutual animosity. Pollock tries all tricks to explain anew the return to Sanskrit by the Buddhists but none of them explains all facts. Much is made of the supposed role of the Buddha as a social reformer, but the Buddha is not known to have suggested the removal/alteration of the *varṇa/jāti* system. The continuity of the caste system in India from times immemorial to our own times is a grand riddle - for economic historians and sociologists alike. Not only has Pollock not been able to explain any well-established facts with his fantastic theories, he has not ably propounded any new theory to see or show things in a new light.

**Sharda Narayanan's paper (Ch.6) "Brāhmanism, Buddhism, and Mīmāṃsā"** gives an overview of the Mīmāṃsā tradition, and lays bare the implausibility of claiming Mīmāṃsaka-s as the aggressors, with Buddhists as the victims. Targeting brahmins has always been high on the agenda of Western Indologists, and Pollock is no exception - despite the fact that a life of discipline, one sans pelf and power,

was ordained for the brahmins, which they followed all through, generally speaking, till even recent times. Blaming the brahmin or the *Mīmāṃsaka* for the age-old caste system or Nazism evinces non-adherence to historical facts on the part of Pollock, and the political motivations of the master misinterpreter of history. “Aryan” interpreted on racial lines has no basis whatsoever.

The fantastic claim of Bronkhorst that the beginninglessness of the universe was propounded by the *Mīmāṃsaka*-s - “apparently for an entirely non-philosophical reason: the distaste felt for the newly arising group of of brahminical temple priests” - is well-refuted by her. When you prefix your statement with “apparently” (or even “virtually”), you can present any nonsensical idea without a feeling of guilt and /or, more importantly, without getting caught. The *Mīmāṃsaka*-s evinced little distaste towards the temple-priests; but then, are the Western scholars envious in no small measure towards the Indian scholars of yore, or even the contemporary pundits, because they are after all themselves driven - apparently, let us say - by the leftist frameworks or leftist agenda? On the whole, Pollock’s attack on *Mīmāṃsā* for its “confrontation with history” is completely off the mark.

The paper (**Ch.7**) by **Arvind Prasad** viz. **“Chronology Beyond ‘Sanskrit Cosmopolis’”** looks at Pollock’s ideas on Sanskrit; his very coinage ‘Sanskrit Cosmopolis’ is directed towards baselessly, hence brazenly, cooking up an idea of Sanskrit as a political tool - of all! It is only typical of Pollock to pose as a careful writer, and state preemptively that his dates are tentative and can be disputed, but then by and by press forward a little later and present it all as if he has actually already proved what he at the outset had presented with trepidation as but a hypothesis for consideration. The paper anchors on a key publication of a well-established author viz. Baldev Upadhyaya to substantiate its solid claims as against the puerile Pollockian posits. Sanskrit was developed in terms of grammar and literature, essentially as a tool for colonising, asserts Pollock - the Pollock who imagines a balkanised past of India, and so fervently dreams of its balkanised future - which can after all never come true. (Many “leading” intellectuals have cherished stupid dreams - much like Karl Marx’s “The State will wither away!”, whereas it is only such silly dreams that have withered away). Prasad is able to see through the politician in Pollock in the very coinage of the

term ‘Sanskrit Cosmopolis’, and the nonsense of supralocal ecumene. Pollock tries to provide statistics of the percentage of inscriptions in Sanskrit versus local languages in a given period, but has no documentation to be appended so as to give a semblance at least of the same. His wild theories of *praśasti* are subverted by the *praśasti*-s that we find composed even for the Dutch lords! Pollock toes the usual line of Christian evangelists in spewing venom against “power-hungry” Brahmins, but the abundance of evidence produced by Baldev Upadhyaya bears out the utter hollowness of the imaginary claims of Pollock. Pollock is befuddled in numerous ways: Hanneder and Sastry have, too, shown several fallacies in Pollock’s arguments. Pollock is indeed good - but only for obfuscation.

The paper (Ch.8) by **Vishal Agarwal** viz. “**Hinduism: a Precursor to Nazism?**” takes on the view of Pollock that Hinduism anticipates Nazism. Oriental scholarship did act by and large as but a handmaiden, after all, of European colonialism and imperialism. Early 18th c., Schlegel mooted the idea of a master Aryan race; and the IE languages were linked to the Aryans. But the British could hardly bear with any racial affinity to Brahmins, the elite among the Hindus. A hierarchy of races - with Europeans, who else, at the top was framed. A premodern racism, Pollock posits, has deep roots in the śāstric tradition: the *śūdra*-s, he imagines, were castigated like the Jews in Nazi Germany! He tries to drive a wedge between the upper classes versus not only the *śūdra*-s, but even women, Buddhists, and Jains. The sinister motivations of Pollock in his “Deep Orientalism” are but patent. Much has been made of the Aryan “stock”, and the colours - of the skin, hair and eyes; whereas in vivid contrast, sages are themselves described as dark, or even praying for black hair. It is only Nazis who equate language to race, and race to one’s looks. Unlike Nazis who sought the expulsion of Jews, never did Dharmaśāstra-s seek the expulsion of *śūdra*-s.

In order to counter Pollock arguing on the basis of *Mīmāṃsā*, Agarwal provides the very *Mīmāṃsā* grounds for exactly the opposite conclusions. In any case, whoever speaks today for Hindus is branded a Hindu Nationalist; and a scholarly hatemonger that Pollock after all is, he loves to portray Brahminism as premodern racism. Preaching anti-Hinduism, Pollock is a bird of the same feather - as the Nazi scholars preaching anti-Semitism.

**Sharda Narayanan**'s paper (**Ch.9**) entitled “**A Rejoinder to A Rasa Reader**” attempts to analyse Pollock's interpretations and translations, and to showcase his methodology in distorting the tradition. Pollock's annotations and comments are often of a disparaging and prejudiced nature. Pollock complains how even though Šiva was a dancer, God in India was generally not an artist! She concurs with David Frawley who says most Westerners do not go beyond the surface in what they see of Indian culture. She feels that Pollock's work derives its value and gravity solely from the presentation of passages from the classical tradition of India. Drawing attention to Pollock's question regarding the very number of *sthāyi-bhāva-s*, she says the modern scholar's conclusion borders on the absurd. She objects to the segmentation of *rasa* as seen and as heard. The translation of *rasa* as “taste” is also not a commendable translation; *pratyakṣa* is not just “visual”; *vibhāva* rendered as “factor” is also not satisfactory; *śrīgāra* as “sexual instinct” is hopeless; and again, that *Nātyaśāstra* does not speak of the *rasa* in the spectator is also far from truth. Pollock's translation of *vipralambha śrīgāra* also does not do justice to the term. Embellishments of sound are belittled by Pollock as unnecessary fuss, but even Keith had the sense to note it as a matter of keen appreciation. Speaking of “seduction” by literature, which Pollock does, is shocking, she points out. Pollock has missed the role of “propriety”, and he even questions the language of aesthetics in *bhakti*. Pollock's translation of text titles are, too, problematic as are his translations of *sāṃskāra*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, etc. We keep coming across contentious claims by him such as the “demise of dramaturgical theory after about the 13th c.” and that “it was the Buddhists who invented compassion” etc.. Indeed Pollock out-Keiths Keith in his mordancy and sardonicism.

**Murali K. Vadivelu**'s article (**Ch.10**) entitled “**Othering and Indian Population Genetics**” suggests that studies of endogamy in the Indian context have been modelled after the Arab-Muslim clan-tribal endogamy. Social scientists do not seem to have grasped the concept of *gotra-s* across *varṇa-s*. Archival records indicate that the colonial education system completely replaced the indigenous education systems, and also curtailed tenancy rights - all leading to much ruination, all man-made - which is to say the inhuman-British-made. Westerners have misinterpreted the role of Sanskrit as an instrument of oppression. Political Philology, mooted by Pollock, is a dehumanising ideology.

Citing the hearty acclaim by Ambedkar regarding the uniqueness and richness of Sanskrit literature, Vadivelu notes how the modern political-academic campaign against it borders, rather, on hysteria. For Pollock, Sanskrit knowledge presents itself as a major vehicle of the ideological form of social power in traditional India; gross asymmetries of power characterise India over the last three millennia. As against Pollock, even Ambedkar admits that the caste system existed long before Manu. The caste system cannot be attributed to Brahmins, asserts Ambedkar. For him, the caste system was essentially a class system. Initially brahmins were endogamous, and subsequently others followed suit. Dharampal cites William Adam who notes that Brahmins studied till they were nearly forty, and would even beg for their survival during their avid pursuit of studies.

On the other hand, the poor education of Muslims during those times, and the continued practice of the caste system among the very converts to Islam - even during those days, are all in fact well-recorded. As to the education of *śūdra-s*, it may be mentioned that nearly 80% of the total students in Tamil speaking regions, for example, were *śūdra-s*. Thomas Munro stated in unmistakable terms that India was more civilised than England. Apparently, Muslim-rule enforced greater endogamy than might have been current. The division of society is linked to their professions by and large. Ambedkar clearly warned that conversion to Islam or Christianity will denationalise the depressed classes, which is so well borne out today. Ambedkar was in fact all for making Sanskrit the national language of India.

Of othering on the basis of colour, the typical Westerner's practice, and charge against Hindus, the answer is found in the dark divinities viz. Lord Kṛṣṇa, Kālī, or even Draupadī. Ambedkar took note of the endless atrocities of the Muslim rulers - circumcising brahmins, making slaves of Hindu women and children, slaughter of Hindus on a large scale, plunder of temples, and so on. Especially, during Muslim rule, it is brahmins who were "othered", and it continues to this day - bearing out and standing as a witness to - the very antithesis of Pollock's claims.

It must be said in conclusion that Pollock's Political Philology and Liberation Philology thus go against all empirical and scientific evidence.

The dictum of *Yoga-Vāsiṣṭha* is after all not too off the mark:

“पापा म्लेच्छा धनाध्याश्च  
नाना-देश्यास्युसंहताः ।  
वहवो लक्ष्य-रन्द्राश्च  
सामादेनर्नास्यदं द्विषः ॥”

“The vicious *mlechha*-s from various countries, affluent and well-organised, large in number and given to accessing others' loopholes - are veritable foes, fit indeed for no conciliatory dialogues.” Deal with the devious after their own fashion - so dictates the *Mahābhārata*:

मायाचारो मायया चर्तितव्यः  
साध्वाचारः साधुना प्रत्युपेयः ॥

It remains to be added that the various contributors hold themselves responsible for their statements in their various papers. And lastly, we crave the indulgence of the readers - for, for certain practical reasons, full conformity to the standards set in the previous volumes in the Series could not be thoroughly ensured in this volume.

Cāndramāna Yugādi  
Śārvari Samvatsara  
(25-March-2020)

**Dr. K. S. Kannan**  
Academic Director  
and  
General Editor of the Series

# Chapter 1

## ***Pūrva-pakṣa of Sheldon Pollock's Use of Chronology***

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### **Abstract**

Prof. Sheldon Pollock's body of work shows his penchant for a few pet topics: his positioning Buddhism as the silver bullet that saved the 'Indian' from Vedic and Brahmanic oppression and his strenuous case to uncover tenuous parallels between Greek classics and Indian epics, effectively taking away the Indian claim to deeply native and formative elements of her culture. The dismissal of centuries of indigenous oral traditions, a strategic emphasis on deliberately limited aspects of the essence and historicity of *kāvya* in evaluating its contributive value, his theorisation of a perceived tension between Sanskrit and the regional languages as well as his position that the field of Sanskrit has not had a history of examining its own literary change, among other similar fantastic claims, constitute some of his key

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\*pp. 25–76. In: Kannan, K. S. and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*. Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

arguments. When different works from his scholarship are considered together, not only do logical and chronological inconsistencies become evident, but also the near-absence of a detailed chronology, which in his own words is ‘central to comparative intellectual-historical practice.’ *Ergo*, we present a detailed consolidation of his dispersed chronological data into a framework and proceed to address questions such as—“Does tradition disagree with some of the dates he assigns? Which ones and with what evidence or logic do traditional scholars disagree with Pollock?”—with a particular focus on the epoch around the first of the “two great moments of transformation in culture and power in premodern India” (Pollock 2006:1) when the supposed ‘momentous rupture’ that led Sanskrit to descend from ‘The World of Gods’ to ‘the World of Men.’ Particular recurrent themes in Pollock’s work as well as the larger context he provides for the study and revival (or a case for no revival) of Sanskrit, in context of his chronology, are also probed in this paper.

## 1. Introduction

Over the course of its long unbroken history, India has had several encounters with the West, with some that have been mutually enriching while others, challenging and nearly destroying everything she has held as precious and sacred. What could not be destroyed has been left maligned and vilified, with massive ramifications that have changed the very course of her flow several times. Yet, one cannot think of another country, that has faced the sheer number and intensity of assaults that India has, and survived and risen again. When one considers the treasure that every nation brings to the world, India stands tall as one who sought after Infinity, beyond Life and Death, and understood it in all its intensities and hues. She strove to bring that aspiration into everything she realised and built in her world. If she manifested the *veda*-s, the *upaniṣad*-s, and the *śāstra*-s, she also created structures of unimaginable beauty and intellectual precision, in her arts and architecture and literature and sciences, casting her unparalleled keenness of sense to even the smallest of everyday acts. War, statecraft, human psychology — no arena was spared. The space she created, for the *nāstika* to exist and thrive and express with as much freedom as the devout *bhakta* is a testament to her vision. This state of being, where all was a simultaneous seeking

and expression of the Divine within and without man, has driven one of the oldest civilisations of the world. The master key to the Indian mind is not merely seen in the reflections of his philosophical, intellectual, rational or emotional mind, but, in the spiritual ethos that drives his very being.

However, history has shown how it has been at times a most arduous battle for India to fight and defend. Every encounter she has had with the outsider, especially in the last thousand years, has left her in an increasingly enfeebled state. The very fact that she has survived is a testament to her inner spirit, but, the survival and the price she paid for her political freedom has seen her wealth, in all domains, looted. Analysis, exegesis, interpretation of Indological elements are now carried out primarily by outsiders even as it is the Indian who bears the burden of a history that has been written and shaped and continues to be in various forms, by forces of colonialism. Studies about India now bear three distinctive phases, though work in each of them is evolving concomitantly. Scholarship in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial critiques of Indology today finds itself charged with western methods that seek to reckon Indological components through leitmotifs of power and domination. But, scholars from the post-colonial age, while wielding theories and models characteristic of their times, continue to base their constructs on 'evidence' and 'facts' that were methodically built as a part of creating knowledge about India for the purposes of colonial rule. Thus, while newer and different perspectives on India during its various epochs in her long history continue to be generated, there has been little significance attached to examining the very 'facts' that have been taken for an objective given and built further upon.

In spite of the recognition by the domain today, that in creating a picture of India, commissioned by the East India Company as it assumed the role of a ruler, several indigenous voices were silenced and never made it to the authoritative, sanctioned canvas, Indologists continue to use these fabricated falsities. And Sheldon Pollock, a leading American Indologist studies, is no different in this regard. Pollock expresses mild disdain at several places for ideas from European Orientalism, including dismissing the regard some Oriental Indologists had for India as just Romanticism, but, clearly uses the chronological data built during the period. Even as he professes to be a lover of Sanskrit, his narratives of the language and everything

it has represented in India are replete with intellectual *parti pris*. Recurrent major themes in his voluminous scholarship include setting up dichotomies between Hinduism and Buddhism, Sanskrit and the regional languages and often positioning the outsider as someone who saved the language and the society while the native actively used the same as tools of oppression the latter being perhaps the least obvious. Pollock's hypotheses include incredible ideas that *kāvya* was invented around the beginning of CE and its arrival brought down the language from the realm of Gods, thusly presenting a bizarre and incongruous picture of ancient India for the preceding millennia, where one of the greatest civilizations of the world seems to have had little life outside of Vedic chanting and oppressive Brahmanical paraphernalia, which, according to Pollock, includes even grammar!

The first five lines of the introduction of Pollock's magnum-opus<sup>1</sup> *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* should make evident the centrality of Chronology to his book's attempt and therefore, to his theorizations and conclusions:

“This book is an attempt to understand two great moments of transformation in culture and power in premodern India. The first occurred around the beginning of Common Era, when Sanskrit, long a sacred language restricted to religious practice, was reinvented as a code for literary and political expression. ...The second moment occurred during 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.”

(Pollock 2006:01)

That Pollock chose to frame the whole “attempt” of his book as “to understand two great moments” naturally necessitates that his methods, theorizations and conclusions are evidently and irrevocably linked to chronology. Consequently, if his assumptions and implications are not chronologically fool-proof, his theorizations and conclusions, at least some if not all, may need to be declared suspect and be revisited for validity, if not completely discredited. The first of the “two great moments” referred to above is in large part, the focus of this paper — the scope has been limited by the authors to the period of BCE — which is an attempt to address some questions including “Does tradition disagree with some of the dates he assigns? Which ones and with what evidence or logic do traditional

scholars disagree with SP? Are there other examples in his work that show bias?”<sup>2</sup> In addition, we aim to identify internal inconsistencies, if any, in his own chronological data, with the objective of a more comprehensive *pūrva-pakṣa* of his chronology with regard to the first great “moment” and pinpoint which of the theories, particularly those he claims are his (or ascribed exclusively to him in the academia), become questionable.

A survey of Pollock’s works makes evident a stumbling block: the lack of a consolidated, sequentially-arranged view of chronological data,<sup>3</sup> necessitating, as first step a clear and sufficiently comprehensive reconstruction of his Chronology, in order to identify his chronological assumptions, its sources and their validity, and compare them with data across specifically selected influential scholars who could be seen as belonging to different points of the spectrum bounded by the qualifications of “Insider and Outsider.”<sup>4</sup> One of the outcomes of the analysis is also to arrive at and propose a checklist of ‘chronological “poison-pills”’<sup>5</sup> that could be used as a tool-kit by anyone in the future, to quickly assess and classify narratives in the insider-outsider spectrum. This spectrum is entirely non-political in nature, even as a scholar in the spectrum can subscribe to narratives which may represent insider accounts on a given chronological milestone while to an outsider narrative on any other.

## 2. Sheldon Pollock’s Chronology

While a first reconstruction and clear presentation of some aspects of Pollock’s chronology as part of a *pūrva-pakṣa* with a scope much larger than that of this paper is found in *The Battle for Sanskrit* by Rajiv Malhotra, a consolidated study of the chronological data that we could find diffused throughout Pollock’s works leads to Tables 1 and 2:

**Table 1: Sheldon Pollock's Chronology reconstructed from some of his scholarship**

Sl. No.	Epoch		Referenced (Yes/No)	Source
	Period/Date	Detail		
1	1000 BCE (Beginning of first millennium BCE)	Earliest form of Sanskrit appeared in South Asia	No	Pollock 2006:39
2	1000 – 1 BCE (Entire first millennium BCE)	Vaidika Sanskrit culture: Prevalence of its liturgical dimension and restriction of its use	No	Pollock 2006:67
3	550 – 330 BCE	Achaemenids	Yes (elsewhere)	Pollock 2006:597
4	527 BCE	Mahāvīra	Ascribed to tradition without being specific	Pollock 2006:424
5	500 – 400 BCE	Rise of Buddhism	No	Pollock 2003:85
6	c. 400 BCE	Buddha	No	Pollock 2006:81
7	Mid fourth century BCE	Pāṇini	Ascribes to convention without being specific	Pollock 2006:81

8	400 – 200 BCE	Sanskrit grammatical tradition synthesized around third or fourth century BCE	No	Pollock 2003:62
9	400 – 200 BCE	Pāṇini's <i>Aṣṭādhyāyī</i>	No	Pollock 2006:45
10	400 – 200 BCE	<i>Vinaya pitaka</i> (text)	Yes	Pollock 2006:54
11	320 – 150 BCE	Maurya dynasty	No	Pollock 2006:59
12	320 – 150 BCE	Mauryas	No	Pollock 2006:597
13	300 – 200 BCE	Latin firmly rooted in Central Italy	No	Pollock 2006:20
14	300 – 200 BCE	Chi'in Shih Huang-ti dynasty	No	Pollock 2006:535
15	264 – 241 BCE	First Punic War	No	Pollock 2006:264
16	Around 260 BCE	Invention of writing itself in India	Ascribed to a 'new scholarly consensus' without specifying	Pollock 2006:81
17	Middle of third century BCE	Promulgation of edicts during Aśoka's chancery	Yes	Pollock 2006:59

18	Middle of third century BCE	Brahmi syllabary, first South Asian writing system	Yes	Pollock 2006:59
19	Mid-third century BCE onwards	Prakrit, the voice of polity	No	Pollock 2006:499
20	Mid-third century BCE	Beginning of expression of political will by ruling lineages	Ascribed to Aśokan edicts	Pollock 2006:331
21	Mid-third century BCE	Translation of Aśokan edicts into literary Greek	No	Pollock 2006:265
22	Third century BCE	New cultural inputs from the west	No	Pollock 2006:537
23	Mid-third century BCE	Outermost historical limit of Vālmīki's <i>kāvya</i>	Not clear	Pollock 2003:87
24	Last centuries BCE	No evidence compels belief of existence of <i>kāvya</i> before last centuries B.C.E, if that early	Not clear	Pollock 2003:84

25	Third century BCE to first century CE	Early epoch of literacy: no remains of non-sacral, this-worldly Sanskrit extant <i>with the exception of Rāmāyaṇa</i>	No	Pollock 2006:48
26	225 BCE – 250 CE	Sātavāhanas	No	Pollock 2006:597
27	225 BCE – 250 CE	Sātavāhanas	Yes	Pollock 2006:61
28	Last centuries (most probably third or second) BCE	<i>Mīmāṃsāsūtra</i>	No	Pollock 2006:40
29	d. 204 BCE	Naevius – Latin poet from today's Naples	No	Pollock 2006:264
30	Last two centuries BCE	Tamil Brahmi cave inscriptions	Yes	Pollock 2006:290
31	About second century BCE	Kātyāyana	Not clear	Pollock 2006:385
32	Last century or two before the beginning of CE	Development of <i>kāvya</i>	No	Pollock 2003:85
33	Second century BCE	Sinhāla liter-ized	No	Pollock 2006:386

34	d. 169 BCE	Ennius, Latin poet from Calabria	Yes	Pollock 2006:264
35	100 BCE – 400 CE	Śakas and Kuṣāṇas	No	Pollock 2006:597
36	c. 100 BCE – 250 CE	Sātavāhanas	No	Pollock 2003:70
37	From probably first century BCE	Earliest documents in Sanskrit	No	Pollock 2006:60
38	From not much before Common era	Outer limit for Sanskrit <i>Mahābhārata</i>	No	Pollock 2006:224
39	Middle of first century BCE	Arrival of Śakas	Yes	Pollock 2006:70
40	End of first century BCE	Disappearance of all Italian languages from inscriptive record save Latin	No	Pollock 2006:271
41	About 150 CE	Nasik cave inscription of Gautamī Bālaśrī	No	Pollock 2006:238
42	Middle of second century	Patañjali	Yes	Pollock 2003:84

43	Mid second century	Invention of Indian astrology by translation of Hellenistic horoscopy into Sanskrit by “Lord of the Greeks”	Yes	Pollock 2006:537
44	149–150 CE	Middle of the reign of Rudradāman; unprecedented sculpture of Gāndhāra	Yes	Pollock 2006:265
45	In second century and onwards	Beginning of usage of Sanskrit for public texts	No	Pollock 2003:84
46	200 – 400 CE	Dating of Vararuci	No	Pollock 2006:101
47	Around 225 CE	Ikṣvākus	Yes	Pollock 2006:116
48	225 – 300 CE	Ikṣvākus	No	Pollock 2006:597
49	250 – 500 CE	Vākāṭakas	No	Pollock 2006:597
50	300 – 600 CE	Kadambas	No	Pollock 2006:597
51	300 – 900 CE	Pallavas	No	Pollock 2006:597
52	c. 300	<i>Nātyaśāstra</i>	No	Pollock 2016:132
53	Early CE	<i>Stotra</i>	No	Pollock 2016:83

54	320 – 550 CE	Guptas	No	Pollock 2006:597
55	400 – 1000 CE	Gaṅgas	No	Pollock 2006:597
56	Fifth century CE	Beginning of literization of Kannada	No	Pollock 2006:26
57	500 – 750 CE	Bādāmi Cālukyas	No	Pollock 2006:597
58	5th or 6th century CE	Weakening and breaking of Prakrit as a medium for <i>kāvya</i>	No	Pollock 2006:101
59	600 – 700 CE	First appearance of literary-theoretical reflection	No	Pollock 2006:13
60	600 – 700 CE	Kumārilā	No	Pollock 2006:500
61	600 – 1300 CE	Pāṇṭiyas	No	Pollock 2006:597
62	625 – 1075 CE	Veṅgi Cālukyas	No	Pollock 2006:597
63	Mid-7th century CE	Plays, discovered in Trivandrum in early 1900's, ascribed to Bhāsa	Not clear	Pollock 2006:81 Pollock 2003:85
64	Late-7th century 700 CE	Kāvyaḍarśa of Daṇḍin	No	Pollock 2006:163
65	725 – 950 CE	Gurjara Pratīhāras	No	Pollock 2006:597

66	750 – 1200 CE	Pālas	No	Pollock 2006:597
67	750 – 975 CE	Rāṣṭrakūṭas	No	Pollock 2006:597
68	779 CE	Kuvalayamālā	Yes	Pollock 2006:96
69	700 – 800 CE	Śaṅkara	No	Pollock 2006:570

(A continuation of this Table 1 can be found in the Appendix; Table 2 in Appendix is an exclusive chronological tabulation of texts (with their Pollock-assigned English names), reconstructed from Pollock's book: *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*)

### 3. Pollock's Chronology – Analysis and Insights

#### 3.1 Internal Inconsistencies in Pollock's Data

In light of the scope of the paper limited to the BCE period, among the 40 BCE points in Table 1, one observes that a conspicuous 24 lack any references. We also observe that some data within Pollock's own work are inconsistent with each other. From Table 1, at least two such internal inconsistencies can be identified, the first more distinct than the second.

##### 3.1.1 Sātavāhana-s

In Pollock (2003), one finds “Staunchly Brahmanical lineages to the south such as the Sātavāhanas (c. 100 B.C.E–250 C.E.) held to the old ways and supported no literary production whatever in Sanskrit,” (Pollock 2003:70). But in *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men* we see respectively, “Sātavāhanas 225 b.c.e.–250 c.e.” (Pollock 2006:597) and

“Yet this explanation seems to be refuted by a simple fact, one that is no mere artifact of our data: in the early period of literacy in South Asia,

no dynasty, regardless of how *vaidika* it was—and therefore, according to the logic of the religious argument, both willing and able to use Sanskrit—employed that language for its public records. Exemplary here are the cultural practices of the Sātavāhanas. This lineage exercised some form of rule over a wide area of southern India from about 225 b.c.e. to 250 c.e. From the large body of Sātavāhana inscriptional and numismatic evidence available to us now, a very striking kind of cultural politics emerges. This was a lineage of rulers who unequivocally saw themselves inhabiting a Vedic world, as evidenced by both their continual performance of the solemn ceremonies of the *Srauta* tradition and their explicit self-identification as Brahmanical.”

(Pollock 2006:61)

Thus, we see a 125-year difference in the start year across his two books and its significance is evident from the importance he himself attaches to this lineage.

### 3.1.2 Vararuci

In Pollock(2003), one finds

“From among the vast library of early Sanskrit texts, no evidence compels belief in the existence of *kāvya* before the last centuries b.c.e, if that early. Our first actual citations of Sanskrit *kāvya* are found in Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya* (Great commentary) on the grammar of Pāṇini. The materials he cites, if astonishingly thin for a work on the Sanskrit language some 1500 printed pages in length, suggest a state of *kāvya* reasonably developed in form and convention 99. The problem is not the date of literary culture in the *Mahābhāṣya*, however meager, but the date of the author, Patañjali. The evidence usually adduced for an early date is ambiguous and meager; the most compelling arguments place him earlier than the middle of the second century of the common era.”

(Pollock 2003:84)

If dating Patañjali to c. 150 CE (i.e. ‘middle of the second century of common era’) was itself not distortion enough, footnote 99 holds the key to another: “Patañjali, however, refers to a poet by name only once, mentioned “the poem composed by Vararuci (*vārarucaṁ kāvyaṁ*, on 4.3.101)”” (Pollock 2003:84). For a moment, if one were to admit Pollock’s dating of Patañjali, Vararuci should, according to his own footnote 99, predate his dating of Patañjali, i.e. date to a period before c. 150 CE. In Pollock (2006) though, one finds the following

"A major factor in the process was philology in the wide sense of the term. Both Prakrit and Apabhramsha came under the standardizing pressure of a growing scholarly apparatus—newly created grammars, dictionaries, metrical handbooks, dramaturgical treatises, and so forth—that thoroughly bears the stamp of Sanskrit. Instructive here is the earliest systematization of Maharashtri Prakrit, the *Prākṛtrasūtra* (or -*prakāśa*, the Rules of Prakrit, or Light on Prakrit), a grammar composed in perhaps third or fourth century by Vararuci (at least in its core form; chapters for the other Prakrits were added at a later date)."

(Pollock 2006:101)

From review of the footnote 99 in LCIH and the above statement, one of two inferences is tenable: either Pollock's data is inconsistent or that he implies the existence of two Vararuci-s; yet both these inferences would implicate Pollock. Explaining away that the two Vararuci-s above as different would not be sufficient, in light of again, Pollock's own expansions, this time on Kātyāyana, as found in *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, wherein, in addition to dating Kātyāyana to "about second century b.c.e" (Pollock 2006:385), he not only acknowledges the *Vārttika* of Kātyāyana and that it was found in *Mahābhāṣya* in vol 1:12 but also places Kātyāyana, like traditionalists, "between the time of Pāṇini and Patañjali" (Pollock 2006:47). Yet, his dismissal of the scholarship of eminent insider Krishnamachariar to a footnote<sup>6</sup> is only matched by his willful omission or ignorance of the well-known traditional account of Vararuci being the other name of Kātyāyana. Krishnamachariar wrote, in his *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature*:

"Vararuci also called Kātyāyana was the son of Somadatta of Sankjti gotra. He was born at Kauśāmbi on the Jumnā. He studied along with Pāṇini and Vyādi under the Upavarśa in Pātaliputra and married his daughter Upakośa. He composed the *Vārttika* on Pāṇini and the ślokas called *Bhras Patañjali*. Patañjali in his *Mahabhashya* (1. 23) mentions a poem by him (IV iii). According to the Avanti-Sundarī-Kathāsāra (IV 17) Vararuci was born in the reign of King Mahāpadma, son of King Mahānandi son of Nandivardhana, who ruled at Visālā. According to the Purāṇas, ruled for 43 years from 1678 to 1635 BC."

(Krishnamachariar 1937:86) (spelling and italics as in the original)

In light of the above, even without taking into account the dating of Vararuci as per insider accounts such as that proposed by M. Krishnamachariar, does not the difference in Pollock's own date for

Vararuci and Kātyāyana, instantiate a clear case of chronological inconsistency, perhaps willful omission of key information and muddled methodology featuring list-and-dismiss tendencies? A Pollock-acknowledged Vararuci between Pāṇini and Patañjali with a traditional dating would seriously affect his theorization of *kāvya*, which we consider in due course of this paper.

### 3.2 Poison Pills – ABC of Indian Chronology

As studied above, Pollock's methodology related to chronology has at least two basic problems - that of incomplete referencing and of internal data inconsistency. One possible explanation for the first problem could be that these are 'basic facts' of the domain, which have assumed axiomatic status. If that were true, then Pollock's unreferenced dates should be exactly the same across scholarship of most, if not all, his predecessors and contemporaries, from all related fields. A comparative reading of chronological data from 17 sources, should make it amply clear why even a representatively comprehensive yet limited comparative reading such as this is enough to prove that many of Pollock's unreferenced points are hardly agreed upon unanimously, to be considered 'basic data' and to merit unreferenced usage. In the comparative reading tables, scholars have been broadly categorized as either Outsiders and Insiders, based on the positions they take, on what we propose as the 'ABC of Indian Chronology', a short yet effective checklist of four Indian chronology-related-poison-pills that, in our opinion, present divergent positions from the chronological narrative that existed prior to the colonization of India.

**Table 3: ABC of Indian Chronology**

Epoch	Outsider	Insider
Generic	Applies or demands higher standards of multi-disciplinary critical examination for data from Indic sources when compared to those from other traditions, particularly Greek. Assumes data from Indic sources to be by default suspect, correct only if corroborated by a non-Indic source and in case of conflicting information from different traditions, assumes non-Indic data to be correct without commensurate critical examination of data from other tradition. Applies excessive hermeneutics of suspicion and devalues oral tradition of Bhārata.	Does not apply excessive hermeneutics of suspicion and does not feel that Indic source can be accepted only corroborated by a non-Indic source. Relies as primary basis, sources and methods from within Indic canons, using the various disciplines from among the tradition to corroborate timelines.
Aryan problem	Subscribes to the Aryan-migration-into-Bhārata theory (AMT). Attributes Sanskrit, Veda-s to migrants rather than Bhārata's indigenous conceptions. Dates, or endorses dating of Veda-s on the basis of AMT.	Questions the Aryan-migration-into-Bhārata theory (AMT), the non-attribution of Sanskrit and Veda-s to indigenous conceptions and the dating of Veda-s on the basis of AMT.

Buddha Gautama	Dates, endorses or assumes Buddha-Gautama in the 6th century BCE or later. Discards Indic sources—texts, inscriptions—and Indic method—Indian astronomy and reliable oral tradition.	Questions dating of Buddha in 6th century BCE, especially when based on dating of Candragupta Maurya, or more precisely, on synchronism with Greek Sandrokottos.
Bhārata war		Does not discard Indic sources—texts, inscriptions—and Indic method—Indian astronomy and reliable oral tradition.
Candra-gupta Maurya	Sandrokottos-Candragupta Maurya synchronism is a key assumption/basis	Critically evaluates whether Maurya Candragupta is the only possibility of synchronism with Sandrokottos and considers other possibility equally too, that is Gupta Candragupta

### 3.3 Comparative Reading Tables of Indian Chronology (Outsiders and Insiders)

The reasons for shortlisting these epochs becomes apparent when one reviews data from scholars at different points across the insider-outsider spectrum, compiled in two tables—Tables 4 and 5—from 17 sources, available at the authors' page<sup>7</sup>. These tables together constitute what we call Comparative reading tables of Indian chronology. In keeping with scope specified earlier—Pollock's "first moment"—Tables 4 and 5 contain only BCE data. Key in selecting these scholars include either their direct focus on Indian/Hindu chronology or/and availability of sequenced data in their scholarship. As mentioned earlier, a scholar might be, based on approach used for one epoch, be an insider whereas on another epoch, based on approach used for that epoch, be an outsider.

### 3.4 Comparing Pollock with Outsiders and Insiders: Key Chronological Inconsistencies, Pollock's Bias, Insider Evidence

#### 3.4.1 Inconsistency with even Outsiders – Buddha-Gautama

From Tables 4 and 5 of the link, we see that among Pollock's 24 unreferenced BCE data in Table 1, there are clear examples where the dating is far from being unanimously agreed by all outsiders, leave alone insiders, thereby making the potential explanation of these points not being referenced on account of them being 'basic data' of the field, untenable. Consider the dating of Gautama Buddha and the rise of Buddhism. Pollock, in one place dates the rise of Buddhism in the 5th century BCE and in another place, dates the Buddha to c. 400 BCE. Taken together, if one were to hypothesize that Pollock placed Buddha in 5th century BCE and closer to 400 BCE, we see that this does not sit well with the data of Duff (557 – 477 BCE), Danielou (563 – 483 BCE), Thapar (somewhere in 6th century BCE – 483 BCE), Majumdar (566 – 486 BCE), who all place the birth of the Buddha in 6th century BCE and his death before 476 BCE, in variance with Pollock's c. 400 BCE. The criticality of this epoch to the overall chronology of India cannot be overestimated and the following excerpt from Heinz Bechert should suffice for one to get acquainted with its criticality:

"Until recently, the date of the Buddha as calculated according to the "corrected long chronology" has been considered as the only "exact" chronological information from ancient India and before Alexander's campaign. Most chronological calculations concerning the age of brahmanic literary works, on the development of early middle Indic languages, etc. are based on this date, because both Western and South Asian researchers made all relevant calculations using this chronology as a starting point."

(Bechert 1995:286)

#### 3.4.2 Inconsistency with Insiders – Candragupta Maurya

Amidst many such unreliable data, one stands out though, for its conspicuous consonance across all outsider accounts, the C of ABC, i.e. the dating of Candragupta Maurya, to the first quarter of the fourth century BCE. To those familiar with the 'Sheet Anchor of Indian

Chronology', this should not come as much of a surprise, but for Pollock to use this dating of Candragupta Maurya without even making a mention of the debate and dubiousness of method around it – even as he claims to be true to indigenous sources and differ from Oriental Indology methodologically- is revealing of questionable methodology intellectual dishonesty and hypocrisy, to put it more nominally. It is also Candragupta Maurya's dating in fourth century BCE based on synchronism with Greek Sandrokottos that unites all those insiders in addition to others, such as D. R. Mankad in mid-twentieth century and Anthony Troyer way back in the mid-nineteenth century, who may not be mentioned in the insider list but have addressed this issue. Roy (2015) captures well the context, criticality of this epoch and is a sample of the "analysis and evidence"<sup>8</sup> from the insiders.

A glance at the timeline of Indian history before 600 BCE in Table 4 (outsider chronologies) should validate Dr. Roy's point that "if we look closely into this timeline, we find that the chronology before the Buddha is rather vague and amorphous..."(Roy 2016a) and his point about the vacuum "that spans eleven centuries, from the end of Indus Valley Civilization...to the sixth century BCE" (Roy 2016a) during which an "artificial prop called Aryan Invasion has been devised," (Roy 2016a) his observation that one finds "no names of any historical personages before the sixth century BCE"(Roy 2016a) and finally that "...there is only literary history before this period without any names attached to any event."( Roy 2016a)

### 3.4.2.1 The 223-year-old Conjecture and Some of its Key Milestones

"Force-fitting," (Roy 2016a) as used by Dr. Roy, seems quite an appropriate description of the agency behind the genesis of Candragupta-Maurya synchronism conjecture, now 223 years old, dating back to a speech by William Jones titled "*The Tenth Anniversary discourse*":

"...I cannot help mentioning a discovery which accident threw in my way; though my proofs must be reserved for an essay which I have destined for the fourth volume of your Transactions. To fix the situation of that *Palibothra*... which was visited and described by Megasthenes, had always appeared a very difficult problem;....but this only difficulty

was removed, when I found in a classical *Sanskrit* book, near 2000 years old, that *Hiranyabáhu*, or *golden-armed*, which the *Greeks* changed into *Erranoboas*, or the river with a lovely murmur, was in fact another name for the *Sóna* itself, though *MEGASTHENES*, from ignorance or inattention, has named them separately. This discovery led to another greater moment; for *CHANDRAGUPTA*, who from a military adventurer, became, like *SANDRACOTTUS*, the sovereign of Upper *Hindustan*, actually fixed the seat of his empire at *Pataliputra*, where he received ambassadors from foreign princes, and **was no other than the very** *SANDRACOTTUS* who concluded a treaty with *SELEUCUS NICATOR*; so that we have solved another problem, to which we before alluded, and may in round numbers consider the twelve and three hundredth years before *CHRIST...*"

(Jones 1799:152-3) (spelling, italics as in original; emphasis ours)

That Jones attempted to "force-fit" his understanding of facets of Hindu chronology to Biblical chronology is evident from many of his attempts including the tabulation (Jones 1799:313), in which he has himself documented his awareness, as per Hindu chronology, of Buddha in 2nd millennia BCE, and yet, based on his conjecture suggested shrinking Indian chronology by several centuries.

How fundamental William Jones' conjecture is to subsequent conclusions and India's mainstream history even today, including text books for impressionable school children, cannot be overstated but here are some key milestones in its 223 year journey. About six years after Jones' conjecture, Francis Wilford, in his '*On The Chronology Of The Hindus*', can be seen further theorising based on Jones' conjecture, which about eighteen years thereafter, was elevated to being the reckoning, not of an individual, but of the collective 'Oriental Antiquarians,' by James Mill in his *History of British India*. Soon after Mill's book, Cambridge published in 1820, two volumes titled brazenly, *A Key to the Chronology of the Hindus in a Series of Letters in which an Attempt is Made to Facilitate the Progress of Christianity in Hindostan by Proving that the Protracted Numbers of All Oriental Nations when Reduced Agree with the Dates given in the Hebrew Text of the Bible*, that should be much more than a small hint about at least one prevailing colonial motivation in 'studying' Hindu and Indian chronology.

In 1838, 35 years after Jones' conjecture, James Princep, on the basis of his study and interpretation of inscriptions, claimed having deduced an identification of *Devānāmpriya Priyadarśi* with *Aśoka Maurya*. Dr. Roy's appraisal of Princep's findings makes for succinct reading. About

three years after Princep's findings, in the first volume of *The History of India*, Mountstuart Elphinstone lent the weight of his name to Jones' conjecture, by leaning on Princep's:

"Mr. Prinsep's opinion, that the Ptolemy referred to was Ptolemy Philadelphus, who had a brother, named Magas, married to a daughter of Antiochus mentioned in the other edict is either the first or second of the same: that is, either the son or grandson of Seleucus. The synchronism between the grandson of Chandragupta and one of the early successors of Seleucus leaves no doubt of the contemporary existence of the elder princes; and fixes an epoch in Hindu chronology, to which the dates of former events may with confidence be referred."

(Elphinstone 1841:264-273)

And refer, did many indeed, to Jones' conjecture, not just with confidence, as encouraged by Elphinstone, but also with much greater declarative vigor, in further strengthening the outsider narrative of Indian history whose most fundamental, and flawed, assumption still remains the 'Sheet-anchor of Indian chronology', a phrase coined by Max Muller, in which he observed that "everything in Indian chronology depended on the data of Chandragupta," (Muller 1859:275) that there was

"but one means through which the history of India can be connected with that of Greece, and its chronology reduced to its proper limits,"

(Muller 1859:275)

that

"whatever changes may have to be introduced to the earlier chronology of India, nothing will ever shake the date of Chandragupta, the illegitimate successor of the Nandas...That date is the sheet-anchor of Indian chronology."

(Muller 1859:275)

Is it not imperious indeed that comparisons with Greek chronological timeline constitute the master template to frame data as against independent study of Indic history and objective parallels with other classical cultures?

Unlike Pollock, who in his footnotes itself lists and dismisses M Krishnamachariar – whom, if Pollock had actually studied, would have encountered lengthy elaborations dismissing, on the basis of traditional sources, 'the sheet-anchor of Indian chronology' which, as

a scholar claiming differentiation from colonial methods and being true to native sources and notwithstanding the importance he himself attaches to chronology, Pollock should have at least felt compelled to acknowledge; Muller, in his 1859 book, listed and dismissed M. Troyer, translator of *Rājataranginī* into three French-language volumes, not in a footnote but seemingly with a bit more respect:

“There is in the lists of the kings of India the name of Chandragupta, and the resemblance of this name with the name of Sandracottus and Sandrocyptus was first, I believe, pointed out by Sir William Jones....and although other scholars, and particularly M. Troyer, in his edition of *Rājataranginī*, have raised objections, we shall see that the evidence in favour of the identity of Chandragupta and Sandrocyptus is such as to admit of no reasonable doubt.”

(Muller 1859:278)(diacritics as in the original)

While those comfortable with Pollock's theorisations, which are often based on parallels tenuously conjured, should not be uncomfortable with this list-and-dismiss parallel drawn above between Pollock and Muller, Pollock's bias, his dependence on Muller's chronology and thereby on Jones' conjecture, is clearly established by tracing Pollock's frequent and much relied upon source Jan Gonda's reliance on Muller:

“Max Muller's chronological estimate, though not devoid of weak points, has, without the author's reservations, often been more or less tacitly regarded as nearest to the mark.”

(Gonda 1975:22)

Tracing this entire background to Pollock's bias is the simple diagrammatical representation below:

Pollock > Gonda > Muller > Princep > Jones > Sheet anchor of Indian Chronology (Maurya)

Figure 1: Tracing Pollock's bias

Muller's 'Sheet-anchor of Indian chronology,' close to hundred years after it was first conjectured by Jones, was subsequently christened 'historically authenticated date of Chandragupta' (Weber 1892:287) by Albrecht Weber in *The History of Indian Literature* in which, of the seven occurrences of Candragupta, in two of them, Jones' conjecture can be seen becoming the basis for theorisations and/or conclusions on dating of Pāṇini, Kātyāyana (Vararuci) and Buddha-Gautama.

Seven years after Weber's declaration of Jones' conjecture as 'historically authenticated,' Mabel Duff, in possibly the most extant colonial publication purely focused on Indian chronology—*The Chronology of India - From the earliest times to Beginning of Sixteenth century*—makes clear the reliance of colonial chronology of India on Muller's 'Sheet-anchor of Indian Chronology', that is William Jones' conjecture:

"As is well known, the literature of the Hindus, extensive and valuable as it is, contains scarcely any works of historical character. For a trustworthy chronology of India, we are, therefore, mainly dependent on the testimony of coins and inscriptions. Where these fail us, as in the early history of the country, we are thrown back on conjectures and inferences which are always liable to be modified and upset by future discovery. To Sir William Jones we owe the identification of the Sandrokottos or Sandrokoptos of the Greek writers with Chandragupta, the founder of the Maurya dynasty, whose date, B.C. 315, affords a starting-point from which, with the aid of Singhalese and other Buddhist records eked out of Pauranic tradition, it is possible to reconstruct with some degree of success an outline of the history of Upper India between the sixth and third centuries B.C."

(Duff 1899:01)

In Duff's chronological entries for Candragupta Maurya and Gautama Buddha, we find clear evidence of Roy's statement that "the history of India that we know today has been constructed by counting backward and forward from these two sheet anchors" (Roy 2016a):

"B.C. 315: Chandragupta establishes the Maurya dynasty at Pāṭaliputra. The chronology of this dynasty and that of Buddha's death are determined by the initial date assigned to this king (see B.C. 477)."

(Duff 1899:10)

"B.C. 477: Buddha's death in the eighth year of Ajātaśatru, and calculated from the accession of Chandragupta, Maurya, which it preceded by 162 years."

(Duff 1899:06)

For insider responses, while Roy's work has largely been cited in the preceding portions, he is the latest in a line of listed insiders, some of whom have undertaken not only an exhaustive *pūrvā-pakṣa* but also provided *uttara-pakṣa*, based on completely Indic sources, which include varying theories and chronologies. Some such key

insiders include Troyer, Narayana Sastry, M. Krishnamachariar, D. R. Mankad, Pandit Kota Venkatachelam, D.S. Trivedi, Kosla Vepa. In some of their proposed theories and chronologies, while one can still see differences and from which one can adduce that while the task of fixing India's BCE chronology is far from complete, that task cannot be considered to have even been started, in objective earnest, if its foundational assumption, the 'sheet-anchor', the C of our proposed 'ABC of Indian chronology' is not seriously reevaluated, whilst its credibility remains enshrined in NCERT textbooks, publications of our listed outsiders as well as others such as E. Sreedharan, who presents Elphinstone, in spite of his explicit rejection of several Hindu sources, as having "formed a high opinion of early Hindu civilization" (Sreedharan 2004:401) and remarks the following, about his method:

"And now, without any difficulty, he fixed Chandragupta Maurya's accession towards the end of fourth century BCE. Then counting backwards and forwards from this one point, he fixed the approximate dates of the royal dynasties mentioned in the *Puranas* from the Mahabharata war to the Guptas in the fourth century AD. The chronological framework Elphinstone gave to ancient history is much the same as is generally accepted, though occasional modifications have been rendered by archeological discoveries of coins and inscriptions."

(Sreedharan 2004:407) (spelling and italics as in the original)

One wonders if it is to such Indians with outsider lens that M. Krishnamachariar almost prophetically refers, as "Professors of Indian History" in the following excerpt from his preface:

"In the hands of many Orientalists, India has lost (or has been cheated out of) a period of 10-12 centuries in its political and literary life, by the faulty Synchronism of Candragupta Maurya and Sandracottus of the Greek works and all that can be said against the "Anchor-sheet of Indian Chronology" has been said in this Introduction. In the case of those early European Orientalists, very eminent and respectable themselves, this thought of resemblance and historical synchronism was at least sincere; for it was very scanty material they could work upon. But for their successors in hierarchy who are mostly our "Professors of Indian History", that have given a longevity and garb of truth to it by repetition, there is to my mind no excuse of explanation, if at all it be a confession of neglect and recognition of India's glorious past in its entire truth."

(Krishnamachariar 1937:02) (spelling and italics as in the original)

With elaborate refutation and evidence provided in the Introduction of his work, he further remarks:

“Thus we see that Vincent Smith is the modern protagonist of this identity, the *Anchor-sheet of Indian chronology*. It is he that is quoted and followed without enquiry by our Indian professors of history and it is this chronology that is and *must be* taught in our schools. By sheer repetition by men in authority and in the works that emanate from them, the theory has become an axiom and rarely does any thought occur for any fair investigation. Day after day the assumed identity takes a firmer root and is considered a matter of senility or superstition to express a need for reconsideration. Hasty generalisations lead to prepossessions and it is rarely human to attempt to demonstrate their reality. It may appear therefore, a futile cry to seek to go behind these established opinions and to ask the reader to forebear and see for himself of the original bases of this theory, if after all, the narratives of the Purāṇas, so honestly planned, are ‘pious frauds.’ For the vindication of the morality of our sages and the merit of our traditional lore, a lore adored by millions of Hindu India, an attempt must be made, be the effect as it may.”

(Krishnamachariar 1937:lxxiv) (spelling and italics as in the original)

Nearly 80 years after the above statement appeared in print, and close to 70 years after India became independent, many minds of her children as well as her textbooks of history across all levels are still not freed from the clutches of colonial motives and narratives, whilst post-colonial scholars of Indology like Pollock seek to polarize her peoples using postmodern theories underpinned by motivated, colonial chronological conjectures.

### 3.4.2.2 Debunking the 223-year-old conjecture: Past Attempts and a Recent One

While M Krishnamachariar’s book was focused on Sanskrit literature and the sheet-anchor was dealt with primarily in its introduction, Mankad’s *Puranic Chronology* and Kota Venkatachelam’s *The Plot in Indian Chronology* deal exclusively with chronology from an insider’s point of view and while reaching different conclusions, they do a thorough *pūrva-pakṣa* of Maurya synchronism and talk in one voice about the invalidity of the Candragupta Maurya synchronism with Sandrokottos. Both Vepla and Roy refer to Kota Venkatachelam in their elaborations on this matter, however Dr. Roy, goes much

further. After reaching the same conclusion as Venkatachelam about the implausibility of Sandrokottos being Candragupta Maurya with his evidence, he critiques though, Venkatachelam's endorsement of Somayajulu's proposals (that *Devānāmpriya Priyadarśi* was not Aśoka Maurya but Aśokāditya and that Aśokāditya was another name of Samudragupta), on account of perceived lack of evidence. He then proceeds to first make compelling arguments himself to show "that the identification of *Devānāmpriya Priyadarśi* with Aśoka Maurya is not as sacrosanct as the modern historians would make us believe" (Roy 2016b) and then claims an original proposal, a result of his fourteen years research, that Kumāragupta-I is *Devānāmpriya Priyadarśi*. The sheer impact that Dr. Roy's proposal could have on changing the face of India's history as it is today, and the need for it to reach more scholars and citizens sensitive to India's real history, compels the authors to reproduce a part of his conclusion here:

"The identifications of Sandrokottos with Chandragupta-I and *Devānāmpriya Priyadarśi* with Kumāragupta-I, both of the Imperial Gupta dynasty, provide us the opportunity to reconstruct the history of India that better represents the evidence and is more faithful to the native traditions of India. In this chronological reconstruction we have a historical *Vikramāditya*, the greatest hero of ancient India, whose death in 57 BCE is commemorated by starting the *Vikrama* era in 57 BCE. We also have *Gautamiputra Śātakarṇi* crushing Śakas in 78 CE which is celebrated by starting the Śaka era in 78 CE. Currently foreigners are given credit for instituting both of these important Indian eras by historians whose hearts are full of love for invaders and who specialize in making a mockery of our traditions."

(Roy 2016c)

Whether or not Roy's proposal that Kumāragupta-I is a real breakthrough to solving the issue of the second sheet anchor, there is little doubt that the first 'sheet-anchor' of Indian history was from its genesis, a motivated conjecture and while published challenges to it have existed starting from at least the mid-nineteenth century (Troyer), through the twentieth century (M. Krishnamachariar (whose work was clearly known to Pollock), D. R. Mankad, Kota Venkatachelam), up until contemporary times (Kosla Vepa, Roy himself), the quantity and quality of objective, unmotivated scholarship in mainstream Indology, on a topic as crucial as Chronology of India, has evidently been disproportionately sparse.

Pollock could have been deemed only as guilty of the crime of not having addressed this issue as most of his innumerable predecessors, had he not proclaimed that staying true to insider sources was one of the key differentiating factors of his methods *vis-à-vis* that of his predecessors, specifically colonial, never mind whether British or their Indian ‘Sepoy’, methods<sup>9</sup>. Given that Pollock’s scholarship is not known to have included considerations of conclusions from truly modern fields such as computerized simulations of literary astronomical references, one questions if Pollock has at least studied the literary evidence from truly traditional sources such as the wide range of texts Pandit Venkatachelam suggests (Venkatachelam 1953:14).

## 4. Pollock’s Theories Proceeding from his Chronological Framework

Principal among Pollock’s assertions is that, at the onset of the first millennium C.E, Sanskrit transformed itself from being a sacred language to one of ‘literary and political expression.’ ‘Culture’, ‘power’, ‘pre-modernity’ and ‘cosmopolitan’ are the linchpins upon which his grand structures of the spread of Sanskrit as well as its domination are built. Pollock believes that ‘culture’ can be equated to its subset ‘language’ and a further subset, ‘literature’. Thus, for pre-modern India, *kāvya*, with its history, nature and role becomes the pivotal basis. Pollock says his magnum opus *The Language of Gods in the World of Men* could have carried an alternate sub-title “A Study of Big Structures, Large Processes, and Huge Comparisons,” (Pollock 2006:2) but his data set from which he leaps to imperious designs is so small, that surely his work could have been more aptly titled ‘A Study of Unsound Structures, Illogical Processes and Inaccurate Comparisons.’

### 4.1 Dismissal of the Oral Tradition and Emphasis on Writing

With *kāvya* becoming such a focal point, Pollock considers aspects of it and at times, in a manner that disconnects very significant sections from the native points of view. While admitting that Western literary theory does not have a place for native concepts of *pāramārthika*

and *vyāvahārika*, Pollock astonishingly remarks that “One thing that could not be *kāvya* is purely oral.” (Pollock 2006:3) Pollock boldly declares that *kāvya* is defined in terms of the written, “practically if not explicitly,” (Pollock 2006:4) not just for the modern readers, but even the pre-modern. But, there has been no distinction at all between the written and the oral in traditional sources, be it Bhāmaha or Daṇḍin or Jagannātha Paṇḍita and certainly not in the manner in which Pollock presents. For Pollock, “writing claims an authority oral cannot” (Pollock 2006:4) and this point is essential for his political lens to associate Sanskrit and its use with “privilege” and analyse the spread of the language. Pollock’s dating of *kāvya* to last centuries BCE sits hand in glove with his claim that writing is also seen for the first time during the same period and the latter played a crucial role in the development of the former – “In short, the world of *kāvya* was a world of literacy, and was so from the very first,” (Pollock 2006:87) “This phenomenology of the constitutive literacy of *kāvya* is entirely consistent with the historical argument in favor of placing the beginnings of *kāvya* after the technology of writing was disseminated in the subcontinent in the last centuries b.c.e.” (Pollock 2006:86)

With this manifest bias towards the written and casual and startling dismissal of centuries of the oral, Pollock sets the stage for his key points – “the invention of literacy and growth of manuscript culture” (Pollock 2006:4) at the start of the Common Era which led to a complex socio-political structure through which Sanskrit began its reign across the Indian sub-continent. Ascribing enormous importance to the moment of introduction of writing, in fact, so much so that he believes a new word needs to be coined for the process, Pollock generously introduces us to “literization.” (Pollock 2006:4)

The import of writing in Pollock’s thesis of Cosmopolis is also seen in its second major component – vernacularisation. Pollock believes that “We understand less of the history of culture in South Asia the less we understand of these dominant conceptions, including the essentialization of literature and the primacy granted to writing in the constitution of literature,” (Pollock 2006:5). Thus, writing and consequently, the new forms of Sanskrit literature as well as socio-political transformations it heralded during the beginning of CE, set the norm for the commencement of literature in the vernacular languages as well. But, if one were to momentarily admit his supposition, the following statement, in light of the monumental

significance of the historical dating of Candragupta Maurya, at once confutes his chronological placement of the introduction of writing and *kāvya* in India –

“Our ability to trace the lineaments of the expansion of Sanskrit’s social and discursive domain, and to understand something of the new cultural political order this generated, takes on an altogether different degree of historical precision once we enter the age of writing. This commenced around the middle of the third century b.c.e. with the records issued by Aśoka, the third overlord of the Maurya dynasty (320–150 b.c.e.). This has long been known. An emerging scholarly consensus, however, now regards the Brahmi syllabary, the first South Asian writing system (and the parent script for almost every other writing system in southern Asia), as the deliberate creation of Aśoka’s chancery for the promulgation of his edicts on moral governance (in both the epigraphical idea itself and some of its formulaic language Aśoka was imitating Achaemenid practices)”

(Pollock 2006:59)

The waves from the mammoth, pervasive ramifications of this single colonial dating artifact of Maurya Candragupta seems to never ebb.

## 4.2. Invention of *Kāvya*

Pollock, at the very outset of *The Language of Gods in the World of Men* clearly sets out that his aim is to study the culture-power practices of Sanskrit without agonizing over the details of whether the practices indeed form the right set of questions to explore. He feels the use of *saṃskṛti* is itself unattested in pre-modern times and prefers to use Cosmopolis, even though the latter may not be entirely suitable to describe the set of conditions he considers, and counter-examples can indeed be found to contest his claims. In the process of building this timeline for the invention of *kāvya* and lay the basis for the construct of Cosmopolis, Pollock dates crucial milestones in Indian literary and socio-political history in a manner which is far removed from traditional chronology and expounds the conditions and implications of his timeline. Some of these key milestones are below.

### 4.2.1 Dating of *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*

In setting the tone for the dramatic nature of the formation of the Cosmopolis, Pollock believes that “social monopolization and discursive ritualization” (Pollock 2006:51) were the main features of

the language and the community which it represented in the centuries of BCE. Pollock cites Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* as being the authoritative text on the matter and places it in the last centuries (2 or 3) BCE. He says the work was influenced by the spread of Buddhism and hints at a causal link between the two –

“There is good reason to believe that the reflexivity, even anxiety, about Vedic authority evinced in the work, of which the restriction on access to the corpus and its language is only one (if a decisive) component, would have been unthinkable in the absence of the broad religious and social critique that Buddhism had enunciated in the preceding two centuries and the ‘disenchantment of the world’ that critique had signaled. But if the reflexivity of the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* was new, relatively speaking, the restrictions it promulgates were not,”

(Pollock 2006:40)

Pollock, from the entire discourse chooses to focus primarily on the *Adhikāra* chapter of *Pūrvamīmāṃsa* and despite its rather unremarkable position in the work, is convinced the chapter is indicative of the social conditions of the day. Pollock believes that Sanskrit was confined in its usage only for sacred purposes and hence, restrictions on who could use it were built into the language. He thus reduces the conditions that existed for thousands of years before CE to one where the Vedic circle alone exercised monopoly over the use of Sanskrit for ritualistic purposes. Curiously, Pollock admits that the conditions that existed may have been less rigid, and acknowledges the same from Jaimini's work (Pollock 2006:41).

But, it is only in briefly considering alternate pictures and dismissing them that he betrays his motives. The chronological placing of Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* this way, along with Buddha himself during the 5 century BCE is preeminent for Pollock's premise of Buddhism being the influential factor to which the Vedic society was necessitated to provide a response.

Positioning Buddhism as the silver bullet that saved the ancient Indian from the clutches of Vedic oppression and creating a dichotomy between the two is a recurrent theme of Pollock's oeuvre,

“The most important of them for our purposes here are embodied in the language theory and practices of early Buddhism, though these were in fact only part of a larger process, a transvaluation of values, that occurred in the last centuries before the Common Era. This stood in

radical opposition to the naturalism of the *vaidika* thought world. The new conventionalism came to have application not only to individual psychology but to the social world at large and, more important in the present context, to language. In light of these broad tendencies, there was every reason for Buddhism to reject Sanskrit in the course of its confrontation with the social-religious practices for which Sanskrit was the principal vehicle,”

(Pollock 2006:51)

After having repeatedly highlighted the challenge and radical departure the rise of Buddhism posed to the *vaidika* world, Pollock expresses wonder that by the turn of the millennium, Buddhists have abandoned their use of Pāli and Prakrit exclusively and resorted to Sanskrit,

“The fact that many Buddhist communities in the north of the subcontinent abandoned their long-standing language pluralism in favor of Sanskrit, the language they had rejected for centuries, therefore awaits better explanations.”

(Pollock 2006:59)

He does not give any credence to the possibility that the two *dharma* based faiths, over the course of centuries of simultaneous existence, could have seen a detente and tempering of exchanges and is in fact, dismissive of more reasonable and guileless accounts of history and mutual influence between the two. Especially given the challenge to the colonial Indological dating of the Mauryan empire, Pollock’s thesis stands on fragile ground:

“The standard account of Sanskrit cultural-political history purports to explain these developments by postulating a “resurgence of Brahmanism” leading to a “reassertion” or “revival” of Sanskrit as the language of literature and administration after the Maurya period. The more plausible interpretation is that a new cultural-political formation, a Sanskrit cosmopolitan formation, was on the point of being invented. The textbook narrative posits the resurgence of a community we have no reason to believe was in need of resurgence; it assumes a reassertion at the expense of Buddhism, which in fact hardly suffered a subsequent decline (quite the contrary, it expanded markedly); it asks us to believe in the revival of cultural forms that cannot be shown to have preexisted in the first place.”

(Pollock 2006:74)

One wonders at the motives behind such purposeful undervaluing of alternate, plausible accounts.

#### 4.2.2: Pollock's Dating of Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and its Implications

Pollock in his *The Language of Gods in the World of Men* repeatedly paints a picture of Sanskrit having no other primary function apart from the sacerdotal in BCE and that the language spread rapidly once it was freed from this role –

“Once Sanskrit emerged from the sacerdotal environment to which it was originally confined, it spread with breathtaking rapidity across southern Asia.”

(Pollock 2006:14)

but, during the last two centuries of BCE and at the dawn of the new millennium, Sanskrit acquired a “new sociology and politicization of the language,” (Pollock 2006:12) even as Pollock attributes a role to the “western Asian and central Asian peoples” (Pollock 2006:12) while referring to the Śakas. This is representative of his typical, biased attribution of social change and innovation to the good outsider, be it the Śakas or the Greeks. Pollock confidently refers to *kāvya* as an invention of the period of the commencement of the Cosmopolitan era, along with its subset *praśasti* and together, they drove forward the Cosmopolis construct.

Highlighting the features of *kāvya* and how different it was from every literary form prior to it, Pollock astonishingly states that “*kāvya* was almost certainly composed and circulated (though not typically experienced) in writing” (Pollock 2006:13), in spite of there being no evidence to this statement and that it was “a new phenomenon in Indian cultural history when it first appeared a little before the beginning of the Common Era” (Pollock 2006:13). Pollock then makes a second startling statement regarding the dating of the first poem Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, placing its creation in the first two centuries before the advent of the CE

“In reflexively framing its own orality in a way that would be impossible in a preliterate world, and in doing so around the narrative of human response to problems of a human scale, the *Rāmāyaṇa* account captures some central features of the new expressive form that was *kāvya*.”

(Pollock 2006:13)

His dating of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* is especially crucial, for it reinforces his idea that the social order was primed for change -

"The *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*, which both literary tradition and the text itself regard as the first Sanskrit *kāvya*, represented an entirely new genre in Indian literary history, and its reflexive understanding of the social and discursive peculiarities of the language it employed became possible only at a moment that marked the beginning of a new cultural order."

(Pollock 2006:45)

Pollock withal maintains that Sanskrit never fulfilled a role of being used for everyday communication by citing that there has been no evidence to the contrary -

"Sanskrit probably never functioned as an everyday medium of communication anywhere in the cosmopolis—not in South Asia itself, let alone Southeast Asia—nor was it ever used (except among the literati) as a bridge- or link- or trade language like other cosmopolitan codes such as Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Chinese."

(Pollock 2006:14)

Given this ill-founded and outrageous assumption of Sanskrit's role and use, the dating of *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* bears greater significance when Pollock says the following:

"It is significant that, with the exception of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, no remains of a nonsacral, this-worldly Sanskrit are extant from the early epoch of literacy (from the third century b.c.e to, say, the first century c.e.), when, as some believe, Sanskrit was still supposed to have been an everyday idiom, whereas vast amounts of such Sanskrit are available from the later period when Sanskrit 'had ceased to be truly a current language.'"

(Pollock 2006:48)

This is indeed dubious methodology by the author, for there is no evidence for his claims regarding the conditions that existed in the last millennium BCE, of Sanskrit being restricted to ritualistic practices alone, with its use confined to the Vedic practitioners and the social conditions representing the same. Pollock paints a picture of contrast for the use of Sanskrit in BCE and in the first millennium CE, with the former being one of strict use of the language for sacerdotal alone (no evidence cited for these conditions), and against this background, he aims to show that the language became one used for *kāvya* and to capture emotional content.

Moreover, with the traditionalist's dating of *Rāmāyaṇa*, it becomes manifestly clear that *kāvya* was not the invention of the CE but a form of literature that has existed for centuries prior! And, as Pollock himself maintains, *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* represents the commencement of a genre that marked one of the greatest achievements of the Sanskrit language. But, with the timeline in which the insider places *Rāmāyaṇa*, Pollock's premise of it characterizing the social order and period of innovation in the last centuries of BCE reduces to disannulled conjectures. Against the chronological backdrop of *Rāmāyaṇa*, Pollock's repeated dinning of the farcical idea of *kāvya* being invented at the turn of the CE and an entire civilization consumed with no other goals except ritualistic ones seems highly suspect and puerile. *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* has been rightly hailed as one of the greatest epics of our culture, simultaneously being a representation of the Indian ethical mind and a touchstone for *kāvya* until the modern day. Pollock's discordant dating of the epic and hence, the very commencement of *kāvya*, thus strikes oppugnant notes with the insider accounts.

Having set aside analytical terms from the tradition itself such as *sāṃskṛti*, Pollock's unsubstantiated statements of associating *kāvya* exclusively with the written and his placing its invention close to the start of CE feels more a deliberate attempt at legitimizing his Sanskrit Cosmopolis theory rather than the latter idea being driven by facts. Pollock further charges Sanskrit grammar to be an instrument of power of the language, by insisting that "a vision of grammatical and political correctness—where care of language and care of political community were mutually constitutive—was basic to the cosmopolitan ethos from the very beginning" (Pollock 2006:15). "Sanskrit philology was a social form as well as a conceptual form, and it was inextricably tied to the practices of power." (Pollock 2006:15).

#### 4.2.3: Pollock's Dating of Pāṇini, Patañjali and its Implications

Pollock places the landmark *Aṣṭādhyāyi* of Pāṇini around 3 or 4 century BCE, and this only reinforces his picture of a society where grammar was a tool to preserve the purity of the language and restrict those who could participate in its use. Pollock also places Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* into the first centuries of CE and highlights its use for the sacred:

"In the *Aṣṭādhyāyi*, this sacerdotal function characterizes both registers of the language: on the one hand, the idiom actually used for the

Vedic texts themselves, what Pāṇini calls chandan, verse, or better, “the Verse”; on the other, the rigorously normative idiolect restricted to (Vedic) pedagogical environments, which he calls *bhāṣa*, speech. That both had largely sacral associations as late as the beginning of the Common Era is shown in Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya*, the *Great Commentary* on Pāṇini’s grammar.”

(Pollock 2006:46)

Pollock holds even the *Mahābhāṣya* to the same line of thinking, in underscoring the role it played to ensure the use of the language remained primarily for ritualistic and religious purposes

“Not all of these reasons may be entirely clear to us, but there can be little doubt that for Patañjali, principal heir and final arbiter of the *vaidika* grammatical tradition, the purposes of Sanskrit language analysis were more or less exclusively tied to sacred performance and to the pedagogical practices, both social and discursive, pertaining to knowledge of the sacred.”

(Pollock 2006:47)

Pollock sets Kātyāyana’s time to be in between that of Pāṇini and Patañjali.

As is seen from some traditional sources, Pollock’s dates of these three crucial figures do not concur with the traditional accounts. It’s vitally important for Pollock to date these landmark texts and luminaries close to the beginning of CE for it highlights the divergence the socio-political conditions of the period are set to experience, with the ‘invention of *kāvya*’ in the close to the first millennium of CE. Given Pollock’s constant reiteration of Sanskrit being confined to liturgical purposes alone for millennia, he builds a case for *vyākaraṇa*, being a limb of the *Veda*, to be an instrument that enforced and perpetuated the exclusive monopolization of Sanskrit. It is bemusing indeed, even a tad absurd, that a language and its grammar can possess the power to exercise such domination over every strata of the socio-political conditions of a culture for millennia and one feels perhaps Pollock’s scrutiny of the very composition of the term *Saṁskṛtam* and *devabhāṣā* crosses over into the realm of incredulity.

#### **4.2.4. *Kāvya, Prasasti and Cosmopolis***

Having painted a picture where the socio-political conditions have been dominated for centuries by ritualization and monopolization, Pollock maintains that it was due to the “innovative force” provided by

the outsider i.e. the Śakas, whom he places during the period 100 BCE - 400 CE, that the breach against the authoritarian old order was made. In quintessential style, Pollock believes that Sanskrit was appropriated by the Śakas — initiated by Rudradāman — for public display of political power, leading to the creation of the Indian panegyric *praśasti* and literature itself — “What had now begun, however, was not only *praśasti* but also the genus of which that discourse is a species. In other words, what began when Sanskrit escaped the domain of the sacred was literature,” (Pollock 2006:74). With this new mantle, Sanskrit descended and travelled freely in the world of men, without being tied down to a region or liturgical purpose alone.

Attributing any new impetus or socially liberating role to forces outside the Vedic order is a chief hallmark of Sheldon Pollock's work and his bias. Be it Buddhism in the socio-religious domain or the Śakas in the socio-political world, he portrays an image of Sanskrit being freed from the clutches of the dominating, oppressive traditional order. In this portrayal, written works and *kāvya* and *praśasti* and liberating Buddhist ideals become *ne plus ultra* while oral works and grammar and Vedic order get rendered as organs of hegemony. And Pollock even points to a possible relationship and similarities between the appropriation of Sanskrit by the Śakas and the Buddhists (Pollock 2006:72).

Chronologically, having Buddhist influence contemporaneous with the Śakas leads his premise of the conditions of the day set for a mammoth change:

“Earlier scholars may have been right to argue that the new overlords only consecrated the vogue of literary Sanskrit and did not create it, though the evidence to prove this conclusively does not exist. A caution has been raised against adopting any mechanistic model and in favor of viewing the factor of political change as mere concomitance (and, we are rightly warned, “concomitance is not causality”), yet the synchrony of the two events is striking, and it may ultimately prove correct to locate in the Śaka practices a truly ‘innovating force.’”

(Pollock 2006:72)

But, Pollock not only throws caution to the wind but goes ahead in his quest to find a grand role for Sanskrit, if only based on grander and one must add ludicrous assumptions.

Pollock is dismissive of accounts that dispute his thesis –

“The standard account Sanskrit cultural-political history purports to explain these developments by postulating a “resurgence of Brahmanism” leading to a “reassertion” or “revival” of Sanskrit as the language of literature and administration after the Maurya period. The more plausible interpretation is that a new cultural-political formation, a Sanskrit cosmopolitan formation, was on the point of being invented. The textbook narrative posits the resurgence of a community we have no reason to believe was in need of resurgence; it assumes a reassertion at the expense of Buddhism, which in fact hardly suffered a subsequent decline (quite the contrary, it expanded markedly); it asks us to believe in the revival of cultural forms that cannot be shown to have preexisted in the first place. Sanskrit of the kind under discussion had not died; rather, it had not yet been born, at least not for the uses to which it was about to be put—*laukika*, or this-worldly, uses, such as political discourse, beyond the domain of the liturgy and its sacral auxiliaries.”

(Pollock 2006:74)

His rejection of the more plausible standard account feels labored, given his penchant for downplaying any transformative causes from within the *dharma* based social system. A dynamic social order, which innovated and produced works, be it in literature or the sciences, finds no place or even mere consideration in Pollock’s theorization. Chronologically, if one were to admit native sources and data, one sees an absence of a design that could lead to Pollock’s account. The dating of *kāvya* itself, with the timeline of *Rāmāyaṇa*, places the impact of its creation in an asynchronous manner with respect to Pollock’s “moment of rupture” (Pollock 2006:73). One feels that the traditional dating of Buddha and rise and decline of Buddhism lends itself more reasonably to not only the enormous positive influence as well as the mutual acceptance it shared with *sanātana dharma*-based beliefs but also, the eventual embracing of Sanskrit itself by Buddhist practitioners. Pollock’s argument for Buddhism “appropriating” Sanskrit words including *dharma* and *sūtra* and the eventual rejection of Prakrit for the new, transformed, liberated Sanskrit during the start of CE wears the colours of convoluted and fanciful theorization more than those of equitable justification.

If the creation of *praśasti*, whose style is defined by Pollock as “the standard *praśasti* style: the fixing of genealogical succession, the catalogue of kingly traits of the dynasty, and a eulogy of the ruling lord,” (Pollock 2006:119) marks the heralding of the cosmopolitan order of Sanskrit, Pollock’s characterization of the new features of the

language are dramatic. With his unconvincing dismissal of standard theories and use of contestable chronological data to build a case, he declares:

“Many uncertainties continue to obscure our insight into the origins of the Sanskrit cultural-political formation, the agents involved, and their social goals. But at least the fact that this formation *did* begin should now be beyond dispute.”

(Pollock 2006:74)

In tracing the attributes of this momentous formation, Pollock focuses on the relationship between *kāvya* and *rājya*, with *praśasti* being representative of power and a “new politics of culture and culture of politics” (Pollock 2006:73). The first of these attributes is the role of Sanskrit in the new linguistic space it entered. Pollock believes that Sanskrit assumed a position unique from the regional languages, which were more locally tied, as against the former –

“Considered carefully, these interactions reveal much about both the general character of the cultural political identity of the cosmopolitan polity and the particular kind of tasks that Sanskrit—and never the vernacular—was empowered to execute, precisely as envisioned by the theory of literary language.”

(Pollock 2006:115)

The interaction between Sanskrit and regional languages assumes a dichotomous role in Pollock’s work, with the latter increasingly giving rise to literature and the former restricted to courtly use and symbolizing power –

“Just this division of labor was to be replicated with respect to the languages of Place: Sanskrit would monopolize all ideational and expressive functions in inscriptional and other written discourse while assigning to regional languages the quotidian status and function they had in everyday life,”

(Pollock 2006:118)

Pollock characterizes this as complex interaction between the two sets which led to increasing vernacularisation in the second millennium of CE, giving him the platform to introduce parallels with European vernacularisation as well.

Secondly, Pollock states that, as “the language of royal encomium,” (Pollock 2006:115) Sanskrit had clear objectives and reduces its

aesthesia to one of politically motivated expression. One wonders at this bizarre characterization as even a casual survey of works produced in the language over the past two thousand years shows not only the peaks they aimed and reached but the very range has been among the broadest! What is more remarkable than Pollock's cosmopolitan thesis is his method of only considering instances that purportedly defend his projections. One finds it hard to reckon such methodology when what is at stake with his conjectures is the very role and nature of Sanskrit over many centuries –

“It is not necessary, even were it possible, to provide a complete survey of the institutionalization of the Sanskrit political idiom for the vast space-time of the cosmopolis. Concentrating on a few exemplary cases will suffice to suggest the historical rhythm and spatial extent of the dissemination of Sanskrit, as well as the specific functions Sanskrit executed to the exclusion of other available codes.”

(Pollock 2006:115)

And even when one finds examples readily to disprove his thesis, Pollock is quick to dismiss them by focusing on selective parts of the case. Illustrating through the choice of language in the courts of Ikṣvāku and Vākātaka rulers, Pollock highlights how Prakrit and Sanskrit interacted with each other in a manner that justifies his theorization but when it comes to the case of Pallavas, while Pollock admits that indeed there is evidence for Sanskrit being used as a communicative medium for everyday life during their rule, there is no example of the regional languages being employed in a role similar to that of *praśasti* –

“While examples exist in earlier Pallava records of Sanskrit being used to document the everyday world—a function that would become increasingly rare wherever it could be relegated to the vernacular—none exists where the everyday language is allowed to do the work of Sanskrit in a *praśasti*: the literary work of interpreting and supplementing reality and revealing it in its truth.”

(Pollock 2006:122)

If one were to accept *selection bias and proof by example* as chief characteristics of Pollock's modus operandi, certainly one sees the natural emergence and defense of the Cosmopolis construct of Sanskrit.

Pollock's use of Cosmopolis to describe the transformation of Sanskrit is peculiar, as he attributes to a language, a uniquely chosen subset of culture, features and designs that are coloured with the lens of power. On the other hand, there have been writers from the insiders' part of the spectrum who have truly brought out the import of the word Cosmopolis in a manner that not only ascribes proper place to the lenses of power and rule, and yet, refrained from projecting outré intentions to a language! D. R. Mankad characterizes Samudragupta's rule as being one where the ruler's outlook helped create a "cosmopolitan and vigorously practical religion" (Mankad 1951:279), while comparing the roles of Maurya Ásoka and Samudragupta in propagating their respective beliefs. Understanding the evolution of socio-political and cultural conditions from this basis lends itself naturally to an understanding of how Sanskrit established its presence across the sub-continent as against harping on outlandish and even suspect constructs.

## 5. Conclusion

Among Pollock's extensive scholarship, characterized at times by Daedalian writing, one deciphers not only distinctive patterns of analysis but also the inclination towards asking the most ambitious of questions related to the domain. In the process of answering them, Pollock's assumptions and methodology reveal his bias — some, his own and some, inherited from his colonial predecessors — as well as his proclivity to define the pre-modern conditions of India in a manner that lets him make grand comparisons that adroitly pit one Indological system against another. Thus, comparison is a key trait of Pollock's analytical approach and as he himself states in *Comparison Without Hegemony*, the basis of comparison is chronology -

"Not only should chronology be central to comparative intellectual-historical practice—which is not the same thing as comparative philosophy—but no given model of intellection can be held to be universal. Observing this limit, I argue below, is critical if comparativism is to be saved from itself. It is vitally important, thus, that the synchronicity grounding comparative intellectual history contain no necessary content of this or any other sort."

(Pollock 2010:10)

With this centrality accorded to chronological data, it becomes all the more imperative to ensure one is on firm ground before positioning one's theories, especially those that aim to build grand structures. Lamentably, Pollock's chronology of key Indological events is a small, spartan bag comprising of inherited assumptions and convenient placements of key data, perhaps to create a synchronicity where none naturally exists, and is woefully short of even a semblance of a stable foundation. Be it his dating of the invention of *kāvya* or the composition of *Rāmāyaṇa* or key figures such as Buddha Gautama and even Pāṇini, there is little uncontested ground for Pollock to make sweeping generalisations regarding fundamental, formative elements of Indian civilisation and culture. It is not the façade wearing Sanskrit lover who bears the burden of the weight of these vexing and exasperating theories but the native who faces the reality of being on the side which paid the highest possible price to the plunderers for political freedom.

Recognizing the criticality of chronological data to Pollock's theorisation, we have in the course of this paper aimed to address questions including "Does tradition disagree with some of the dates he assigns? Which ones and with what evidence or logic do traditional scholars disagree with SP? Are there other examples in his work that show bias?" as well as identify main inconsistencies in Pollock's data by firstly, reconstructing his chronology and checking them for the same; secondly, comparing his data with that from the outsider and insider realms; and thirdly, studying Pollock's theories proceeding from his chronology which address larger concerns, with potentially greater consequences for his models and conclusions. While the authors have limited their focus to BCE part of chronology and therein identifying potentially the most important chronological epochs – the ABC of Indian chronology – Tables 1 and 2 are not limited to BCE, in order to enable ease of reference for any future *pūrva-pakṣa* that chooses to focus on the CE portions of Pollock's work. We have addressed in the paper at several levels the chronological placement and use of key texts over the last four centuries – by examining the very basis of colonial Indology, how texts get interpreted in terms of neo orientalist tools of power and culture, especially in the works of Pollock. We have not addressed vernacular literary texts in as much detail as we would have liked, as we believe it deserves a more detailed analysis and is given a basis in the present paper.

In the process of working on this paper, what clearly stood out from the score and deeply impacted us authors are the works of several native voices that have, with clarity and depth and exigency repeatedly tried to ensure the truth survived, in spite of the legion of assaults brought down upon them. The willful propagation of fallacious chronological data has, as shown in this paper, been the keystone for and symbolic of, the perpetuation of imperialistic design. Modern/ pre-modern, colonial/postcolonial theories of Indology will truly be insightful only when the very basis of these paradigms is carefully re-examined, the age old, deeply entrenched bias admitted, and the foundation rewritten without the utilitarian and detestable intentions of the coloniser or his native sepoy. And that process can begin to be effective only when the indigene is given, or he takes, his rightful place at the table, for it is verily his most deep-rooted, cherished creations and canons that have been set on the balance for judgment.

## Appendix A – Sheldon Pollock's Chronology Reconstructed from His Scholarship

Table 1 (continued)

S No.	Epoch		Source
	Period (CE)	Detail	
70	900 – 1200	Cōlas	Pollock 2006:597
71	900 – 1300	Yādavas of Dévagiri	Pollock 2006:597
72	900 – 1400	Angkor	Pollock 2006:597
73	960 – 1200	Kalyāṇa Cālukyas	Pollock 2006:597
74	1000 – 1300	Caulukyas ( <i>sic</i> ) of Gujarat	Pollock 2006:597
75	1000 – 1300	Hoysalas	Pollock 2006:597

76	1011 – 1055	King Bhoja	Pollock 2006:105
77	1100 – 1400	Kākatiyas	Pollock 2006:597
78	Early 12th century	Serpentine Scimitar of King Udayāditya	Pollock 2006:Cover
79	12th century	Vāgbhaṭa	Pollock 2006:112
80	1340 – 1565	Vijayanagara	Pollock 2006:597

**Table 2: Sheldon Pollock's Chronology of texts reconstructed from Pollock's book *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics***

S No.	Dating (CE)	Transliterated Sanskrit Name	Author (as per Pollock)	Pollock's English Name
1	300	<i>Nātya-śāstra</i>	Bharata	Treatise on Drama
2	650	<i>Kāvyālaṅkāra</i>	Bhāmaha	Ornament of Poetry
3	700	<i>Kāvyādarśa</i>	Dāṇḍin	Looking Glass of Poetry
4	800	<i>Kāvyālaṅkāra-sāra-saṅgraha</i>	Udbhaṭa	Essential Compendium of the Ornament of Poetry
5	825	<i>Nātya-śāstra-vyākhyā</i>	Bhaṭṭa Lollāṭa	Commentary on the Treatise on Drama
6	850	<i>Kāvyālaṅkāra</i>	Rudraṭa	Ornament of Poetry

7	859	<i>Nātya-śāstra-vyākhyā</i>	Śrī Śaṅkuka	Commentary on the Treatise on Drama
8	875	<i>Dhvanyāloka</i>	Ānandavar-dhana	Light on Implicature
9	900	<i>Laghu-vṛtti</i>	Pratihārendu-rāja	Brief Elucidation
10	900	<i>Nātya-śāstra-vyākhyā</i>	Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka	Commentary on the Treatise on Drama
11	900	<i>Hṛdaya-darpaṇa</i>	Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka	Mirror of the Heart
12	950	<i>Śrutānupālinī</i>	Vādījaṅghāla	Guarding the Tradition
13	950	<i>Ratna-śrī</i>	Ratnaśrījñāna	Ratna's Glory
14	975	<i>Kāvya-nirṇaya</i>	Dhanika	Analysis of Literature
15	975	<i>Kāvya-kautuka</i>	Bhaṭṭa Tota	Literary Investigations
16	975	<i>Avaloka</i>	Dhanika	Observations
17	975	<i>Daśarūpaka</i>	Dhanañjaya	The Ten Dramatic Forms
18	975	<i>Vakrokti-jīvita</i>	Kuntaka	The Vital Force of Literary Language
19	990	<i>Dhvanyāloka-locana</i>	Abhinavagupta	The Eye for Light on Implicature
20	1000	<i>Abhinava-bhāratī</i>	Abhinavagupta	The New Dramatic Art
21	1025	<i>Vyakti-viveka</i>	Mahima Bhaṭṭa	Analysis of "Manifestation"

22	1025	<i>Sarasvatī- kāñṭhābharana</i>	Bhoja	Necklace for the Goddess of Language
23	1050	<i>Śrīgāra- prakāśa</i>	Bhoja	Light on Pas- sion
24	1050	<i>Kāvya- prakāśa</i>	Mammaṭa	Light on Po- etry
25	1068	<i>Tippaṇī</i>	Nāmisādhu	Notes
26	1100	<i>Vivṛti</i>	Tilaka	Exegesis
27	1150	<i>Alanikāra- sarvasva</i>	Rājānaka Ruyyaka	Compendium of Tropes
28	1150	<i>Kāvyañuśāsana</i>	Hemacandra	Manual of Po- etry
29	1150	<i>Kāvya- prakāśa- saṅketa</i>	Ruyyaka	The Short Explanation of Light on Poetry
30	1200	<i>Rasa-kalikā</i>	Rudrabhaṭṭa	Bud of Rasa
31	1200	<i>Bhāva- prakāśana</i>	Śāradātanaya	Light on Emo- tion
32	1200	<i>Nātya- darpaṇa</i>	Rāmacandra and Guṇacan- dra	Mirror of Drama
33	1215	<i>Rasika- sañjīvinī</i>	Arjunavarma- deva	Elixir for the Rasika
34	1225	<i>Saṅgīta- ratnākara</i>	Śāringadeva	Jewel Mine of Symphony
35	1300	<i>Kaivalya- dīpikā</i>	Hemādri	Lamp for Transcen- dence
36	1300	<i>Bhāgavata- muktāphala</i>	Vopadeva	Pearls of the Bhāgavata
37	1300	<i>Ekāvalī</i>	Vidyādhara	The Single Strand

38	1320	<i>Pratāpa-rudra-yaśo-bhūṣaṇa</i>	Vidyānātha	Ornament of the Fame of King Prataparudra
39	1350	<i>Sāhitya-darpana</i>	Viśvanātha	Mirror of Literary Art
40	1385	<i>Rasārṇava-sudhākara</i>	Singabhūpāla	The Moon on the Rasa Ocean
41	1400	<i>Taralā</i>	Mallinātha	The Central Gem
42	1430	<i>Ratnāpana</i>	Kumārasvāmin	The Jewel Store
43	1500	<i>Rasa-taraṅgiṇī</i>	Bhānudatta	The River of Rasa
44	1540	<i>Bhakti-rasāmrta-sindhu</i>	Rūpa Gosvāmin	Ambrosial River of the Rasa of Devotion
45	1541	<i>Durgama-saṅgamāṇī</i>	Jīva Gosvāmin	Passage Through the Impassable
46	1550	<i>Alaṅkāra-kaustubha</i>	Kavikarṇapūra	Divine Jewel of Ornamentation
47	1550	<i>Prīti-sandarbha</i>	Jīva Gosvāmin	Treatise on Divine Love
48	1592	<i>Sāhitya-sudhā-sindhu</i>	Viśvanātha-deva	The Nectar Ocean of Literary Art
49	1650	<i>Rasa-gaṅgādhara</i>	Jagannātha Paṇḍitarāja	Bearer of the Ganges of Rasa
50	1650	<i>Kāvya-darpana</i>	Rājacūḍāmaṇi Dīkṣita	Mirror of Poetry

51	Undated	<i>Laghu-ṭīkā</i>	Bhaṭṭa Nr̥siṁha	Brief Annotation
52	Undated	<i>Dīpikā</i>	Bahūrūpa Miśra	The Lamp

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Refer Gould (2008).

<sup>2</sup> <https://swadeshiindology.com/si-2/position-papers/>

<sup>3</sup> The disproportionate (in relation to the volume of the dates used in his scholarship) and mostly unreference data in Appendix B.1 (Pollock:2006; 597) is clearly the solitary exception.

<sup>4</sup> Unless specified otherwise, Outsiders and Insiders used throughout this paper are in the sense seen in Malhotra, Rajiv (2016). *Insiders versus Outsiders: Who speaks for our heritage?* <https://battleforsanskrit.com/insiders-versus-outsiders/>

<sup>5</sup> Refer Malhotra, Rajiv (2014) *Indra's Net*, Chapter Conclusion: The 'Poison Pill' for Protection of Hinduism.

<sup>6</sup>Refer Pollock (2003:84), Footnote 9.

<sup>7</sup> Refer <https://drive.google.com/file/d/13PTG4h9XSxFEFRzQBVC20UndCYM7v8hH/view>

<sup>8</sup> Refer in particular to:

- 1) Mankad (1951) Part III, Chapter I: Chandragupta Maurya and the Greek evidence; Chapter II: The Greek evidence and the Guptas; Chapter III: The Priyadasi Inscriptions; Chapter IV: The Gupta Era
- 2) Venkatachelam, Kota (1953) Chapter II: 4. Modern Indian Historical Research, 5. Puranic Chronology as given by Sir William Jones, 6. Puranic History as understood by Sir William Jones, 8. Conjecture of Sir William Jones, 10. Concocted chronology of Jones, 12. Misrepresentation of Jones; Chapter IV: 20. Foundation of the False History of Bharat, 21. Max-Muller's Arbitrary and False conclusion; Chapter V: 35. Tampering with the verses by Partiger, 36. Historical literature of India (Stein, Wilson, Col. Tod); Chapter VIII:

48. Inscriptions, 49. Misrepresentation of Kharavela's inscription; Appendix III: Important Dates in Indian History; Appendix: IV: Some Major errors in Modern Indian History

3) Raja Ram Mohan Roy (2015) Chapter 5: Sandrokottos vs. Sandrokottos

<sup>9</sup> See Narayana Sastry (1916) Chapter 1 - Method of Investigation, for a brief appraisal on prevailing colonial methods.

***Editor's Note:*** The paper was received in 2016, selected for presentation in the first Swadeshi Indology Conference. Further, the order in which the names appear as the authors of the paper, does not indicate seniority or hierarchy of any kind between the authors.

# Chapter 2

## Astronomy and Epic Chronology

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### Pollock’s Claim for the Chronology of *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*

On the chronology of the *Mahābhārata*, Pollock writes:

Everything about the *Mahābhārata*, from its history as a text to the history of its impact on South Asian culture, is huge and complex. **There is little hard evidence about the origins of the work** in its monumental form (eighteen books, and something on the order of a hundred thousand verses according to its own calculation). Even a cursory analysis of the manuscript data available in the critical edition reveals that the majority of the books were transmitted not orally but in reasonably stable form based on written archetypes. **These cannot have come into being much before the beginning of the Common Era and are very likely of a much later date.**

(Pollock 2006a: 224) (*emphasis ours*)

On the chronology of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Pollock writes:

“No convincing evidence has been offered for a pre-Ashokan date of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in its monumental form (the common denominator of all our

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<sup>\*</sup>pp. 77–104. In: Kannan, K. S. and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism* Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

manuscripts), let alone a date before the Buddha (c. 400 B.C.E.). The attributions of individual verses, or whole *kāvyas*, to “Pāṇini,” whose own date is largely conjectural (convention puts him in the mid-fourth century B.C.E.), are late and without a shred of reliability.”

(Pollock 2006a: 81)

In effect, he considers timing of 200 BCE through 400 CE for the first text of *Mahābhārata* and about 150 BCE for the first text of *Rāmāyaṇa*.

## How does Pollock Arrive at his Chronology Claims?

His claim for the above chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is based on pleading for his claims, in a circular fashion, by alluding to absence of evidence for existence of manuscripts or inscriptions, prior to his claimed time (200 BCE through 400 CE), for the writing of these epics.

Pollock’s entire approach to chronology, not just the chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* but also any instance of ancient Indian chronology, is through a confusing combination of ‘irrelevancies’, absence of evidence coupled with alleged consensus of Indologists, in turn supported by lack of evidence.

Here are a few illustrations of how Pollock arrives at his claims for the timing of various things Indian and how he connects them, without any logical relevance, to his claims for the dating of Indian epics.

### 1. Irrelevancies; Absence of Evidence = Evidence of Absence

Pollock writes:

“Patañjali ... appears to have lived at a moment of transition in intellectual history when the tradition of systematic study of grammar had somehow been disrupted...Patañjali goes on to cite a number of Vedic passages that identify additional functions of grammatical knowledge. These include the ability to distinguish between those who employ correct language forms and the “antigods” (*asura*) with their deviant usage; avoiding the potentially fatal consequences of the improper use of a word; acquisition of true learning, which consists in understanding

and not just reproducing..."

(Pollock 2006a: 46-47)

And in what way Pollock considers this relevant for the dating of the *Mahābhārata*? This is never clear. Even more confusing, although irrelevant, is how Pollock goes on to investigate the date of Patañjali:

"The problem here is not the data but the date of the *Mahābhāṣya* itself. The evidence usually adduced for placing Patañjali around 150 B.C.E. is subject to a number of uncertainties, not least the possibility that the grammarian might have been citing predecessors in the passages taken as grounds for early dating. **Arguments placing him as late as the middle of the second century C.E. are entirely credible.**"

(Pollock 2006a:80) (*emphasis ours*)

And what is the logical connection between this claim for the 'credible arguments for Patañjali in second century CE' and the chronology of the *Mahābhārata*? Pollock continues with additional irrelevancies:

"Patañjali refers only once to a poet by name, *vārarucanī kāvya* (on 4.3.101, which is also his sole use of the word *kāvya* in the sense of literature), and he refers to only three literary works (*ākhyāyikās*, on 4.2.60). Since the grammarian could be citing older grammatical materials (even as he elsewhere cites older philosophical materials) in two key historical passages... Frauwallner argues for a mid-second-century C.E. date (1960, especially pp. 111ff.); so Sircar 1939a. If the *Mahābhāṣya* is taken as a composite work (denied by Cardona 1978), any precise dating of course becomes impossible. At all events, Patañjali's is hardly "the only really firm initial date known in Sanskrit writing" (Zvelebil 1992:102)."

(Pollock 2006a: 80-81ff)

Pollock does not tell us how many counts of referrals to poets by name, or how many counts of literary works would have been sufficient to question the credibility of the claim for Patañjali in 2nd century CE. He does not tell us the logic employed by Frauwallner. Why did Pollock bother to refer to all this speculation if any precise dating was considered impossible 'if 'Mahābhāṣya' is treated as a composite work', which he seems to suggest? Pollock concludes by stating that much alternate evidence exist and one need not depend on the dating of Patañjali. Of course, he nowhere states what those other 'really firm initial dates known in Sanskrit writing' are.

## 2. Assumed Consensus of Indologist Opinions and Negative Evidence

Here is an illustration of Pollock combining ‘scholarly consensus’ with ‘negative evidence’:

One factor in determining the beginnings of Sanskrit *kāvya* that has been mentioned so far only in passing needs detailed consideration: the place of writing in the constitution of this cultural form and the date of the invention of writing itself in India. We have seen that a new scholarly consensus places the latter at the Maurya chancery around 260 B.C.E. (chapter 1.2). Whether or not this consensus is true in all particulars, nothing suggests a date for Indic writing before that period, and much evidence from after that date serves to sustain the consensus.

(Pollock 2006a: 81-82)

## 3. Mixing of ‘Bad’ Inferences with the ‘Good’ Inferences

Pollock often mixes ‘bad’ inference with ‘good’ inference to push his ‘bad’ claim as credible:

“Chapter 2 sets out the grounds for thinking of Sanskrit *kāvya*—a category, as noted earlier, that was clear and distinct in premodern South Asia—as a new phenomenon in Indian cultural history when it first appeared a little before the beginning of the Common Era. From the first, *kāvya* was almost certainly composed and circulated (though not typically experienced) in writing;...”

(Pollock 2006a: 13)

## 4. Absence of Evidence as ‘Clinching’ Evidence

Finally, an example of Pollock treating ‘absence of evidence’ as clinching evidence for his desired conclusion:

Inscriptions, *testimonia*, citations in literature, philology, the history of literary theory—every piece of evidence hard and soft thus requires locating the origins of *kāvya* in the very last centuries B.C.E., perhaps as much as a millennium after the Sanskrit language is believed to have first appeared in the subcontinent.

(Pollock 2006a: 81)

Faulty assumptions, however unstated, of AIT timeline (1500 BCE as time of “Aryan arrival”) abound.

## Pollock's Three Step Method

While Pollock uses arbitrary or selective evidence and interprets it in an irrational fashion, a general pathway of his methodology can be described as follows:

Step 1: An initial hypothesis, with selectively picked (and most cases, wrongly interpreted) data which is woven into a theory

Step 2: A lot of subsequent work is produced to support this flimsy theory by usage of mutually referencing data which in turn is based on other equally flimsy theories (circular reasoning). Voluminous works are generated. This is very important in this phase. These works should support the narrative that leads to the initial hypothesis. Contrary data is ignored.

Step 3: When enough 'scholarly work' is thus produced, the hypothesis is assumed to be 'proven', with no need for any further proof. There is a heavy burden of proof on any competing theory. In summary, the hypothesis is presented as self-evident, without explicitly stating it to be such.

Pollock cites claim of invention of '*anuṣṭubh*' *chandas* as that of Vālmīki, in defense of *Rāmāyaṇa* as 'ādi' kāvya:

Two other considerations bear on the question of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s firstness. The verse-form that the text celebrates as Vālmīki's invention (the eight syllable *anuṣṭubh*) in fact antedates the work by a millennium or more.

(Pollock 2006a: 78)

Instead of explaining who made the claim and in what context, Pollock (2006a:200-204) refers to another chapter where one learns that this claim was made by Rājaśekhara, around 920 CE (Pollock's dating). On the other hand, when he cites the claim for the first time, his intention is to show alleged contradiction (and thus dismiss it) by referring to existence of '*anuṣṭubh*' about 'a millennium or more' before Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. He does not explain how he arrived at that conclusion or why he is referring to a period of 'a millennium or more'. It is left to the reader to figure it out.

What he is referring to is the fact that Veda also has verses in this metre (including '*anuṣṭubh*'). Pollock combines this fact with his assumption for the chronology of Veda-s (1500 BCE – 1200 BCE).

This is because Pollock still sticks to the now-defunct Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT) and its alleged timing of 1500 BCE. Pollock considers the claims of AIT as self-evident, and thus displays ignorance towards enormous evidence that has piled up via astronomy, archeology, hydrology and genetics against AIT, and the AIT timeline of 1500 BCE. Pollock proceeds with, nonchalantly, combining of AIT timeline of 1500 BCE with his own speculation of 150 BCE for the text of Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and arrives at his additional erroneous claim for the gap of ‘a millennium or more’, between existence of ‘*anuṣṭubh*’ *chandas* in *Veda*-s and its ‘alleged invention’ by Vālmīki.

This erroneous conclusion of Pollock (irrespective of whether ‘*anuṣṭubh*’ *chandas* was an invention of Vālmīki or not) is due to his problematic chronology, in turn based on wrong assumptions (his first assumption for *Veda*-s around 1200-1500 BCE and his second assumption for *Rāmāyaṇa* around 150 BCE).

The illustration demonstrates that Pollock can and does, using irrational and illogical methods, generate arbitrary chronology at the drop of a hat and with very little efforts. On the other hand, it takes enormous energy and efforts to expose such baseless claims. This illustration of Pollock’s work is but an example of mainstream and non-scientific approach employed by Videshi Indologists to the chronology of ancient Indian narratives.

## Analysis of Pollock’s Position on the Chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*

Let us begin with his claims of 150 BCE and 200 BCE-400 CE for the chronology of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, respectively. Pollock provides no evidence for his claims. He states them as self-evident truths. Pollock employs series of irrational means to manoeuvre through issues of chronology of the epics, as and when required, for whatever thesis he is promoting at any given point. These irrational means are worth enumerating:

1. Absence of evidence = evidence of absence
2. “Consensus” of selective group of Indologists

3. Assumed consensus of Indologists' opinions
4. Irrelevancies and digression from the key issues of chronology to avoid succinct and crisp discussion about chronology
5. Invoking of background assumptions, in defense of his claim, without regard to the fact that such background assumptions have already been falsified
6. Acceptance of or claiming of specific chronology timelines, as if they are self-evident truths.

It is then interesting to note that Pollock is quick to criticize, correctly so, certain “self-evident” claims, elsewhere, and in a non-chronology context:

This makes it hard to accept, for South Asia at least, a whole range of scholarly assertions: that only the modern map can have brought such geo-bodies to life in the imagination and made discourse about them sensible; that belief in the premodern existence of regions constitutes “a curious misreading” of the past since the “sense of region and nation emerged together through parallel self-definitions” in modernity, and upon this recognition depends any understanding of “the distinctive, layered character of Indianness”; that it was only “subjection to many different highly compartmentalized communities of South Asia.” **It is not obvious what evidence underlies such assertions, all of them repeated as self-evident truths, nor what purpose they serve other than to impede an understanding of “the distinctive, layered character of Indianness.”**

(Pollock 2006a: 560) (*emphasis ours*)

However, this rational attitude is nowhere to be seen when it comes to defining the chronology of ancient Indian history, and as relevant to our discussion, i.e. the chronology of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Elsewhere, Pollock also shows awareness of the need for original research to test any claims as to something being “self-evident”:

None of them explains what exactly qualifies a language for literary work. The very specification of limits—“Literature is written in A, B, and C,” entailing “and not in X, Y, or Z”—implies some principle of selection. **Perhaps this was self-evident and required no explicit discussion; in any case, the silence of the tradition forces us to work out for ourselves what constituted the qualification for literature.”**

(Pollock 2006a: 100) (*emphasis ours*)

Despite this realization, Pollock's own approach to chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* is that of “self-evident” claims. His silence about the need or demand, for the necessary evidence in support of his “self-evident” claims, forces others to work out for themselves the chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, before critiquing Pollock's numerous non-chronological claims which otherwise are based on his “self-evident”, and thus faulty, chronology.

A rational, scientific and constructive response is presented in the rest of the paper for the chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

## Method of Science

Pollock's methodology for generating voluminous works via a three-step process may have multiple motives. Whatever his motives, the problem with his methodology is that it directly goes against the very spirit of science. In science, no theory is ever ‘proved’, but it can be ‘disproved’. And any existing theory is only one experiment or data-point away from being falsified (proved wrong).

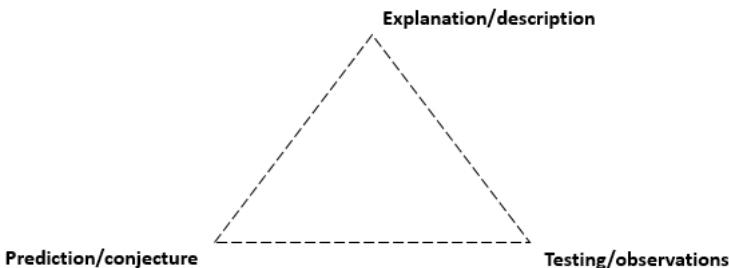
Argumentative, polemical and rhetorical methods can generate enormous volumes of work. Such voluminous work can be generated, with very little energy, by likes of Pollock who employ illogical methods. On the other hand, it takes a lot of energy and work to expose such irrational and non-testable works. And all one has done at the end of such effort is exposed a very small piece of argumentative work.

Thus, instead of writing volumes on why 150 BCE or 200 BCE through 400 CE timelines do not make sense for the chronology of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, respectively, one's energy is better spent on approaching the problem of chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* via subject independent testing of evidence (objective evidence) from the very pages of these epics.

Scientific method begins with a problem and then proposes a tentative solution to solve it. This proposed solution is called a theory. Various consequences due to this theory are calculated and the outcome is compared against the actual evidence. If the evidence matches with the consequences of the theory, the theory is accepted as tentatively viable; and the cycle repeats until all the evidence is tested. A successful theory still gives birth to newer problems. In fact, the worth of a revolutionary theory is to be judged by the higher complexity

of newer problems it generates. And the cycle repeats itself. This is the reason behind the growth of knowledge due to truly revolutionary scientific theories.

The specific outcome of a scientific theory based on the testing of a specific piece of evidence can be described with the help of a triad of (1) Explanation/description (2) Prediction/conjecture and (3) Testing/observations. The process begins with one of these three corners or legs of the triad. Where one begins depends on what problem one is trying to solve. This will be illustrated for the specific evidence of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* discussed in this paper.



## Defining a Problem

The *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, of their own assertion, are ‘*Itihāsa*’. They are ancient narratives of events of past Indian civilization. Both texts are explicit in stating their purpose, and it is easy for readers of these epics to determine for themselves, objectively, how far they succeed in their stated goals.

Pollock translates ‘*Itihāsa*’ as ‘the way it once was’ (2006a: 76), as ‘accounts of the ways things were’ (2006a: 17) or as ‘an account the way things indeed were’ (2006a: 224). Nowhere is he explicit as to what he thinks of the contents of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as they relate to actual events of Indian history. His speculations, for the chronology of the texts of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, focus on earliest manuscripts available and the dating of those manuscripts. Pollock remains, not surprisingly, oblivious to the chronology and dating of actual events described in these epics.

*Itihāsa* can be meaningfully translated as ‘an ancient narrative’, ‘ancient chronicle’ or ‘traditional accounts of former events’.

Pollock’s speculation is restricted to identifying the timing of the first manuscript(s) of Vālmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* or Vyāsa’s *Mahābhārata*. On the other hand, the actual problem to be solved is much broader than his narrow, and thus erroneous, definition for the chronology of these epics.

The problems of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* chronology are as follows:

1. Is there objective evidence that would allow us to define specific lower limits (and upper limits) on the chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* events?
2. Is there objective evidence that would allow us to define specific lower limits on the chronology of the first composition of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* texts?
3. Is there objective evidence that would allow us to define specific chronology markers (day, year or millennium) for the events of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*?
4. Is there objective evidence that would allow us to define specific chronology markers for the first composition of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* texts and their chronological gap from the actual events of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

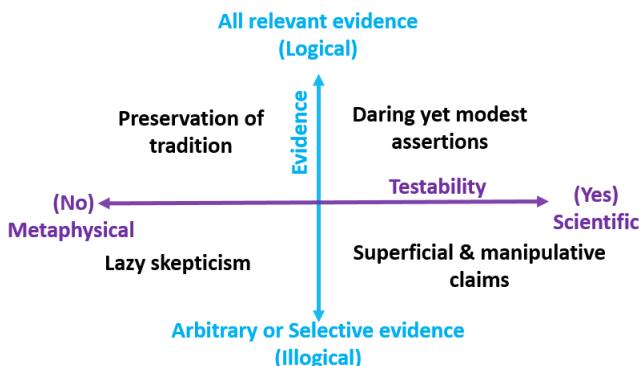
Problem (1) is addressed in this paper. It is critical to recognize that appealing to objective evidence alone is not sufficient. This is because supporting evidence can be found for any theory if one looks for it. Testability of an evidence is what turns specific evidence into an objective evidence and it is one of the key criteria for anything to be considered as scientific evidence. Unfortunately, testability of evidence is one of the many necessary conditions of scientific investigation, but by itself, is not a sufficient condition. Confusion persists among the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* researchers. Many researchers do not comprehend necessity of evaluating and testing ‘all relevant evidence’ for their theories. Ignorance of this basic premise has resulted in numerous claims for chronology of these epics that are irrational. Such claims lead to erroneous conclusions and are rather

falsified easily. However, it is not easy for a lay person to recognize this problem.

A simple framework can be used to analyze any claim (not limited to chronology) related to these epics. The framework can be employed to evaluate other claims for varied aspects (when, what, why, where, how, etc.) of all ancient narratives.

# Framework for Scientific Investigation of Ancient Narratives

The following framework allows quick analysis of any claim (not limited to the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa*).



(Figure 1)

The vertical axis of ‘evidence’ is defined by ‘all relevant evidence’ and ‘arbitrary or selective evidence’ as its endpoints. The horizontal axis of ‘testability’ is defined by discrete definitions (yes or no) as its endpoints. These simple criteria allow us to place any claim into one of the four categories (quadrants).

There are additional demands on any given claim for the consistency of a theory, corroboration and falsification outcome for each piece of relevant evidence and growth of knowledge that leads to newer

problems of higher complexity. For brevity, the elaboration of these demands is not discussed in this paper.

A research effort that focuses on preservation of ancient narratives, without any concern for testing them to check if they are valid or not, can be described as ‘metaphysical’ and ‘rational’. This **Preservation of tradition** is a critical function, and only because of numerous individuals, our ancient heritage remains preserved for our benefit.

A research effort that focuses on analyzing all relevant evidence in the light of a specific theory and is concerned with proposing a theory in such a fashion so that all evidence becomes testable, can be described as scientific and rational. Generation of these **Daring yet modest assertions** is the desired approach.

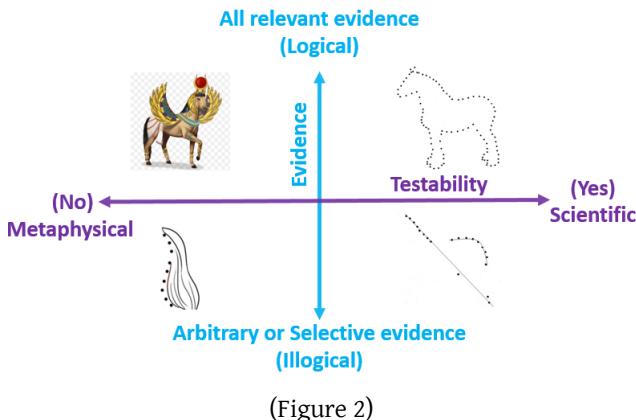
Aware of the importance of testability, if a research effort has a semblance of testability but otherwise lacks the rationality of including all relevant evidence, can be described as irrational and fit for scrutiny. Generation of these **Speculative and manipulative claims** is an undesirable approach. Unfortunately, a majority of research works on the dating of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* fall into this quadrant.

The remaining quadrant of **Lazy skepticism** is characterized by lack of action and metaphysical argumentation. This includes invoking of specific references/observations from the ancient narratives that are not testable (and thus metaphysical), which are then employed to argue for the futility of research efforts or to claim non-historical nature of these ancient narratives. To enable these viewpoints, the emphasis is placed on descriptions, references or observations from these epics that are non-testable. Existence of such ‘non-testable’ observations is employed to justify unauthenticity of numerous other observations that can be tested.

Metaphorically, the emphasis of research efforts and the outcome for each of these four quadrants can be described as follows (Figure 2):

A preserver of tradition will note down (and preserve) the descriptions of a flying horse with colorful wings and a crown on his head with meticulous details, free from concerns such as if the description is factually possible or not (in the real world). On the other hand, a daring yet modest asserter would search through multiple scientific disciplines and may build a theory that would be tested against

available evidence for the plausible case of flying horse and may end up with only limited evidence that can corroborate existence of 'horse like' creature. Both approaches are 'fearless' and 'humble' in their outlook. While a preserver of tradition may invite ridicule, a daring yet modest asserter may be criticized for his inability to provide evidence in support of all the descriptions of ancient narratives. The preserver of tradition is fearless in his effort to retain and preserve all that exists in the manuscripts of ancient narratives, even when contradictions may exist within the same manuscript. The daring yet modest asserter is fearless in drawing inferences, based on testable evidence, no matter how much it conflicts with existing and established mainstream wisdom. Preserver of tradition is humble in being open about his inability to test and thus his inability to either resolve internal contradictions or verify claims of ancient narratives. Daring yet modest asserter is humble in recognizing that what can be inferred is limited by what can be tested and for this very reason acknowledging the ultimate limit in comprehension of certain descriptions of ancient narratives.



(Figure 2)

The efforts of the preserver of tradition leads to the preservation and availability of ancient narratives for posterity. The efforts of daring yet modest asserter, invariably, leads to the solving of the existing problem that leads to a further growth of knowledge which in turn leads to newer problems of higher complexity.

A lazy skeptic wants to identify descriptions of ancient narratives that cannot be tested. He employs this very tactic as evidence of why researching of these ancient narratives is a futile effort. His approach not only leads to inaction on his part but may lead to inaction on the part of those who are otherwise curious to research more about ancient narratives. A lazy skeptic wants to score points via arguments and thus may ask preserver of tradition for evidence of flying horse and may ask the daring yet modest asserter for an evidence of bushy tail of the horse! For these reasons, the approach employed by the lazy skeptic is irrational and metaphysical in nature and leads to stagnation of knowledge.

A superficial manipulator invariably has *a priori* answer to the problem being addressed. Not surprisingly, the approach focuses on identifying testable evidence that tends to support the answer arrived at *a priori*. This results in deliberately ignoring of other testable evidence which otherwise would have falsified the preset answer. This effort should be labelled as superficial because any theory and/or proposal can always find some evidence that support the theory and/or proposal. The evidence produced is a trivially true factoid and hence superficial. On the other hand, this approach is one of a manipulator due to deliberately ignoring testable evidence that would have otherwise falsified the preset answer. This superficial manipulator is striving for quick success and want to be in a limelight and thus in a hurry to select only evidence that tends to support a specific answer while ignoring all other evidence that would falsify this preset answer. Metaphorically, this approach can be described as celebrating success based on its ability to draw a straight line or a curve through some of the data points while altogether ignoring the rest of the data points. This approach rarely, if ever, opens up newer problems of higher complexity. When done intentionally, this would amount to a fraud. When done unintentionally, it is typically due to an ignorance of scientific method, and due to a poor comprehension of the method of drawing inferences.

## **Development of a Theory and Selection of Evidence**

The development of a theory depends on the nature of problem to be solved. The selection of evidence is determined by the nature of

the theory proposed. For example, validating the existence of the ancient river Sarasvatī would begin with the descriptions of the river from ancient narratives and would require a theory (or theories) that is geological, hydrological and climatological in nature and thus the corresponding evidence would also be sought from these disciplines of science. The problem of dating the *Mahābhārata* or the *Rāmāyaṇa* would begin with the descriptions of testable evidence from these ancient narratives however would require a theory (or theories), for example, that are astronomical, archaeological, geological or hydrological, etc. in nature. The corresponding evidence would be sought from relevant disciplines of science, and the evidence would have to be compared against the claims/descriptions of these ancient narratives.

A claim validated by a theory based on evidence from a specific discipline (e.g. astronomy) may luckily be validated by evidence from other disciplines (e.g. archaeology, geology, hydrology, genetics, etc.) also. In such a case, the claim might be accepted, albeit tentative, with relative ease.

While all relevant evidence is important, and must be tested for a given theory, that evidence which leads to clear restrictions on the plausible choices (When? Where? What? How? etc.) is the most prized evidence. Such prized evidence conduces to a sound growth of knowledge. In other words, a scientific investigation that eliminates certain choices as plausible options is much more valuable than the one that tends to provide support for an existing proposition.

## **Astronomy-theory and Evidence vis-à-vis the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa***

Astronomical data includes descriptions of star positions, descriptions of planets – their positions, their specific motions and their conjunctions with other planets and/or *nakṣatra*, descriptions of comets, solar and lunar eclipses, positions and phases of the moon, descriptions of the seasons, descriptions of nature during specific lunar months and lunar *tithi*. Numerous chronological narrations, when coupled with astronomy markers such as seasons or cardinal points of solstices and equinoxes, also constitute astronomical evidence.

The *Mahābhārata* text has more than 200 astronomy and chronology observations and testing of them leads to 5561 BCE as the year of *Mahābhārata* war. The *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* text has more than 500 astronomy and chronology observations and testing of them leads to 12240 BCE as the year of the birth of Rāma, and 12209 BCE as the year of Rāma-Rāvaṇa *yuddha*.

Testing of two astronomical observations, one each from the *Mahābhārata* text and the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* text, out of a total of 800 relevant observations from these two epics, is demonstrated which in turn lead to lower limits of 4500 BCE and 10,000 BCE, on the chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, respectively.

A comprehension of the astronomical phenomenon of the precession of equinoxes (explained later) and its resulting consequences is a prerequisite to understand the testing of these two astronomical observations, and their implications for the chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

## Precession of Equinoxes

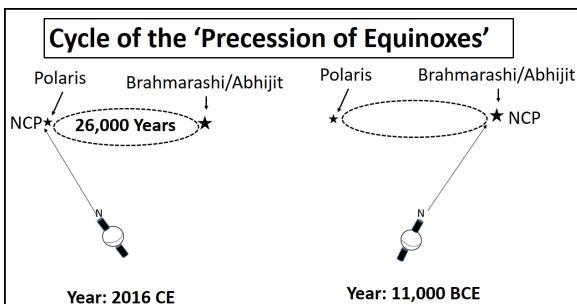
The Precession of equinoxes is the phenomenon of the movement of the earth's axis in a circular path that takes about 26000 years to complete one cycle. As the earth's axis moves through a circular path, it traces a circle in the sky. At any given time, where the earth's axis points to, along this circular path, is called the point of the North Celestial Pole (NCP). If a distinct and visible star is close to this point of NCP, it attains the status of a North Pole Star (NPS) the period, i.e. until the NCP moves far away from the position of the star.

**This results in:**

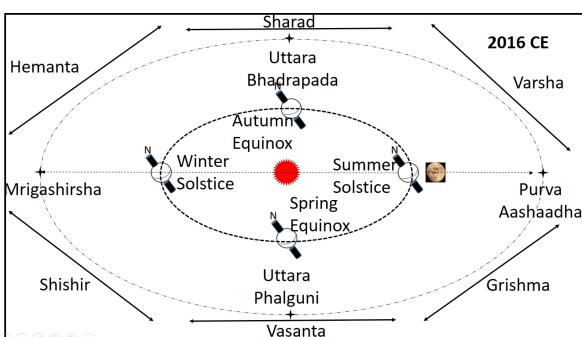
1. Change in the location of NCP and thus also the change of NPS.  
For example, while 'Polaris' is NPS in our times, Vega (Abhijit/Brahmarāśi) was the NPS around 12000 BCE (Figure 3).
2. Change in the position of the Sun (with respect to the reference frame of the background *nakṣatra*) for specific cardinal points.  
For example, timing (day, Lunar month and *tithi*) of Winter Solstice would shift with respect to the background reference frame of the *nakṣatra*, by about one day (one degree) every 72 years. This means the point of Winter Solstice would shift by

about one *nakṣatra* every  $(26000/27 = 963$  or approximately a 1000) thousand years.

In the present context (2016 CE), the position of the Sun is between *nakṣatra* Mūlā and *nakṣatra* Pūrva Āṣāḍha on the day of Winter Solstice, and is between *nakṣatra* Ārdrā and *nakṣatra* Mṛgaśīrṣa on the day of Summer Solstice (Figure 4).

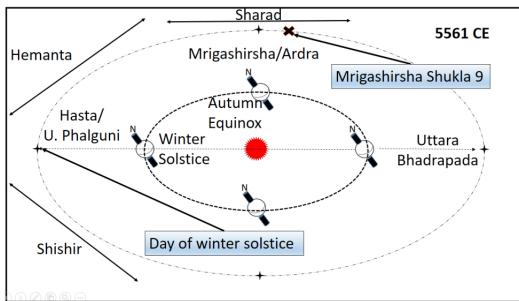


(Figure 3)



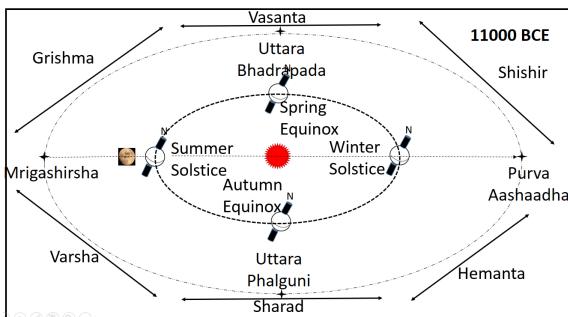
(Figure 4)

If we go back in antiquity by about 7500 years, the position of the sun for the day of Winter Solstice, would shift from *nakṣatra* Mūlā/Pūrva Āṣāḍha to *nakṣatra* Uttara Bhādrapada; and the position of the Sun for the day of Summer Solstice, would shift from *nakṣatra* Ārdrā/Mṛgaśīrṣa to *nakṣatra* Hastā/Uttara Phalgunī. A shift of about 7 *nakṣatra*-s would occur, as expected, corresponding to 7000 years. (Figure 5)



(Figure 5)

3. Change (shift) of season with respect to calendar, by about one lunar month every 2000 years.



(Figure 6)

Lunar month of Caitra occurs during the second half of Vasanta *ṛtu* (Spring) in our times. If we go back, halfway through the cycle of the precession of equinoxes, to 11000 BCE, lunar month of Caitra coincided with the second half of Śarad *ṛtu* (pre-autumn). Lunar month of Āśvina occurs during the second half of Śarad *ṛtu* (pre-autumn) in our times. If we go back halfway through the cycle of the precession of equinoxes, to 11,000 BCE, lunar month of Āśvina coincided with the second half of Vasanta *ṛtu* (spring). In other words, the points of all cardinal points (solstices and equinoxes) had reversed (2016 CE vs 11000 BCE) (Figure 4 vs Figure 6).

## An Illustration from the *Mahābhārata* text

Vyāsa met Dhṛtarāṣṭra on the day before the first day of *Mahābhārata* war, as a final attempt, to avoid the war. Vyāsa mentioned series of omens (*nimitta*) to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and among them was this peculiar one:

**Bhiṣma Parvan** (2.31) (Gita Press and Critical Edition)

yā caisā viśrutā rājāṁstrailokye sādhusāṁmatā ।  
arundhatī tayāpyeṣa vasiṣṭhāḥ prṣṭhataḥ kṛtaḥ ॥

(Gist: Renowned and well respected Arundhatī has gone ahead of Vasiṣṭha)

Majority of the *Mahābhārata* researchers were too perplexed by this astronomy observation to even dare mention it in their analysis. Few researchers mentioned Arundhatī-Vasiṣṭha (AV) observation only to explain it away. Bharata Ratna and Mahāmahopādhyāya Pandurag Vaman Kane wrote, referring to AV observation:

The author or authors of the *Mahābhārata*, in describing the evil portents of an impending tragic or catastrophic event, often assemble such observations **irrespective of the fact whether some of them are possible in the very order of nature.**

(Kane 1968: 905) (*emphasis ours*)

Bharatāchārya C. V. Vaidya (1905: 84) compared his shock at the description of AV observation with that of biologically implausible absurdities:

The last editor probably wished to accumulate the number of the evil omens which preceded the war and tried to put in such impossible combinations as he could bring together. **For instance,... the statement that Arundhati went before Vasishtha among the Saptarishis.** These may be classed with absurdities in the animal world mentioned further on such as the birth of a cow from a mare or a jackal from a dog.

(Vaidya 1905: 83-84) (*emphasis ours*)(spelling as in the original)

Professor R. N. Iyengar (2006) began with AV observation reference, but only partially, and combined it with another non-relevant and partial reference from another chapter of Bhiṣma Parvan, presumably

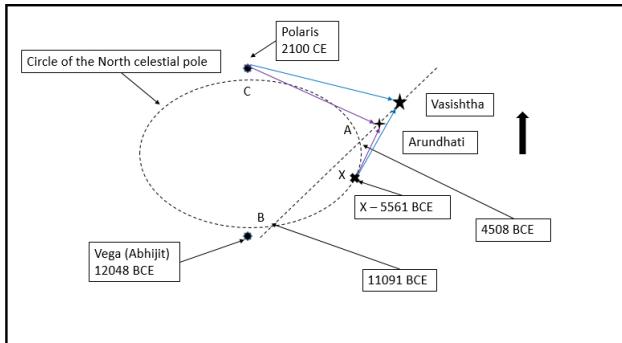
to make some sense out of this AV observation, on which Prof. Iyengar's article does not shed much light.

More than half of the over 130 *Mahābhārata* researchers have employed astronomy evidence as their basis in proposing those many different dates for the chronology of the *Mahābhārata* war and none of them, apart from Dr. P. V. Vartak, dared to analyze AV observation. These researchers avoided AV observation as if it was a poison pill. This is especially intriguing when it can be shown that these same researchers refer to three of the four astronomy observations from the same chapter of Bhīṣma Parvan, fourth observation being that of Arundhatī-Vasiṣṭha. Even more perplexing is the fact that AV observation appears very much in the middle of these astronomy observations.

What can explain the aversion and reluctance of these *Mahābhārata* researchers to this AV observation 'poison pill'? It is not difficult to understand their dilemma. They were at loss to explain or to test this observation. This is because Arundhatī-Vasiṣṭha form a stable star-pair and Vasiṣṭha is walking ahead of (moving ahead of) Arundhatī, in an anticlockwise direction, around Polaris - the north pole star, in our times. In addition, even if we simulate movement of Arundhatī and Vasiṣṭha, further back by 2000, 4000 or 6000 years, in antiquity, Vasiṣṭha would have still appeared walking ahead of Arundhatī. On the other hand, many of these researchers had assumed, without much basis and a priori, that the *Mahābhārata* war had occurred, within last 5000 years.

Only one the *Mahābhārata* researchers, Dr. P. V. Vartak, was convinced of the factual nature of AV observation. Dr. Vartak made various attempts to test this observation empirically however failed. This author became aware of AV observation sometime in 1995 CE and thought, naively, that it would be easy to test and validate this observation empirically. Fifteen years of uninterrupted efforts led to empirical validation of this observation on 8 May 2009 CE.

Relative positions of Arundhatī (Alcor) and Vasiṣṭha (Mizar) with respect to the north pole star (Polaris) are shown in Figure 7.



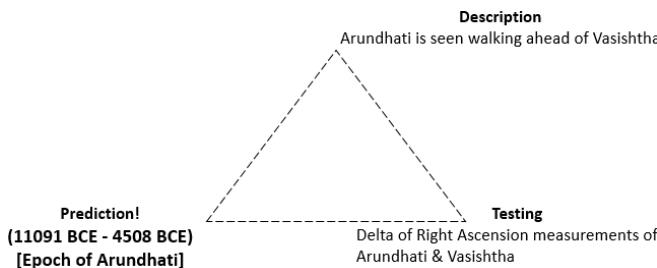
(Figure 7)

1. Arundhatī and Vasiṣṭha go around Polaris (point C), not unlike two end points of the long and short arms of a wall clock, except in anticlockwise direction, and complete one round in 24 hours. Their relative positions are such that Vasiṣṭha would appear to walk ahead of Arundhatī. The dotted line circle represents the path of north celestial pole (NCP) also known as the precession of equinoxes that completes one round in about 26000 years. If a straight line is drawn through Arundhatī and Vasiṣṭha, it intersects the circle of NCP at two points (A and B). These two points correspond to positions of NCP in year 4508 BCE and 11091 BCE, respectively.
2. When points of NCP are at A or B, Arundhatī and Vasiṣṭha would appear to walk around these points of NCP, again anticlockwise, with no one ahead and no one behind.
3. The third scenario occurs when the point of NCP is anywhere along the path of the NCP designated by portion of the circle AXB. As shown by the point X, which represents the position of NCP in the year 5561 BCE, Arundhatī and Vasiṣṭha would walk around this point X, again anticlockwise, but this time Arundhatī would appear to walk ahead of Vasiṣṭha.

There was, thus, indeed a time interval, in antiquity, beginning with 11091 BCE and ending with 4508 BCE, when Arundhatī indeed appeared to walk ahead of Vasiṣṭha. This time interval (Epoch of Arundhatī) defines the boundaries where one should search for the year of the *Mahābhārata* war. Keeping aside the question of the exact year of

the *Mahābhārata* war, what can be said with mathematical certainty is that the *Mahābhārata* war did not take place any time after 4508 BCE. AV observation and its validation presented an excellent illustration of *śabda pramāṇa* validated by *pratyakṣa pramāṇa* that also puts a strict lower limit of 4508 BCE (poison pill) on the chronology of the *Mahābhārata*.

The revolutionary outcome of AV observation can be understood in the context of the triad of explanation-testing-prediction. While the description of AV observation was unambiguous, no prior researcher had succeeded in testing it empirically. However as soon as the empirical test validated the description, it led to a clearly marked time interval for the year of the *Mahābhārata* war. In this case, the prediction of the time interval for the year of the *Mahābhārata* war was the invaluable insight!



The validation of AV observation was only the beginning of a long journey as more than 200+ additional astronomy, chronology and seasonal observations existed, and their meticulous testing led to 5561 BCE as the year of the *Mahābhārata* war and 16 October 5561 BCE (Julian calendar computation) as the first day of the *Mahābhārata* war.

## An Illustration from the *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* text

The Vānara search party returned to Kishkindhā with news of Sītā. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa, along with Sugrīva and his Vānara army, marched towards Laṅkā. It is during this time, Lakṣmaṇa mentioned numerous omens and among this list, he described the north pole star of the *Rāmāyaṇa* times:

**Yuddha Kāñḍa** (Gita Press Edition 4:48, Critical Edition 4:43)

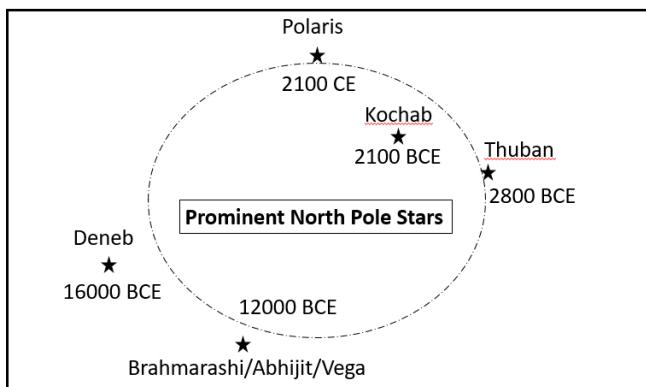
*brahmaśir viśuddhaś ca śuddhāś ca paramarṣayaḥ ।  
arcismantah prakāṣante dhruvāṇi sarve pradakṣinām ॥*

(**Gist:** Seven pure sages are making *parikrama* around fixed Brahmarāśi, the pole star)

The position of the north celestial pole (NCP) slowly moves in a circular path and completes one cycle in about 26000 years (Figure 3). If a bright star happens to be next to the point of NCP, it attains the status of a north pole star, for some time. Polaris is the north pole star in our times and will attain a position closest to the point of NCP around 2100 CE. If we simulate the skies for the point of NCP,

Kochab was the north pole star around 2100 BCE,

Thuban around 2800 BCE, Brahmarāśi (also known as Abhijit or Vega) around 12000 BCE and Deneb around 16000 BCE (Figure 8).

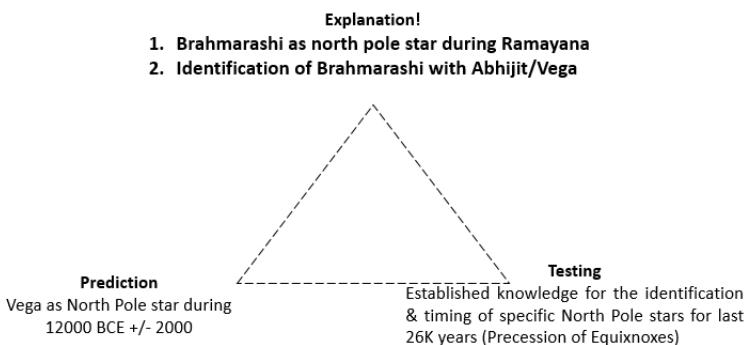


(Figure 8)

Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa refers to ‘Brahmarāśi’ as the north pole star. Brahmarāśi would have attained and retained a status as north pole star for about  $\pm 1000$  or 2000 years around 12000 BCE, when the point of NCP was closest to Brahmarāśi. Star Vega is mentioned multiple times as Abhijit and Brahmarāśi (Rāmāyaṇa) or Brahmarāśi, *nakṣatra* of Brahma and Abhijit (Mahābhārata) in these epics. The validation of Brahmarāśi as the north pole star of Rāmāyaṇa times defines the

interval of 10000 BCE – 14000 BCE where one should search for the plausible chronology of *Rāmāyaṇa*. And keeping aside the question of the exact year of the birth of Rāma or the battle between Rāma and Rāvaṇa, it can be stated with mathematical certainty that the *Rāmāyaṇa* did not take place any time after 10000 BCE.

The revolutionary outcome of the Brahmarāśi observation can be understood in the context of the triad of testing-prediction-explanation by recognizing that while the identification of various stars for their status as north pole stars was well known, and the timing when they attained such status could be easily tested, no prior researcher had comprehended either the value of Brahmarāśi observation for the dating of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and/or identification of Brahmarāśi with that of Abhijit/Vega. However as soon as these two insights dawned upon, it led to a clearly marked time interval for the year of Rāma-Rāvaṇa battle and hence of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. In this case, the recognition of Brahmarāśi observation and identification of Brahmarāśi with that of Abhijit/Vega – were the two invaluable insights!



The testing of Brahmarāśi observation defined a time interval for the plausible timing of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This was only the beginning of a long journey as more than 500+ additional observations pertaining to astronomy, chronology and seasons, and their meticulous testing led to 12209 BCE as the year of Rāma-Rāvaṇa battle, and 12240 BCE (Julian calendar computations) as the year of Rāma-janma.

## Way Forward

Preservers of tradition are doing their jobs and daring yet modest asserters are proposing bold theories and then testing them against the available evidence, to develop/improve our knowledge of ancient Indian civilization. Manipulators with superficial knowledge put forward numerous proposals do not stand scrutiny. The refutation of such numerous *ad hoc* proposals also leads to a growth of knowledge – by eliminating the impossible.

Researches of Videshi Indology may fall, occasionally, into ‘lazy skeptics’ quadrant, however, for most part they do not follow either evidence based or logic based thought process. Therefore, efforts of swadeshi Indology should be limited to demonstrating illogical and unscientific nature of Videshi Indology works. On the other hand, swadeshi Indology researchers should concentrate their efforts on producing new research that is logical and evidence based.

## Poison Pills

Discovery of these two pieces of evidence, their empirical testing and their implications for the chronology of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* were made less than ten years ago and will serve as ‘poison pills’ against any dogmatic and extreme views for the chronology of these epics. Even those who do comprehend the revolutionary impact of this evidence express concern. They worry that opposing and dogmatic forces might raise an objection such as “but these are only two references and it could be just a coincidence that their testing led to prediction of a time interval with crisp lower bounds”. Such objections are not based on facts. We should eagerly encourage not only Videshi Indologists and but also researchers of existing dogmatic claims to study and challenge these claims. While these two observations and their implications have produced ‘poison pills’ par excellence, this is only the beginning. More than 800 astronomy and chronology observations from these two epics have generated numerous additional poison pills, e.g., empirical testing of set of astronomy and chronology references related to Bhīṣma-Nirvāṇa, from the *Mahābhārata* text, also leads to 4500 BCE as the lower limit on the chronology of the *Mahābhārata* war; and empirical testing of three additional observations from three different sections (*kāṇḍa*) of

*Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* independently corroborate lower limit of 10000 BCE established by Brahmarāśi observation.

Additional evidence is pouring in, from varied disciplines of science – geology, anthropology, paleontology, astronomy, genetics, hydrology, oceanography, seismology and climatology that provide strong corroborative support for these chronology claims.

Pollock comments in assigning very recent timeline for the composition of these epics:

Only an ideology of antiquity and the cultural distinction conferred by sheer age have induced scholars to move them back appreciably before this date—a move that requires conjecture every step of the way and the most fragile gossamer of relative dating.

(Pollock 2006a: 81)

This very statement of Pollock ought to be modified in the context of accumulating evidence for the deep antiquity of these epics and that apply, fittingly, to irrational and metaphysical approach of Pollock:

*Only an ideology of Hinduphobia and the smugness conferred by sheer time spent in Indology has induced Pollock to move them forward to a date at the beginning of a common era – a move that requires citing negative evidence every step of the way and the most fragile gossamer of relative dating.*

## The Epics as Unitary Works

Pollock writes in his introduction to the translation of ‘Aranya Kāṇḍa’ in the Clay series:

The problem of what unifies these two very different sections of the poem [referring to Ayodhyā and Aranya Kāṇḍa sections of Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*] remains a challenging one. In the case of ‘The Ramāyaṇa’ the view persists that the poem is a fusion or amalgamation of two very different and in fact unrelated stories. Not only has the need to develop a unitary understanding of the poem been eliminated by eliminating the perception of the poem as a unitary work, but what in this tradition has been considered the first and greatest poem, and venerated as such for two thousand years, is now declared to be, not a meaningful whole – as Indian audiences have invariably taken it to be – but a congeries of utterly distinct and unrelated materials.

(Pollock 2006b: 15-16)

The cumulative evidence of 800+ testable observations from the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* text, establishes beyond doubt, whether one is talking of either eighteen *parvan*-s of *Mahābhārata* or seven *kāṇḍa*-s of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, that they form a unified whole. However, elaboration of this assertion would require a longer discussion, which is beyond the purview of this paper.

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# Chapter 3

## Hindu-Buddhist Framework: Detonator of Western Indology

– *Ravi Joshi*\*

### Abstract

Western Indology is prone to looking at India from its own lenses, in spite of voluminous and well-structured material available on India's own self-perception over the ages. This is especially true when they deal with India's "Religions". Having developed a sophisticated globally applicable framework with the category of "Religion" as fulcrum, they rarely pause to question the appropriateness of their criteria, preferring to impose and extend an inadequate framework, adding untenable riders and extra assumptions, just to continue using "Religion" as a lynch-pin of their analysis of societies. This framework is so hegemonic that its lack of coherence for vast non-Abrahamic societies has become all but invisible.

This framework and its derived methodology have been profitably utilized by Indologists in contrasting the categorization of Hinduism with that of Buddhism. Though there is much contestation on what the term "Religion" means when used for non-Abrahamic societies, its use is still dominant.

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\*pp. 105–134. In: Kannan, K. S. and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*. Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

Prof. Sheldon Pollock, eminent Sanskritist and Indologist, seems to have taken the existing tropes of “Protestant egalitarian secular Buddhism” vs. “Theistic Hierarchical Hinduism” to new depths. This paper specifically investigates the validity of his assertions on “spiritualistic Evangelistic Buddhism” vs. “Ritualistic escapist Hinduism”, and what follows from them in his claims on the ills of Indian society being products of Hinduism. In this paper, key aspects of the terminology are unpacked, and the internal *emic* Dharmic categories are introduced and used to refute the artificial “Hinduism vs. Buddhism” divide upon which this scholarship rests. Pollock’s relevant works are cited. Full use is made of existing Western academic grade scholarship on Hindu-Buddhist philosophy, as well as *emic* sources such as *sāstra-s*, *darśana-s*, *sūtra-s* etc. that explicate the Vedic-Hindu and *Bauddha Dharma* categories in an integral framework. What may appear as “deep foundational difference” via an *etic* reading is seen as integral and organic systems spawned from the same meta framework. Some comments are also made regarding the distortion of timelines of India’s history - required in order to make Pollock’s claims of Hindu “reaction” to Buddhist “innovation” tenable.

## Introduction

“Religion” has been a category used for describing certain aspects of a society no matter where that society was located in time and space. Though it looks like a compelling and obvious choice, on deeper inspection, this category loses coherence in its ability to describe the lived-in reality of most societies outside of those dominated by the Abrahamic constructs of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. As a category native to the West, it went global following the last few centuries of Western dominance via colonization of an overwhelming majority of societies of the world (Staal 1996: Ch28; Balagangadhara 1994).

This situation is especially true of India, where after British colonization for two centuries, the word ‘religion’ has almost ‘gone native’, especially for the English educated elite and followers. India is no isolated case though, as (Staal 1996) shows. European colonialism has remade at least the thought world of the rest of the globe – even non-colonized Japan - in this respect by universalizing the category ‘Religion’ to explain all activity that does not fit into the easily comprehensible economic, sociopolitical, and other empirically

available domains. Needless to say, this is a manifestation of the European Enlightenment based Secular/Religious divide wrought onto European society, which has a valid, if peculiarly European, genesis. Axiomatic imposition of this divide on Indian social reality is highly questionable, and has often been contested.

This brings us to the key issues for discussion here. It has become conventional wisdom to assume that in India there have existed, and still exist, many religions. Hinduism and Buddhism are cited as two of the big religions of India, and are also considered to be two of the five major global religions, the other three being the Abrahamic ‘trinity’ of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The possibility of categorizing based on the available meta framework of India’s Dharmic systems has been studiously ignored until recently. In his book *Being Different* (Malhotra 2011: 41 refs 38, 39) he refers also to works of McKim Marriot and A. K. Ramanujan who did this earlier, but in a much more limited and less focused sense. While it is understandable why Western scholars and followers would be unwilling to let go of a framework in which they have been so heavily invested, it just needs to be pointed out that India as a civilization did quite well without the “Religion” construct until the advent of large scale Abrahamic influences starting with the Islamic conquests. Buddhism was then known merely as “Buddha *saṃpradāya*” one among many Dharmic *saṃpradāya*-s (i.e. paths / sects) of India. The meta-category of *Dharma* – not to be wrongly equated with “Religion” - had and still has deep roots, with subcategories enough to encompass virtually all indigenous systems.

When looked at as two separate entities i.e. religions, scholars find it easy to show up contrasts, and elaborate on their differences, with impressive confidence in the validity of their categorization. Here, in summary form, is the Western academic consensus on these two religions. Hinduism is considered ahistorical, theistic, talks about ‘being’, and of ultimate reality as permanent; whereas Buddhism is considered historical, atheistic, talks about ‘becoming’, and says that ultimate reality is ‘nothingness’. This much itself seems to show a radical difference in orientation, perhaps unbridgeable. Not only this, we are told, it seems but obvious that there are strong parallels between how in the West Protestant Christianity grew out of and attempted to reform Catholicism – away from outmoded ritual and priestly hierarchy, and similarly in India how Buddhism grew out of, and attempted to reform, Hinduism – away from outmoded ritual and

priestly hierarchy. (Smith 1991: 92-94 “The Rebel Saint”; Upadhyay 1970)

Another interesting factor is the historical evolutionary timelines given to Hinduism and Buddhism. Current historicizing trends are built on shaky foundations of Western impositions of linear historical sensibilities on the timelines of Indian history. The emic insider mode of recording India’s past via *itihāsa*-s and *purāna*-s is considered too alien to be of value, and mostly used selectively as fragmentary pieces of data where it helps to buttress the pre-derived timelines of the Indologists. Inconvenient data is thrown out or ignored until it becomes too compelling, for example the current excavations that are pushing back the timelines of the Indus Valley civilization complex by a few more thousand years. More assorted genetic and other challenges are now forthcoming to the fiat currency of the Aryan Invasion Theory, and its weaker variants.

What directly concerns us here though, are the controversial moves to completely invert the traditional timelines so as to establish Buddhism as the ‘source’ of all the innovations in Hindu religion and philosophy. Specifically, if the *Rāmāyaṇa* (traditionally from the *Tretāyuga*) can be shown as being after the *Mahābhārata* (traditionally from the *Dvāparayuga* that follows the *Tretā*) then it becomes easy to locate the Buddha as prior to both *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. A few more moves and the field is set for “a reactionary Hinduism” – led by its wily Brahmin elite - that consistently seems to subsume ‘foreign’ ideas like Buddhist thought and appropriate them.

The key point to remember in all this is that these timelines - at their axiomatic base - still have not unshackled themselves from Colonial Indology of Max Mueller’s time. His and other colonial Indologists’ wide ranging and determinedly post-Biblical-flood estimates compressed a few thousand years of pre Christian era Indian history into a few hundred years, full of highly linearized interpolations. (Arya 2016) for example shows the deliberate confusion engendered by Colonial Indologists regarding the date of the beginning of the *Śaka* era, which pervasively influences most dates regarding Hindu history upto the time of the Buddha and later. Even if the Indology timeline is the best one can do with available data, it is a far cry from being acceptably precise for one to start simply overturning the traditional view, and establishing a new priority of

one event over another. All the speculative reading is passed off as research, but the question remains: to what end?

More historicizing often attempts to show that Buddhism was hounded out of India by 'rival' Hinduism's zealous advocates, although this is quite untenable due to the self-attested history of the 10th century onward Islamic invaders – Bakhtiar Khilji onwards, without exception - which unabashedly celebrates their accomplishment in this regard. Their own historical record shows their relentless destruction of 'idolatrous temples' that, unbeknownst to them, also meant wholesale extinction of Buddhist *vihāra*-s (havens of "but *parasti*" i.e. idol-worship, "but" also being a corruption of the word *Buddha*) with their 'clean shaven Brahmins'. Indologists of late seem to have a hard time acknowledging that this was what actually led to the vanishing of institutionally dependent Buddhism from India.

As Western Indology, under the lead given by prestigious scholars like Sheldon Pollock, proceeds further into its research program on India, there is more that is being built upon this current edifice of India's Religions. Now the next layer of academic knowledge has begun to whittle away at the perceptions of the positives of Hinduism. It is asserted that it is not really the inherently well-grounded and dynamic nature of Hinduism, but its appropriations from and reactions to Buddhism that have given the world today's sophisticated philosophies and practices like *Vedānta*, *Yoga* etc. Per this theorizing, "the wily elite" of the times of the Buddha and after, incorporated basically 'foreign' ideas into their own inferior and backward looking mystifying Vedic philosophies since Buddhism introduced "Axial" (Pollock 2004, Bellah 2012) ideas into Indian civilization. (Malhotra 2014) has also comprehensively shown that this same mode of theorizing is in vogue to establish and then deride the academically created entity "neo-Hinduism" –which incidentally delegitimizes modern Hinduism - and its supposed founders, the 'Nationalist elite' of colonial era India. Here the supposed source of their borrowing is the European Enlightenment that the British colonizers carried into India, and the Indian elite were interested in appropriating. So it appears Hinduism – neo or otherwise - is something to be reliably invoked when a straw man is required to show how it is the wily elites of India who illegitimately borrow from others.

After the positives of Hinduism are thus analyzed away, it is the turn of the perceived negatives to be brought in. This would include the blaming of current political problems of India on some inherent Hindu essence, or some variant of the persistent ‘wily Brahmin keeping power to himself’. Upadhyay (1979) is a good example of this, having completely internalized the Indological framework in his sweeping historicization of Brahmins from Vedic times to the twentieth century. To top it off, we now have Pollock’s students, Indologists like Audrey Truschke, supported by her students, using this genre of selective textual ‘research’ to even rehabilitate proven Islamic bigoted Mughal emperors like Aurangzeb into some benign presence beneficial to Sanskrit, irrespective of how cruelly he oppressed its native practitioners, and regardless of how gleefully his official historians –and the mute evidence of archaeology – recorded fact after fact emphasizing the same.

## Western Frameworks: Buddhism vs. Hinduism

All current academic frameworks are Western defaults, entirely dependent on how the West has historically constructed knowledge of India. One key item to remember (Elst 2013, Weber 2001) is that the West initially got exposed to Buddhism not from its original cradle in India, but via looking at its exported varieties developed in other Asian civilizations such as China, Japan and South East Asia. Hence Western knowledge frameworks are almost axiomatic in their belief of Buddhism – associated mainly with other ‘Asian’/‘Oriental’ countries, being distinct from Hinduism – associated exclusively with India. Also Buddhism, since it has been ‘triangulated’ – i.e. abstracted and cross checked – via various independent cultural sources, appears in scholars’ eyes to be a pre-existing coherent and stable category, as opposed to Hinduism which is ‘constructed’ and chimerical in their eyes. This Western study of Buddhism has been generally under the charge of the Buddhologist, who generally has a lot more pan Asian linguistic and cross cultural competence (Staal 1996: 409).

It is also an interesting fact of history that typically China is considered via frameworks emphasizing ‘rationality’ since studying it was the fashion during the European Enlightenment era, whereas India is studied via frameworks emphasizing ‘religion’ since studying it began to be fashionable during the European Romanticism era. These two

trajectories have important bearing on where we have ended up today, especially in explaining why Indology is still trapped in the ‘religion’ framework.

In contrast to “stable” Buddhism, the fate of Hinduism — as an academic construct in the charge of the Indologist — has kept changing with the changing perception of India in European, and now Westernized academic eyes globally. As India moved over time from being an exotic ‘mother’ civilization (via Voltaire and Romantics), to becoming a colony of defeated kingdoms and a broken down intellectual structure (via Colonial Indology), to finally ending up as a post-colonial ‘developing third world’ country (via Modernization theory, Area Studies, Postcolonial studies etc., all dependent on Indology for their primary base framework even when reacting against it); the valuation given to Hinduism also kept going up and down with it (Breckenridge 1993: Selected summarization in my previous SI-1 paper).

The well founded fact that the backbone of the Indian cultural mainstream is – even now – the continuation of the primarily Vedic, even pre-Vedic civilization cannot be easily wished away; but this shows up mostly via negative critical analysis of today’s politics and problems. The current problems of Indian society are still blamed on Vedic values and traditions – i.e. Hinduism - that refuse to die away in the face of modernity. (Deshpande 1999) shows the history of this in a detailed survey of the history of Westernization, Modernization, Development paradigms in use for Indian sociology/anthropology.

Indologists in turn make indiscriminate use of whatever suits their preset theses from these social science fields. The way in which Indologists totally refuse to do any inter-cultural comparisons to justify this implicit but persistent verdict on Hinduism and India is certainly highly unscientific. No serious comparisons are shown with, for example Christianity or Islam’s relation to the violence prevalent in societies dominated by them. Moreover, all the negativity about Hinduism is juxtaposed against either Western best-case scenarios, or egalitarian intellectually sophisticated Buddhism, which is shown as somehow grandly aloof from all this social context, other than vainly trying to ‘civilize Axially from inside’ and then walking sadly away with tears in its eyes, as it were.

## How It Works in Indology: The Hindu-Buddhist ‘Divide’

The Western construct of “Religion” plays a key role in establishing a divide between two entities, namely the religions of Hinduism and Buddhism. Some of the key axiomatic, hence unquestioned, assumptions are as follows. Firstly, it is assumed that there were historically two separate, self-standing Religions of Hinduism and Buddhism, at least after the life of Siddhārtha Gautama, the Buddha. Secondly, it is assumed that Gautama started and established a protest movement against the prevalent Vedic religion that is now known as Hinduism. Thirdly, it is assumed that much of the post *Rgvedic* writings - especially the *Āranyaka*-s and *Upaniṣad*-s that deal with *jñāna*, i.e. knowledge mostly abstracted from Vedic rituals - either (a) did not exist at Buddha’s time, or (b) if they did, did not contain knowledge framed coherently as knowledge. This knowledge-as-knowledge is assumed to be a reactive construction based actually on Buddhist knowledge. (Staal 1996: 115, for details on *Mīmāṃsā*, its chronology) shows a different, more coherent way of reading this, and a way more in consonance with the traditional outlook.

In order for this characterization to stick, there also are unresolved issues that have to be forcibly interpreted one way, i.e. to only favor the hypothesis. A lot of Hindu (non-Buddhist) literature has to be postdated to comply, eg. The *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Mahābhārata* etc. (Bronkhorst 2003)

## Across Disciplines: a Philosophical View

If one provisionally puts aside the mode of historicizing, and pays attention to what scholars of philosophy have been saying about the contents of the two thought systems of Hinduism and Buddhism, there is much to be learnt. It is quite easy to see that the commonalities are such that any claim of “axial breakthrough” by Buddhism - in terms of abandoning or radically overturning or altering an existing system in India - ring quite false (Staal 1996: 406ff; Ch28 with detailed reasoning, especially section 28B).

The Buddha’s own statements as saved for posterity via the *Tipiṭaka* are quite clear in this regard. Most emphatically, he never advocated any

radical social revolution, i.e. any repudiation of the existing *jāti-varṇa* ('caste') system. He insistently said he was only reiterating the ancient knowledge. Also already in place in India was the *Śramaṇa* tradition (*Jaina*, *Ājīvika* and many others) in its many variations which made – and still makes – a person's world-renunciation a non-unique social event, even a commonplace event. This is what India has known for ages as the distinction between *pravṛtti-mārga* (worldly householder's way) and the *nivṛtti-mārga* (renunciant's way).

Without taking away any of the merit of the Buddha's message, there was and is nothing unique in the basic contours of his social experience, found too commonly in many other less publicized traditions across the length and breadth of India. The one possible uniqueness could be the pan Asian spread of his message and the impact it had and continues to have, on other civilizations. Even here, Buddhism-as-Buddhism is not advocating anything as socially radical or revolutionary the way Judaic prophets, or later Christian institutions were doing. It is the receiving culture that adopts and adapts Buddhism to its own social formations, without traumatizing itself by abandoning any of its own pre-existing foundations. (For Buddhism in China/Japan, see Baird 1971; also, Introduction in Puligandla 1994)

## Why are Both Religions at all, and How Different Really?

Let us see if it is possible to talk about things without recourse to the idea of 'religion' and associated key terminology like theism, founder, scripture, and the like. (Staal 1996:401; Frazer:64–65 Chin Kung on why Buddhism is not a religion) If one can still talk coherently about these two systems, this should alert one to the fact that this 'religion' based terminology - grafted fairly recently, let us remember - is not only superfluous, but also misrepresents the entities we are talking about. When one looks at the preserved debates amongst various schools – obviously including Buddhism - in India, one sees just that. They are all based on the standards of *pramāṇa* *śāstra* (methods of proof). *Pratyakṣa* (available to cognition/senses), *anumāna* (inference), *upamāna* (analogy), and other auxiliaries obviously are *pramāṇa*-s grounded in the logical and empirical. Even with regards to *śabda*-

*pramāṇa* (the ‘word’), there is interpretation of the Veda (*śabda*) only for āstika schools, whereas since Buddhists will not accept Veda as *pramāṇa*, the debates are carried out without recourse to it. Hence the Buddha’s silence on – and not denial of – theism was hardly the kind of ‘religion’ vs. ‘atheism’ issue that we see in contentious modern Western style debates.

It is not difficult to show that Buddhism in essence is an abstracted, culturally decontextualized path entirely based on and compatible with a huge subset of Hindu thought and practice. Its career inside and outside India has ample evidence showing this (Malhotra 2011, Bronkhorst 2003, Staal 1996). Neither India – the donor – nor the Asian countries that were the receivers were looking at ‘religion’ – especially in the sense of doctrines or truth claims, rather the focus seems to have been to learn and adopt ideas, mores and methods that enhanced their own civilizations. Hence we find that much of the Vedic practices that made it into places as far away as Japan, now considered to have happened under the umbrella of Buddhism (Staal 1996:403–405). This would hardly have been possible if they thought they were dealing with two separable and conflicting entities called “Buddhism” and “Hinduism”.

The existing Hindu cosmology during the Buddha’s time was – and still is – entirely compatible to his message. There is a strong correlation between the Hindu framework of the *pañca-koṣa*-s and the Buddhist five *Skandha*-s, when it comes to modeling the macro and micro cosmos, and the living human body, at increasing levels of subtlety. The analogy between the prevalent Sāṅkhya/Vaiśeṣika *tattva*-s and the Buddha’s framework is strong enough to show that he did not have to propose any radically new cosmology, or even do much more than extend existing terminology to put across his teachings. (Dalai Lama 2005:52–53 on *Vaibhāṣika* framework in works of Dharmasri, among others). One might concede that there was an increasing effort to reflect upon this cosmology in terms of developing a structured thinking, and that these would later become the *darśana*-s, of which Buddhism is considered a member, as part of the *avādika/nāstika* subset.

This makes Buddhism not an originator, but only a part of a trend towards increasing reflexivity – with greater emphasis on structured thinking and conceptual communication in the culture, historically

speaking. It is hard to see how Buddhist thought can become the unique originator of some culturally disruptive Axiality when it started out quite within existing frameworks of thought. Ever since the Buddha's time, Mīmāṃsā/Nyāya/Buddhist debates have a long history showing the topics coalescing around key preexistent themes and issues, and show only an intensification of focus on specific issues post Buddhism, but not any disruption in topics of debate (Vidyabhushana 1988, Puligandla 1994, Phillips 1995).

The genius of Buddhist thought was and is its disciplined self-limitation to actionable aspects of human psychology to solve the existential problem of human existence, i.e. dukkha, without getting too entangled in distracting arguments over underlying metaphysics, theology etc (Baird 1971 and others: Sutta about healing from arrow without worrying about the 'caste' of the shooter) But this is a far cry from claiming that Buddhism caused some radical shift from a 'ritualistic' thinking to a 'spiritual' thinking, and that it 'broke up existing social hierarchies' by engendering conversions from Hinduism (Weber 2001: on Buddhism having predominantly elite converts).

Buddhist thought, throughout its history, has only sharpened the focus of existing culture towards a more pragmatic psychological emphasis on attaining personal enlightenment, using and building upon tools already at hand before his time. The tools were always geared towards a soteriology that was for a unitive vision of the cosmos, and for personal and social efforts to attain the same via harmony within the person and the society. Staal also clearly shows that Vedic rituals, with high discipline and rigor, but also with their utter lack of interest in this-worldly rewards (the reward-based justifications and explanations came much much later than the rituals themselves proper); can be considered to this day as a continuously existing living prototype of the *niskāma karma* or 'work without expecting results' that was later spelled out in the *Upaniṣad*-s and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and also was fleshed out in a uniquely refashioned way in Buddhism. (Staal 1996: 121-122).

## Current State of Indology Research

Since Indology derives its authority from its claim to objective knowledge using the latest cutting edge technologies from the social-sciences, we have to examine these tools. Objectivity in analysis is one goal considered worthy in any contemporary endeavor to obtain knowledge. In any social science, this would be great, provided there is a reliable way of removing the inherent subjectivity when one deals with human beings and their social motivations. There is no known reliable way to assess how truly objective an analysis is, since there is no repeatable experiment that can be performed to verify it, and no really unbiased observer to collect 'clean' data. The best we can do here is to lay out the current axioms guiding Indology. This will at least clarify how and why the Indologist methodically and repeatably arrives at the conclusions he does. It is only by accepting certain axioms as true can Indological claims seem logical. These axioms need detailed scrutiny.

We have already talked about at length in regard to, and problematized, the first one viz. Religion. We have shown that there is much incoherence in analyzing Hinduism and Buddhism as two separate members of this category viz. Religion. In fact Staal is on record as saying and showing that this category – even in its more universal extended Durkheimian formation – is inapplicable for anything outside the three Abrahamic Monotheisms (Staal 1996: 401, 406, 415).

The next axiom is the pervasively used idea of any society primarily consisting of two well defined, fairly static camps, viz. an elite (presumably free of the 'taint' of meritocracy) and the remainder (an exploited proletariat and peasant class), both with diametrically opposed social interests. While admittedly this is a good first cut in analyzing an industrialized capitalist producer/consumer society as consisting of the Owner vs. the Worker; it is an oversimplified binary, and too reductionist for purposes of cultural analysis, especially of pre-Westernized/pre-capitalist-industrialized, but still sophisticated and complex societies. But this thinking is entrenched in academic social science, with its cultural studies etc., much of which uses this Marxist inspired binary axiom as an unproblematised starting point. In any case, Indian society is implied to be an unregenerate example of elite vs. 'the people', in that the "Hindu Caste System" with its supposed static social hierarchy is always brought in to explain (away) whatever

latest Indological conjectures there are regarding the causes of India's social problems.

There are a series of attempts to explain away the empirical fact that over its vast history, Indian society has shown remarkable continuity. It has been exceptionally stable and resilient even in the face of dynamic long duration disruptive events — axial or otherwise — as shown by (Malhotra 2011 on Integral Unity).<sup>1</sup>

Never allowed in the Indological analysis is the capacity for constant adjustment and resulting social dynamism exhibited by the civilization/society, in the face of both internal and external origin events. Evidence attesting internal dynamism and material progress is being rediscovered as more and more historical data comes out debunking the Orientalist/Marx-inspired stereotypical construct of the timeless static India of the sleepy villages. The response against major externally imposed events are well known — as evidenced by India's survival after centuries of Islamic imperial violence as well as Western colonialism that followed almost immediately.

## **Pollock as Indologist: a Scholar, a Doctor, or a Prosecutor?**

This brings us to the attitude with which Indologists conduct the practice of Indology, both in general, and in Pollock's case in particular.

A scholar is supposed to dispassionately study facts and data that then would lead to a hypothesis that shows causal patterns and explains events, i.e. create a valid model from objectively researching available data. On the other hand, a doctor is supposed to diagnose and 'solve' the 'case', where the solution is to restore the patient's health. A doctor is different from a medical researcher (i.e. a scholar) who may study the same phenomena, since he — the doctor, but not the scholar — has the responsibility to make life and death decisions affecting the patient's future, but in a positive way. A medical researcher — typically not responsible for the patient's health — cannot advocate solutions, let alone make direct life and death decisions. Amongst attorneys, a public prosecutor is also supposed to use all the facts/data at his command, and 'solve the case'. But in his case, success typically means

a ‘negative’ outcome of a ‘guilty’ verdict for the accused. In actual practice, the prosecutor - though supposed to be fair and objective - is under huge pressure and incentivized to produce guilty verdicts. So he conducts his case with a specific outcome in mind, it is not open ended inquiry the way a scholarly inquiry is supposed to work.

If the subject/case is a society/culture/civilization, each of these above approaches necessarily lead to different results, different ‘negative’ or ‘positive’ outcomes. The prosecutorial approach that Pollock arguably adopts is pre-ordained to the tenets of his Political Philology. The ‘verdict’ already built into its presumptions necessarily leads to a ‘negative’ outcome for the culture/civilization under scrutiny, making this an overwhelmingly ‘prosecutorial’ venture. There may be pretensions of being a ‘doctor’ with the civilization as a ‘patient’ to be ‘cured’, but then the ‘doctor’ would have to be held up to a much higher standard of accountability, along with the Hippocratic oath: “First do no harm”. Wallerstein asks for “reopening entirely the epistemological question” instead of being caught in the binary of Orientalism vs. its reverse (2006:47). When research holds on to its Orientalist roots, but still morphs into and becomes muscular activism – as Pollock’s work avowedly does; however scholarly its claims may be, the bar should be much higher. The question is, do Indologists like Pollock hold themselves up to such a high standard?

Here it might be instructive to see the prosecutorial approach that is in the DNA of Indology. Right from its inception during colonial times, Germany has been at the forefront of Indology both as a center of major activity and as a source for the overwhelming majority of authoritative scholars, including the very important Sanskritists. Adluri and Bagchee (2017) show, with comprehensive first-hand references and footnotes, that the clearly discernible motive for German Indology was to demonize and then displace the traditional Brahmin led scholarship framework of Sanskrit texts and practice.

The authors elaborately show how the explicitly Enlightenment-critical and implicitly Protestant supersessionist bias in their *Wissenschaft* framework meant that the Indian tradition was *a priori* held guilty of being responsible for India’s ‘decadence’ and other gross social ills and injustices, which the said *Wissenschaft* would correct. They clearly show that German Indologists qualify as a ‘caste’ of neo-Brahmins by Max Weber’s own influential sociological criteria,

whereby their whole *Wissenschaft* methodology was predicated upon usurping the Brahmins' role for the sake of 'progress' and 'science'. Not only that, they also clearly show that current Indology – including the Pollockian variety – is not too far methodologically from its original roots, and so has the same issues of bias and usurpation of *adhibhāra*. This notwithstanding loud cries of "Deep Orientalism" (Breckenridge 1993) where Pollock tries to make out Brahmins as the "original Orientalists" by another typical masterly sleight-of-hand, projecting historical eras backwards in time and inverting the aggressor and victim relationship.

## History of Axiality and Its Relevance for Indology

The quasi hypothesis of the "Axial Age" in its strong form, or the "Axial Breakthroughs" in its weak form – is being generally revived in academic global studies involving Religion, and is specifically being deployed as a major tool in the analytic toolbox of Indologists. In a simplified form it can be understood as the claim – that there was a global breakthrough/disruption in human history, across most major world civilizations (hence the name 'Axial civilizations'). This breakthrough is supposed to be based on an increased reflexivity (tendency to look in as if from outside, i.e. as a detached observer) with the historical progress of human thought. This led to people writing down objective descriptions of their own existing societal structures and their cosmologies, and following it up by discussion and critique, and eventual problematization of the same.

Inevitably, owing to its genesis in the Western thought world, the theory depends heavily on the Greco-Semitic cases as a paradigmatic starting point, and attempts to extend this to other major civilizations as cases of a similar process. Buddhism, with its pan Asian spread and deep history across cultures and civilizations, is invoked as also "Axial", especially to give the putative theory a global ring beyond what would in essence be just a Mediterranean phenomenon, which used to suffice as a stand-in for "humanity" in the Eurocentric past.

This is not finding uncritical acceptance: "But we must beware of fitting them into a master teleological narrative composed from what is itself a parochial and selective point of view." (Bellah 2012:333).

In its strong form, the “Axial Age” idea depends on the profusion of written philosophy by Greek philosophers, and the writing down of Judaic Prophetic revelations, both of which happened around the time of 500 BCE plus or minus 200 odd years. India and China are pulled into this framework in ways that are still under contention (Bellah 2012). In its weak form the hypothesis merely says there were different breakthroughs in different civilizations, and opens up the timeline to allow for more cases from these and other civilizations to appear part of a relevant dataset, thus lending the hypothesis more validity.

The extension of Axiality for India involves the appearance of Buddhism (and Jainism, *Ājīvika*-s, etc. to a lesser extent) around the time of 5th century BCE. Here’s where we start seeing the key anchor for justification of the idea of radical difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. Since Axiality involves disruption to existing societal patterns, Buddhism must have provided this disruption – a logical deduction from these premises based on extant Indological scholarship.

This however is refutable. Buddhism, even if a breakthrough, by no means is proven to be a civilization level disruption. Nor is the breakthrough unique even inside India. In fact, the move from *Śāṅhitā*-s to *Brāhmaṇa*-s to *Āraṇyaka*-s to *Upaniṣad*-s is a textually mapped journey for Vedic thought, very similar to the Buddha inspired one, or to the *Mahāvīra* inspired one for Jaina thought. The simplest explanation would be of them all crossing evolution thresholds and undergoing cross fertilization around this timeframe. This is the simplest data-backed explanation of Indian conditions over time, and would work for an objective observer. This argument is also given strongly at a global level at various places (See Bellah 2014). There have been and still are many scholars who still hold this view. In spite of being heavily invested in Buddhist scholarship, Obeyesekere (2012) does not quite endorse the idea of Buddhism being a huge disruption in India. “Obeyesekere, with respect to early Buddhism, takes almost an opposite approach. He suggests that our modern notion of the theoretic, what he calls “conceptualism,” though found in Axial India, is inadequate as an exclusive way of understanding what was happening. He emphasizes the presence of visionary experience and aphoristic thinking as moving beyond purely rational thought, though with universalizing consequences.” (Bellah 2014:5).

It might be pertinent to add that if these Western scholars invested in some deeper study of the entirety of the Indian tradition, they would also easily discover the sequence: that the “vision” / “*darśana*” always comes first – whether Vedic, Buddhist or otherwise, even and including current gurus – and only later is it broken out into a philosophical framework. Dissemination happens orally next, and only later is transmission stabilized with help of writing, if at all. Obeyesekere acknowledges this clearly for the Buddha (*all emphases mine*) (2012:131-133, and elsewhere):

#### “Visionary Knowledge

The kind of visionary knowledge that I have discussed thus far entails, I think, the abdication of the Cartesian *cogito*, at least when knowledge appears before the “eye” of the seer, irrespective of the religious tradition involved. Thus Julian’s characterization of her visions as “showings.”<sup>8</sup> The Buddha’s showings during the first and second watches of the night occur when discursive thought is in abeyance, as is clearly recognized in early Buddhist texts. This means that the thinking-I is suspended during trance, dreaming, and psychotic fantasies and also in fleeting moments when pictures as well as thoughts of a non discursive nature float into our ken. One must not assume that cerebral activity is suspended during this state. I am inclined to postulate the idea of passive cerebration as against the active I-dependent cerebral activity involved in our rational discursive thinking processes.

(...)

Given the preceding discussion, the conventional view of Buddhism as an exclusively rational religion has to be seriously reconsidered. It was the theosophist-cum-rationalist Colonel H. S. Olcott who asserted that “Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, and not a creed,” and this credo has become the standard view of native intellectuals in contemporary Buddhist societies.<sup>13</sup> Yet contrary to modern Buddhist intellectuals, the Buddhist ratio is radically different from both the Greek and the European Enlightenments.<sup>14</sup> The European Enlightenment with its reification of rationality ignored or condemned visionary experiences; not so the Greek, it seems to me.

Plato employed reason for discovering true knowledge, but neither he nor Socrates condemned or ignored such things as the work of visionaries and prophets and personally believed in the oracle at Delphi. By contrast, the Buddha condemned all sorts of popular “superstitions” as base or beastly arts in a famed discourse known as the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (“Tenet of Brahma”) but never visions and knowledge emerging through

meditative trance (*jhāna*).<sup>15</sup> During the first and second watches the Buddha sees his own life histories that then are extended to include those of human beings in general, their births and rebirths in various realms of existence. Through the “pictorialization” of births and rebirths, the Buddha can grasp the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth, can see it operating. During the third watch he discovered the existential foundation of Buddhism, these being the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism: *dukkha*, suffering, the unsatisfactory nature of existence owing to the fact of impermanency; *samudaya*, how *dukkha* arises owing to *tanhā*, thirst, attachment, greed, desire, or craving; *nirodha*, cessation of craving that might ultimately lead to *nirvana*; and *magga*, or the path that can help us realize *nirvana*, also known as the “noble eightfold path” including right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Right concentration is *saṃādhi* or the meditative disciplines leading to complexly graded states of trance (*jhāna*, *dhyāna*) that permitted the Buddha to intuit the very truths mentioned above.

We do not know how the Four Noble Truths appeared to the sage in the dawn watch. An early text, however, gives us a clue regarding the **the manner in which intuitively derived knowledge is given rational reworking**. It says that when an Awakened Being has arisen in the world, there is a great light and radiance (associated with direct visionary knowledge), and then “there is the explaining, teaching, proclaiming, establishing, disclosing, analyzing, and elucidating of the Four Noble Truths.”<sup>16</sup> The Buddha adds: “This, *bhikkhus* [monks], is the middle way awakened by the *Tathagata* [Buddha], which gives rise to vision, which gives rise to knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbana* [*nirvana*].”<sup>17</sup>”

(Obeyesekere 2012:131-133)

Writing is held up as a major innovative feature of Axiality, but many scholars, for example Staal, also recognize that a civilization can be a ‘high’ civilization in spite of – or even because of – its text transmission being oral for the most part, with writing being only a later ‘back-up’ feature (Staal 1996:37, 142-143, 385). Indologists, especially of the Pollockian mode, still have a hard time dealing with – or explaining reasonably – the precision/accuracy and integrality of the oral transmission that the Vedic corpus maintains to this day. They would rather stick to elevating and anointing dead written texts as ‘normative’ and speculate on motives of the writers/readers, than engage with the living tradition.

Lack of interest in going deep enough would naturally leave one looking selectively to show Axial disruptions even when the civilization under study has repeatedly shown its enduring continuity, even while allowing a multiplicity of systems to thrive.

Arnason (2005) and Bellah (2014) show that there is much justification, as well as contestation of the validity of this Axiality hypothesis among academics. It is one among many alternate ways of looking at the world's historical trajectory, which could also be independent of any idea of Axiality. There is nothing universally valid about it, in fact it is certainly a product of Western thinking, which tends to be Universalistic. For example Wallerstein says, as part of his "World Systems" hypothesis<sup>2</sup>:

"So we may start with the paradoxical argument that there is nothing so ethnocentric, so particularist, as the claim of universalism. Still, the strange thing about the modern world-system—what is uniquely true of it—is that such doubt [regarding universalist arguments] is theoretically legitimate. I say theoretically because, in practice, the powerful in the modern world-system tend to show the claws of orthodox suppression whenever doubt goes to the point of undermining efficaciously some of the critical premises of the system."

(Wallerstein 2006:39-40)

By advancing the Axiality argument to show Buddhist 'disruption', Pollock is implicitly doing just that, using a mostly Western particularist reading to claim universal applicability, in this case to Indian conditions. (Pollock 2004)'s influence is such that others are now quoting him on the Buddhist Axiality hypothesis without critical comment, as Witrock is in (Bellah 2012:115-116).

The Axiality hypothesis is just not compelling enough to be accepted willy-nilly for India, as Pollock, Shulman, etc. have been doing, per their contributions to the theorizing in (Arnason 2005). In fact, from a truly reflexive objective viewpoint, it seems quite obvious that the hypothesis is yet another attempt to construct a new grand narrative of world history, sophisticated on the surface, but one which has not abandoned the deep structures of previous Western attempts to universalize its own experience and knowledge as world knowledge as shown in (Wallerstein 2006) quoted above. Critics have indeed noted this, and hence the theory has not gained currency outside of select circles. But that has not stopped Pollock and his acolytes from using

it, since it is so convenient to explain, or rather explain away their ideas/conjectures as if based on solid historical foundations (Kennedy 1996, Wallerstein 2006).

## Pollock's Buddhism and Its Axiality

Pollock's take on Buddhism draws upon existing Indological scholarship, but it draws upon only a specific strand – as is only to be expected. As explained earlier (Staal 1996), the Indologist has a different background and training which is highly India-specific, as against a Buddhologist who is familiar with Buddhism's interaction with many diverse host cultures such as Tibet, China, Japan, Sri Lanka, Thailand etc. What Pollock does is to extend a very sketchy understanding of Buddhism's Indian origin and history, and use the premise of Axiality's global 'disruptive' pervasiveness. This is in order to claim that though there is not much ground evidence for Axiality being existent in ancient India in the realm of Power (no Empire level Axial disruptions), there are indeed strong grounds for axiality in the realm of Culture. So he says: "Accordingly, alternative explanations of imperial practices need to be elaborated, along with alternative models of the relationship of culture and power beyond those familiar from Western history and the EuroAmerican social theory that this produced" (Pollock 2004:400).

In other words, though nobody has so far shown Buddhism as leading to any large scale political disruption (realm of Power), Pollock's model seeks to show that it did lead to a huge cultural disruption, and thus reemphasize its qualification as an Axial disruption.

Readers may remember that much of Pollock's huge body of analysis is about the relationship between Culture and Power, using his study of India's Sanskrit texts as source. His study of texts is exclusive, needless to say, and focused to a degree that does not allow non-textual evidence to mar his conclusions. And his conclusions are aligned inevitably with his ideological goals of promoting his Political Philology.

Here's where it is indeed very important to also do an in-depth reading of other scholars of India, both Western and non-Western. This helps one to not get caught in skewed readings that are more polemical than factually objective. Frits Staal is a very pertinent case as a counterpoint to Pollock, especially since he has gone to the trouble

of moving way past the textual-only analysis and done extensive field work on Vedic rituals for decades. In his book, Staal (1996) draws upon multiple textual traditions including Western Buddhology and Indology, along with the tradition's own view of what it is doing. For very clearly argued reasons, Staal thinks (a) that the category of "Religion" misrepresents both Buddhism and Hinduism, and also (b) that Vedic ritual is not originally or primarily meant to have instrumental meaning in the mundane world. It is 'science', a ritual for the sake of ritual, an Orthopraxy, not Orthodoxy.

The implication of (b) above is a body blow to Pollock's theorization that pre-Buddhist Vedic culture was all about mystifying the people for political ends, i.e. 'in the realm of power' as Pollock would put it. The implication of (a) basically lends strong support to what is contended in this current paper, that the Pollock thesis on Hinduism vs. Buddhism – with Buddhism producing major Civilizational disruption – even makes sense only in the categorization scheme of both being Religions and separate and self-standing, not otherwise.

In his 2004 paper, "Axiality and Empire", Pollock is saying, in effect, that though the advent of Buddhism caused a lot of cultural change in India; it is indeed quite remarkable that this effect did not seem to show as spilling over into the domain of politics. He sees this as a flaw in the Axiality model, and brings in his model to show how cultural disruption meant political disruption in the Indian context. Needless to say, this depends on his characterization of the *Veda* as nothing more than a hegemonic political instrument in the hands of the elite Brahmin-Kṣatriya combine.

He again asserts that his analysis will not address any 'transcendental' issues as he finds the whole idea of transcendence problematic, that it "illegitimately privileges religion". This is consistent with his theorizing that religion – even and perhaps especially the Hindu variety - is basically a cover for politics.

As he correctly notes, building of 'translocal' empires is a key feature denoting axiality in a civilization, examples being Achaemenid, Roman, etc. His effort is to show that though India did not have an explicitly political translocal empire, its elites – primarily Brahmins – made clever use of the *Veda*-Sanskrit combine to gain political hegemony over a huge landmass and population, i.e. an empire in all but name.

The rest of his paper is about detailing firstly why he considers Buddhism Axial to India specifically, and then to contrast this with a detailed analysis of how Indian empire formations were consistently different from the other axial empires of Persia and Rome.

To show the axiality of Buddhism, he can lean on Jaspers himself, one of the founding fathers of the current incarnations of Axial theory. Schwartz follows Jaspers in this, but Eisenstadt had initially called late Vedic thought as ‘wholly axial’ and Buddhism as a secondary breakthrough. Pollock disagrees “according to the typology offered above”, i.e. his re-theorizing. He also quickly dismisses Heesterman’s similar, nuanced view with: “(He had argued) that it was the “gap” between Vedic revelation and ritual routinization, where rational order replaced “unsettling... revelatory vision,” that constituted India’s “axial turning point,” a conception again too vague to be of much use” (Pollock 2004:401). Accepting that the Vedic world itself took care of ‘updating’ itself Axially, would of course render Buddhist Axiality superfluous. He then finds “not further elucidated” Kulke’s view that stresses the social aspects of Buddhism, i.e. *Saṅgha* etc., as being more pertinent to Buddhism’s axiality than the Buddhists precepts in themselves.

Here he gets to his key points on the subject of Buddhism vs. Hinduism, with early *Mīmāṃsā* standing in as representing Hinduism. Saying that: “No adequately detailed and textually sensitive account is available of what the critique enunciated by the early Buddhists meant within the larger intellectual history of South Asia”, he moves on to lay out its outline. Readers can note the axiomatic assertion of Buddhism being a ‘critique’. The core of his position is as quoted here.

“While there can be hardly any doubt that the principal thrust of the Buddhist critique was directed toward actually-existing elements of the thought-world of early Brahmanism, it also seems likely that at least some of the most salient articulations of this world, what we now tend to think of as its foundational principles, may have first been conceptualized as a defensive, even anti-axial, reaction to Buddhism”

...

“It is self-evident that no one would elaborate propositions of the sort we find *Mīmāṃsā* to have elaborated, such as the thesis of the authorlessness of the *Veda*, unless the authority of the *Veda* and its

putative authors had first been seriously challenged."

Pollock (2004:402)

There are a number of 'self-evident' axiomatic assertions here, beginning with the certainty of Buddhism being a critique of Hinduism at large. It is this point we can tackle here, since everything else is supposed to logically follow from this and the resulting "transvaluation", for the next millennia or more.

Again, refocusing on categories of analysis, our first question is whether any of above assertions make sense outside the 'religions' criteria, i.e. what if this criteria were not employed? Do we see any serious assertions/hypothesis/'proven theory' in philosophical discussions – either Indian or Western – that Buddhism did effect any far reaching 'transvaluation'? The philosophical categories and related discussions carried on in India for centuries are nothing if not about 'valuation'. Here we have extensive material (Puligandla 1994, Phillips 1995, Potter 1990) that shows that while there were intense disputes about language, meaning, about soteriology (how to achieve 'Salvation', i.e. *Nirvāṇa/Mokṣa*), there was never any major 'shift' in the categories / cosmology used in the discussion. Yes, there was addition to the categories, creation of a few sub-categories, and a deepening of the definitions; but that cannot qualify as a sweeping change, as the assertion of 'transvaluation' seems to imply. Staal shows this in great detail. "... the Buddha did not preach in a vacuum. His teachings were not only preceded by those of Jainism, but they formed part of the general intellectual ferment that characterizes the seventh and sixth century B.C.E. context in India. In that context it should be simple to determine what doctrinal innovations the Buddha offered. In fact, they are surprisingly difficult to find and formulate" (Staal 1996:406-410). Staal continues to survey putative differences and shows there are no significant ones.

Pollock pulls in philosophically tertiary (but politically sensitive present day) issues, for example on 'sacrifice' (presumably animal killing, implied though not explicitly stated) via *Kūṭa-dantasutta* which is not a major *sutta* (Baird 1971, Grimes 1996: 367 charts on all Indian systems, showing classification of the main *Tipiṭaka*-s). This is good drama and tabloid style 'crime report', but hardly scholarly evidence.

He then calls ‘nonviolence coupled with noncoercion’ (the story of the Buddha dissuading a Brahmin from live animal sacrifice to symbolic sacrifice) as a ‘major ethical inversion’ (Pollock 2004: 402-403). But (Staal 1996:408) emphatically shows the commonality of outgrowing animal sacrifice in both *Upaniṣad*-s and *Jaina* works too, without dependence on the Buddha.

Pollock’s claim is that “Buddhist meditation” is somehow a precursor of all meditation systems, including the Hindu/Yogic *dhyāna*/meditation. Here he utterly ignores the fact that the meditations – like Ānāpānasati/Ānāpānasmr̥ti - that Buddha learnt from ‘pre-Buddhist’ Udraka Rāmaputra and Ālāra Kālāma still form the 3rd and 4th *Jhāna*-s prior to the final awakening/enlightenment (Elst 2013).

So Pollock’s implication that Vedic life was all about ‘sacrifice’ (implying animal killing) shows a lack of in depth explanation/understanding of what a *yajña* really meant then, or means even today. Staal shows *yajña* as much more than ‘sacrifice’ usually used in an Abrahamic sense (1996:69). Pollock’s mischaracterization of Vedic ritual is thus way off the mark, but very convenient for his overall thesis.

The other point that Pollock’s analysis focuses on is the idea of “normative inversion”. Here he attempts to show that Buddhist thought basically took existing words from the Vedic universe and inverted their meanings. Quoting:

“Consider the name chosen for the Buddha’s teaching, *dharma* (Pali *dhamma*), or even more combatively, *saddharma*, the real or true *dharma* (already in the oldest parts of the Pali canon). An ancient, even primary, meaning of *dharma*, the key word of Vedic ritualism, is sacrifice — it is to sacrifice that the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* is referring when it opens with the words “Now, then, the inquiry into *dharma*.” Early Buddhism thus sought to annex and redefine the term that expressed what Buddhism most fundamentally rejected. (Even *dharma*’s somewhat later sense of “duty” as an expression of one’s essential nature is turned upside down in the antiessentialist Buddhist appropriation.) Similarly transgressive redefinitions pertain to *ārya*, recoded from its old meaning, “noble,” a member of the “twice-born” social order, to “adherent” of the Buddhist spiritual order.

Pollock (2006:51-52), slightly reworked from Pollock (2004:403)

*(italics as in the original)*

He wishes to make it appear as if the Buddha really was thinking not like an enlightened master, but like a political strategist of modern times, “combatively” relabeling names like *Dharma* and *Ārya* and related concepts, to steal ‘membership’ and legitimacy from the competitor Hinduism. In this whole approach, what is clear is that both Vedic and Buddhist thought are reduced to ideologies that are competing for market share in society, and nothing more.

This again underscores the key point made by Malhotra (2015) that there is a major and consistent effort in Pollock’s works to deny the existence of *ādhyātmika/pāramārthika* components in Dharmic thought, be it Vedic or Buddhist. Obeyesekere (2012) is also pretty clear on this point, as quoted earlier here.

Here it is also glaringly obvious for anyone who knows their history that the reason why Chinese and other Asian scholars flocked to India was not because they were looking for newer *vyāvahārika*/sociopolitical ideologies, but because they saw a chance to learn knowledge and wisdom including, but quite often beyond the mundane *vyāvahārika* realm. “The diffusion was not just of Buddhism, but included the exportation of Indian philosophy, logic, science, medicine, astronomy, grammar, and Sanskrit legends, lore and literature” (Staal 1996:402). Also “We should first of all take into account what the Chinese were looking for. They were not waiting for a “religion.”” (Staal 1996:404-405). Here Staal then details the items of interest to the Chinese, quoting Strickmann.

In fact, Staal goes so far as to say that the more appropriate word would be “Indianization”, since Hinduism also was a huge export –especially to South East Asia – and it is difficult to extricate India’s Hindu and Buddhist exports from one another into neat separable ‘religious’ packages (Staal 1996:403-404 giving the sequence and items in detail). (Staal 1996:192-193, 228, 261) also shows that they also absorbed huge amount of Vedic *mantra-s*, which – contrary to what Pollock’s spin may lead one to believe – the *Mahāyāna/Vajrayāna* Buddhists of India/Tibet had also respectfully preserved and were actively using – as *mantra-s* – in their practices.

Another very important point that is repeatedly de-emphasized in the Pollock type of Indological analyses is that – with their text based fixations – they virtually ignore the fact that India even during Buddha’s times was a sophisticated civilization, despite not

being a ‘literary’ one, i.e. one where writing was the key means of preservation and propagation of culture. (Staal 1996) shows in great depth how the science of ritual — Vedic in particular — can be seen to be the key structure upon which language — Sanskrit in particular — has been built, with phonetics and syntax in place structurally — ritually, even before the search for semantic meaning of utterances led to the full blown development of language as we know it (Staal 1996:138-139).

The key point for us here is that Buddhist thought merely used and expanded on the already existing sophisticated base, and had no reason for, or interest in, any Axial disruption of the existing knowledge base, either *ādhyātmika*, *ādhidaivika* or *ādhībhautika*.

## Conclusions

This paper tries to show that the thesis of radical difference between Hinduism and Buddhism is built on very shaky premises, and is basically untenable. It brings back the question to whether it is suitable to use the ‘Religions’ construct to talk sensibly about Buddhism in opposition to Hinduism. It shows that when one ventures beyond purely textual analysis — that too based on some questionable *a priori* axioms as Indologists are wont to do — the idea of the Buddha’s teachings being civilizationaly disruptive in India — in the Axial sense — also does not hold much water.

Further this paper surveys the domains of philosophy, both Western and Indian, as well as anthropological fieldwork by scholars like Staal, to show how thoroughly is misrepresented the Indological interpretation of Vedic ritual — a foundational aspect of Hinduism. Anyone in touch with the practicing tradition will resonate with Staal’s claim that Hinduism, particularly the Vedic ritual, is more about “Orthopraxy” than about “Orthodoxy” as Indologists are wont to treat it.

For someone studying Hinduism and Buddhism, the key difference essentially is that between (a) studying written texts and then projecting one’s *a priori* axioms onto the civilization that produced it; vs. (b) taking the trouble to do an open minded study of the same civilization, by opening the field beyond texts, to the actual practices of the culture; a culture, moreover, that deserves to be studied as the living culture that it is, and not in the form of “the wonder that was”, i.e. a voiceless museum specimen represented only via dead texts.

Scholars like Staal (who with his deep engagement with the living culture followed up by his opus (Staal 1996)) have shown it i.e. (b) above can be done – to the point of restoring to Vedic ritual the status of science, whereas the Indological tradition exemplified by Pollock, unfortunately has not risen up to the challenge.

## Acknowledgments

The inspiration behind this paper is the series of thoroughly researched books of Rajiv Malhotra, beginning with *Invading The Sacred* (2007), then *Breaking India* (2011), followed by the seminal *Being Different* (2011) that laid out the basis for an alternate framework for categorizing Indian civilizational knowledge systems, then *Indra's Net* (2014), culminating in the *Battle For Sanskrit* (2016) which established a standard from which to begin a *pūrvapakṣa* of Western Indology. It is hoped this paper is a small but meaningful effort in strengthening that argument.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> India itself cannot be viewed only as a bundle of the old and the new, accidentally and uncomfortably pieced together, an artificial construct without a natural unity. Nor is she just a repository of quaint, fashionable accessories to Western lifestyles; nor a junior partner in a global capitalist world. India is its own distinct and unified civilization with a proven ability to manage profound differences, engage creatively with various cultures, religions and philosophies, and peacefully integrate many diverse streams of humanity. These values are based on ideas about divinity, the cosmos and humanity that stand in contrast to the fundamental assumptions of Western civilization.

<sup>2</sup> **World Systems Analysis** (Wallerstein 2004):

World Systems analysis is a methodology a few decades old, pioneered by Immanuel Wallerstein, and taken up and developed by many mainstream scholars. This is an attempt to systematically, and falsifiably (hence scientifically), set up a framework to analyze social events in a unidisciplinary way. The reason why it makes an appealing contrast to patently unscientific hypotheses like Axiality is that these have a built in history of Western Universalistic axioms that are not possibly to explicitly falsify (being based on authoritativeness, but can be seen increasingly to be less and less applicable to societies that do not share the peculiarities of Western European history).

Being unidisciplinary is to eschew the historical problems, involving the way disciplines in current social science have evolved from a Eurocentric base. It puts categories of time and space in a frame with a beginning and end, i.e. understandable limits. Time is based on the '*longue durée*', lasting from the beginning to the end of the particular 'world system'. The geographical space is the space which functions as a 'world' with its own multiple nation-states with their own production processes and interstate trade and other interactions, e.g. the Mediterranean world.

Wallerstein and others have established that the European world since the industrial revolution can be seen as a prototypical world-system, a system that, moreover, has over the centuries expanded to encompass most of the globe today, and a system that is in its end stages now.

While this system needs much more development and broadening to be really applicable to our topic at hand, i.e. ancient Indian history, its value lies in the fact that we can see it as a clear mirror that can show up the problems and plain incapability of the current systems of social science to show a satisfactory model of ancient India. Needless to say, one key category that India and other non-Western civilizations can add to the world systems is the *ādhyātmika* aspect; since the current European Enlightenment based systems – even world-systems – only have an ill-suited and narrowly relevant category of "Religion" to cover a vast aspect of human personal and social life.

# Chapter 4

## The Upaniṣad-s: The Source of the Buddha's Teachings

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### Abstract

Hinduism and its core concepts are facing many challenges today through the misinterpretation and distortion at the hands of Western academicians who are neither practitioners nor insiders. Age-old traditions of Indic civilization are subjected to scrutiny using defective methods and recast with new interpretations and dimensions. New theories which are alien to the civilization are coming forth from various quarters. One such recent 'discovery', proposed by American Indologist Sheldon Pollock, is that Buddhism, a prominent religion of Dharma tradition, is opposed to Hinduism. Prof. Pollock and his school of neo-Orientalist scholars, proponents of this theory, take minor differences existing between the two religions in the *vyāvahārika* world, and give it an absolute meaning. They forget or willfully disregard that there are two degrees of expression, about Reality, in Indic tradition – *vyāvahārika* and *pāramārthika*. While certain differences are common in *vyāvahārika* level, in the *pāramārthika*,

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\*pp. 135–162. In: Kannan, K. S and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*. Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

everyone's aim is same – be one with the Reality, be it *Brahman* or *Nirvāṇa*. And this Reality is not external to the body, but internal. In this paper, I intend to do a thorough philosophical evaluation of the two, to conclude that the foundation of Hinduism and Buddhism is the same. Both are well rooted in the Vedic tradition, especially the *Upaniṣad*-s. This is evident by the outlook of the *Upaniṣad*-s and the Buddha's teaching. I will strive to show that a philosophical research, rather than an evaluation of external ritualistic methods and arguments, will lead us to the conclusion that the Buddha's teaching is almost the same as *Upaniṣadic* teaching, but in a new terminology. The Highest Truth represented by the *Upaniṣad*-s and the Buddha shares similar aspects, only the names are different. I will demonstrate that the two planes of Reality that we get from the Buddha's teaching are also well represented in the *Upaniṣad*-s. In contrast to the common belief, I will attempt to show how the Buddha's theories of Dependent Origination (*pratitya-samutpāda*), No-Soul (*anātman*) are also not against the Vedic tradition. In fact, it is clear that they are in harmony with the *Upaniṣadic* teaching.

## Introduction

It is often remarked by some scholars that, there are only two religions in the world – Hinduism and Judaism. The rest are offshoots of these two religions. Hence, Hinduism is considered to be the mother of Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism while Judaism of the other Abrahamic religions. Only these two religions have robust and independent foundations. Other religions depend on these religions for their existence, myths, ritual, lore and theology. This is a commonly accepted norm in comparative studies in religions.

Buddhism is the second religion that emerged from the Hindu/Dhārmic tradition; the first being Jainism. Buddhism starts with the teachings of Siddhārtha, the Buddha. Siddhārtha after attaining *Nirvāṇa*, preached the Truth to the popular masses. This teaching is often alleged to be different from, or diametrically opposed to the then existing beliefs and customs of the masses, namely, the Vedic tradition. Though we may accept that there may have been some minor differences, because of the rise of a new sect, or say religion, great care must be taken before concluding that the new sect was totally opposed to the old traditions, because Buddhism in its outlook and tradition does

not differ radically from the Indic tradition. This is very evident when we compare the culture of the predominantly Buddhist nations with India. The sharp contradictions, in certain matters, that Buddhism has with Vedic tradition are also, in fact, not raised by the Buddha himself. Take the example of the Buddha's objection towards ritual sacrifices. It is the Upaniṣad-s, which first showed opposition to sacrifices. The Buddha continued to take that opposition forward vigorously. The *pratītya-samutpāda* and *anātman* theories of the Buddha are also related to the Upaniṣad-s. The core teaching of the Upaniṣad-s (from the Advaita viewpoint) as indicated in the expressions like *tattvamasi*, *aham brahmāsmi*, are ultimately against the concept of an individual *ātman*. We are *Brahman* at the ultimate level. Individuality is a product of *avidyā*. The Buddha's *Nirvāṇa* and *anātman* concepts also mirror the same ideas.

Deliberately disregarding this relationship between the Vedic and the Buddha's teachings, Western Indologists like Pollock have attempted to erect a wall between the two. They assert that the Buddha's teachings were opposed to the Veda-s. In this paper I attempt to counter their fallacious theories with proper arguments and evidence.

This paper contains sections that can nullify certain theories of Mr. Pollock. In the next two sections I give a short description of 'Vedism Vs Buddhism', as an entry into the subject, and the two main philosophical tenets taught directly by the Buddha. This will be helpful to set the tone for the positions that will be discussed in this paper. Pollock's critique of Hinduism and the Veda-s is also added for clarity. His comments on the topic are quoted. The next four sections are the core of this paper. In these I show that *pratītya-samutpāda* and *anātman* doctrines of the Buddha are not against Upaniṣadic teaching, but emerged from it. I quote the opinion of eminent scholars who are insiders to validate my points. The immense parallels between *Nirvāṇa* and Upaniṣadic *Brahman*, that make for a compelling case to state that both are same, are touched upon next. The claim that the Buddha rejected the authority of the Veda-s and the existence of two planes of Reality in the Upaniṣad-s and the Buddha's teaching are discussed in the remaining sections. The paper then discusses the implications of the fallacious theories propounded by the neo-Orientalists and finally ends with a conclusion.

Thought development is a continuous process. So when we start from the *Rgveda*, the oldest of our *śruti* texts and proceed to the *Upaniṣad*-s, which is the *Vedānta*, there is a refinement in the interpretation of the *Veda*-s, from the ritualistic to the philosophical. This shows the dynamism of Vedic society and its evolving capacity. We cannot choose a particular part of the Vedic compendium, compare it with the Buddha's teaching and then conclude that the Buddha was against the *Veda*-s. We should evaluate the core of Vedic thought with the teaching of the Buddha. Only then the research and study will be impartial, and output will be balanced. Such an attempt is made here.

## Vedism Vs Buddhism

### Vedism

The means to attain/realize the Ultimate Reality mentioned in Vedic literature are mainly two – *karma* and *jñāna mārga*-s. It is very important to note that one way to *mokṣa* never rejects the other in this worldview. Instead, one *mokṣa-mārga* legitimates the other by giving it an evolutionary role. It is only the degree of importance given to each that differs.

Among the Vedic texts, the *Veda*-s and *Brāhmaṇa*-s predominantly reflect realism. In them, the existence of *prakṛti* on its own terms is recognized and upheld. Gods are invoked and their help is requested for prosperity and fight against opponents. A dualism between man and nature, man and God is visible there. However, it would be wrong to assume that, the idea of monism is not present in the *Veda*-s. Even while worshipping multiple gods, Vedic people were sure that these gods are just manifestations of the One Reality<sup>1</sup>. Thus we can see a glimpse of monism, which later gets thoroughly expanded upon in the *Upaniṣad*-s. While Vedic injunctions primarily give importance to actions (*karma*), similar importance is given to knowledge (*jñāna*) in the *Upaniṣad*-s.

It is also worth noting that the *Upaniṣad*-s did not approve of sacrifices. Also, *Upaniṣadic* statements like 'tattvamasi', 'ayamātmā brahma', if we took them in the ultimate sense, do not allude to the caste-class divide. When taking a stand that *All this is Brahman / sarvam khalv idam brahma*, the meaning to be inferred is that everyone in the world irrespective

of caste and creed is divine in the ultimate sense. Division exists only at the *vyāvahārika* level, where *avidyā* exists.

## Buddhism

Buddhism, in its early period, was more or less a sect than a religion, established by its celebrated founder the Buddha. His teachings resembled those in the Upaniṣad-s, but in a different terminology. He was very liberal in matters of caste, though in some *sūtra*-s (*Ambattha sutta*) he seems to show a preference for *kṣatriya* over others.

The *anātman* concept of the Buddha does not accept the existence of any unchanging constant principle in the *vyāvahārika* world. But in the highest plane he also upholds a state akin to the Ultimate Reality, which he terms as *Nirvāṇa*. It is pointed out by many scholars that there are many similarities between the Upaniṣadic and the Buddha's teachings<sup>2</sup>.

## Two Main Philosophical Concepts of the Buddha

There are some fundamental doctrines of the Buddha upon which the Buddhist belief and philosophy is built. Most important among them are '*pratītya-samutpāda*' (theory of depended origination) and '*anātman*' (no-soul). These two are considered to be the kernel of the Buddha's teachings.

*Pratītya-samutpāda* theory states that **when this is, that is. From the arising of this, comes the arising of that. When this is not, that is not. From the cessation of this, comes the cessation of that.** The simple meaning of *pratītya-samutpāda* is that, things in the mundane world arise depending upon other things. When this thing ceases to arise, the other thing also ceases. The law of causation is inherent in this doctrine. The real import of *pratītya-samutpāda* is believed to be, as adopted by Mahāyānists, the theory of relativity.

Another key teaching of the Buddha is the *anātman* theory, a natural outcome of *pratītya-samutpāda*. According to this, there is no permanent agent called *ātman* because everything is relative. A relative entity cannot produce an unchanging, absolute entity like *ātman*. Everything in the mundane world is therefore without *ātman*.

Many of the Buddhist concepts are centered on these theories, particularly on *pratītya-samutpāda*. These are considered as the direct teachings of the Buddha and this claim has never been disputed at any time in history.

## Critique of Sheldon Pollock's Theses

Western Indologist and professor at Colombia University, Sheldon Pollock is the most influential member of the current day Neo-Orientalist school of Western Indological studies. He and his followers through their various theses distort Indian tradition, culture, *dharma* and reformulate them into a new narrative that reflect their own worldview. This Western universalistic worldview discounts India's oral tradition, makes *kāvya*-s devoid of religiosity, invents chronology for Indian literature so that it serves a pre-decided narrative, and pits the Buddha's teachings against Hinduism and so on. Since Pollock is considered an authority by many on Indian tradition, his arguments about Indian tradition must be critically evaluated, and countered if found to be in contrast with what the insider tradition believes.

Pollock claims in his book, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men*, that by the rejection of the *ātman*, Buddhism altogether negated Upaniṣadic thought.

“...positive transvaluations in early Buddhism of core *vaidika* values were complemented by a range of pure negations, beginning with *an-atta* (*an-ātma*), the denial of a personal essence, whereby the core conception of Upaniṣadic thought was cancelled.”

(Pollock 2006:52)(spellings as in the original)

This is a sweeping claim. By the above statement, Pollock wishes to establish that the Buddha wanted to cancel the Upaniṣadic teaching of *ātman* concept, be it the notion of a *paramātman* or individual *ātman*. But the opinion of eminent Buddhist scholars differ quite radically from the narrative of Sheldon Pollock. W. T. Rhys Davids says –

“Gautama was born and brought up and lived and died a Hindu.... There was not much in the metaphysics and principles of Gautama which cannot be found in one or other of the orthodox systems, and a great deal of his morality could be matched from earlier or later Hindu books. Such originality as Gautama possessed lay in the way in which he adopted, enlarged, ennobled and systematized that which had already been well said by others; in the way in which he carried out to their logical

conclusion principles of equity and justice already acknowledged by some of the most prominent Hindu thinkers. The difference between him and other teachers lay chiefly in his deep earnestness and in his broad public spirit of philanthropy."

(Davids 2000: 83-84)

As the opinion of major Buddhist scholars runs contrary to the claims of Pollock, we must critically evaluate the narrative built by Pollock through his research and examine the different *ātman* concepts that existed in the dharmic tradition in ancient times. Such an attempt is made here in this paper.

Continuing his false methods, Pollock argues that *Vaidika* systems start to write down their ideas due to Buddhist influence and that the *Rāmāyaṇa* was written after the Buddha, with heavy borrowings from *Jātaka* tales. Pollock is also emphatic in his opinion that the Buddha totally despised the *Veda*-s.

"Against the *Mīmāṃsā* tenet that the relationship between word and meaning is *autpatti*, "originary" or natural—a primal, necessary, and non-arbitrary relationship (some-times absurdly reduced by its opponents to a mechanical, even magical view of reference)—Buddhists typically argued for a relationship based on pure convention (*saṅketa*, also *avadhi*). What was at stake for *Mīmāṃsā* in asserting the uncreated, eternal nature of language is the possibility that *vāṇimaya*, or a thing-made-of-language—that is, a text, like the *Veda*—could be eternal too, something the Buddhists sought fundamentally to reject."

(Pollock 2006: 52-53)

This is only partially true. the Buddha was opposed to the *Veda*-s to a certain extent. But this was due to the elements of ritual sacrifice present in the *Veda*-s rather than any disagreement with language convention. There are also opinions from some scholars and dialogues of the Buddha that suggest that the Buddha did support the 'original, unaltered' form of *Veda*-s and later, due to the way sacrificial hymns were interpreted by certain Brahmins. The Buddha was compelled to reject their authority and sanctity. This issue is also addressed in this paper.

## The Upaniṣad-s: The Roots of Buddhist Philosophy

In the following portions I venture to show that the three major teachings of the Buddha – *pratītya-samutpāda*, *anātman* and *nirvāṇa* – have their roots in Upaniṣadic philosophy. This will greatly nullify Pollock's theses which have an inherent tone of separation between the Buddha's teaching and Vedic literature.

### ***Pratītya-Samutpāda* of the Buddha and *Madhu-Vidyā* of Sage Dadhyāñc**

#### ***Pratītya-samutpāda***

The Buddha always tried to avoid giving answers either in the affirmative or the negative to certain questions<sup>3</sup> in order to avoid the extremes of eternalism and annihilationism, and keep strictly to the Middle Way<sup>4</sup>. As an example, for the question *does the Tathāgata exist after death or not?*, the Buddha gave a thick silence as reply because he knew that if he gave 'Yes', it would be interpreted as promoting 'eternalism'. On the other hand, if he gave 'No', he would be promoting the annihilation theory. So he remained silent<sup>5</sup>.

The Buddha knew that the things that exist in the mundane world, neither exist nor non-exist ultimately. That being the case, what then was happening to them? The Buddha's answer was that, they are always 'becoming'. Things always arise depending on other things. This doctrine is known as *pratītya-samutpāda* or Theory of Dependent Origination (as per Mahāyānists, the Theory of Relativity). The doctrine of *pratītya-samutpāda* has profound meaning. In Buddhism, *pratītya-samutpāda* is also known as 'Twelve Chain of Causation' (Sogen 2009:85). It contains three periods – past, present and future.

In this theory of relativity, every entity in the world depends on other entities for its existence. Not only the objects in the mundane world, but also the mental states, are inter-dependent. Such entities that depend upon each other are said to be essence-less (Dasgupta 1933: 77). Continuously changing entities are therefore devoid of essence and thus ultimate existence. Ultimate existence is only for that, which exists by itself, without help from anything external.

## **Madhu-Vidyā**

Among Upaniṣad-s, the famous *Madhu-vidyā* doctrine is in the oldest one, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. It is taught by the sage Dadhyāñc. *Madhu-vidyā* doctrine's teaching is multifarious. But the main theme is that, everything in this universe is interconnected and thus has no independent existence. Hence, they have no essence. Let us quote from the commentary of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* by Śaṅkarācārya.

“Because there is mutual helpfulness among the parts of the universe including the earth, and because it is common experience that those things which are mutually helpful spring from the same cause, are of the same genus and dissolve into the same thing, therefore this universe consisting of the earth etc., on account of mutual helpfulness among its parts, must be like that. This is the meaning which is expressed in this section...”

(Swami Madhavananda 2011: 262)

Śaṅkarācārya here explicitly states that universal entities are in mutual helpfulness. Whatever exists by mutual helpfulness has no independent existence and so they are relative.

It is very much evident that, for a genius like the Buddha, the *pratītya-samutpāda* doctrine can be easily developed from the *Madhu-vidyā* doctrine of sage Dadhyāñc. Also, the Law of Causation (*kārya-kāraṇa-siddhānta*), mentioned elsewhere in the Upaniṣad-s is the foundation of *pratītya-samutpāda*. In addition, depended origination is strongly based on the Law of Karma, which is very well a Vedic concept. The *pudgala-dharma* *śūnyatā* of Buddhists has its roots in the Upaniṣad-s. That being the case, (it is a fact that a prominent teaching of the Buddha that gave birth to the *anātman* theory, has its roots in the Upaniṣad-s), how can Pollock claim that the Buddha nullified Upaniṣadic thought? In fact, the Buddha's teaching was just a re-statement of Upaniṣadic thought from a new standpoint<sup>6</sup>.

## **Anātman Theory of the Buddha and Unreal Jīvātman of Upaniṣad-s**

### **Anātman theory of the Buddha:-**

This is one of the natural outcomes of the *pratītya-samutpāda* theory. Since a permanent and unchanging *ātman* cannot fulfill the ‘relative’ characteristic of *pratītya-samutpāda*, this theory gave birth to the

*anātman* (no-soul) theory. This is an important doctrine of the Buddha. However, there is a lingering doubt that remains regarding this doctrine. Does the Buddha propound the *anātman* theory only with reference to the relative, mundane (*vyāvahārika*) world or was he applying this theory for both the mundane and trans-mundane (*pāramārthika*) world?

### ***Anātman Concept in the Mundane Plane:-***

Let us take the first position. If the Buddha's position was that there is no unchanging principle like *ātman* in the *vyāvahārika* (relative plane of reality), then there is no doubt that it is in alignment with the Upaniṣad-s, since the central teaching of the Upaniṣad-s is non-duality between the *jīvātman* and the *paramātman* (*Brahman*). In fact, the Upaniṣad-s also propound that there is no ultimate individual *ātman* (*jīvātman*) in humans. Our supposition of an unchanging entity like *ātman*, which is related to a single individual only, and our presumption that this is the true ultimate reality/supreme *ātman*, is due to the *avidyā* or ignorance that resides in us. When we obtain *brahma-vidyā*, *avidyā* will be extinguished and we will realize that we are the ultimate reality, *Brahman*. There is no *jīvātman* in the ultimate sense.

The Buddha also suggested that there is no *ātman* inside us permanently. To elaborate further, *ātman* is a term that we give, for the combined operation of five *skandha*-s and it can be annulled by knowing the four noble truths and practicing the eight fold path. Here, the Buddha clearly admits that people may feel something, like an *ātman* inside them and they may experience this entity as unchanging. The Buddha did not reject the feeling inside one, which is akin to *ātman*. Instead he asserted that people may feel something like an individual *ātman* in them, but that thought is utterly wrong. This was Buddha's position<sup>7</sup> and this is similar to the Upaniṣadic teaching.

The Upaniṣad-s say that the idea of an individual soul (*jīvātman/ātman*) in human, is a product of *avidyā*/ignorance<sup>8</sup>. By acquiring knowledge and practicing meditation, people can get rid of the ignorance and then subsequently find release from the clutch of the individual *ātman* concept. He then realizes the *paramātman*, or the *Brahman*. Likewise the Buddha advocated to his followers that there is no real individual *ātman* inside the body and if they feel so, they should know the Four

Noble Truths and practice the noble eight fold path to get rid of that feeling. The path that leads to the Ultimate Truth is almost the same in both traditions. The Upaniṣad-s accord importance to austerity, knowledge, discrimination, reflection (reasoning) and meditation (*nidhidhyāsana*). The Buddhist way to *Nirvāna*/Ultimate Truth includes these in a different package like understanding the four noble truths, practicing the noble eight fold path, meditation, self control, and so on. The similarity between the paths to the Ultimate Truth, in the Upaniṣad-s and the Buddha's teaching is indeed clear.

### ***Anātman* Concept in the Trans-mundane Plane**

We shall now study the second stand. Was the Buddha advocating that there is no Ultimate Truth, like *paramātman* or any such equivalent concept, beyond the realm of mundane world, by his *anātman* concept? In fact, the rejection of the individual *ātman* does not warrant the rejection of the *paramātman*, especially since the Buddha asserted many times that he had attained a highest level of existence, which is difficult to comprehend, which is beyond the realm of logic and which only the wise can attain<sup>9</sup>. There are practical difficulties to reject an Ultimate Reality because the relative, by default, indicates the existence of an Absolute. Without an Absolute, the relative cannot exist and sustain. While the Buddha admitted to the changing, relative character of the external world, he must have posited an Absolute realm too, without which the relative cannot sustain. Furthermore, if there is no Ultimate Reality, then a *mokṣa* aspirant would always be in the loop of *samsāra*, irrespective of how faithfully and earnestly he followed the four noble truths and the noble eight fold path. A *mokṣa* aspirant can then never attain *nirvāna*. Since an aspirant finds asylum from the relative mundane world in *nirvāna*, *nirvāna* itself has to be the Ultimate Reality.

### **Three *Ātman* Concepts and the Buddha's *Anātman* Theory:-**

We must also consider the different concepts of *ātman* that existed in India, while evaluating the Buddha's objection towards the *ātman*. This is a must because there are three *ātman* concepts in India, and from the teachings of the Buddha, we can see that he rejected only two of them, leaving the third intact. The three *ātman* concepts are given below.

**Individual Ātman** – According to this concept, there is an ātman inside each one of us and it is by itself eternal. There are many ātman-s in the universe. Each is independent of the other. The ātman controls the actions, and enjoys happiness and sorrow. After attaining *mokṣa*, the ātman will continue to remain independent, but in a supreme blissful state. This ātman concept is followed by *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika* philosophies.

**Jīvātman** – This is the reflection of *paramātman* on the *avidyā* in an individual; i.e., *paramātman* in the conditioned form. This ātman vanishes when *avidyā* is overcome and the person realizes *Brahman*.

**Paramātman/Brahman** – This is the highest level of Truth according to the *Upaniṣad*-s. This is the One without a second. All that exists in the universe is simply *Brahman*. This is beyond the realm of logic and the senses. This is the non-dual Truth and can be directly realized through *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana*.

Of these three ātman concepts, the Buddha rejected only the first two<sup>10</sup>. He could not have rejected the unconditioned *Brahman*, or such an equivalent Ultimate Reality because any such decision will then mean that people will be permanently entangled in *samsāra*<sup>11</sup>. There should be a way to overcome the hardships of *samsāra*. Logically, it then follows that there must be a Highest Reality. The Buddha called it *nirvāṇa*, and this state akin to the *Upaniṣadic Brahman*.

## ***Nirvāṇa* and *Upaniṣadic Brahman***

There were efforts to compare the ultimate realities propounded by the *Upaniṣad*-s and the Buddha's teaching, at all times. In fact, if you put *Brahman* and *Nirvāṇa* side by side, there is no great discernible difference. They are very similar concepts. As stated in the *Upaniṣad*-s, *Brahman* is all that is, and it is one without a second. These are descriptions about *Brahman*, not definition. Nobody can say what *Brahman* is since it is attribute-less or unqualified (from the *Advaita* point of view). The Buddha too did not define *Nirvāṇa*. To all questions related to its definition, he remains silent.

The Buddha does not talk about anything comparable to an eternal truth apart from *nirvāṇa*. This gives rise to an important confusion. Where is *nirvāṇa*? Is it inside our body? Or is it outside? Or is it inside and outside? Or is it neither inside nor outside?

The fourth option can be rejected altogether because it will lead us to conclude that there is no *nirvāṇa* at all. The problem with third option is that, if we attain *nirvāṇa* from outside, then it will not be our essence and therefore there is a chance of losing it. The second option can also be rejected for the same reason. Thus, only the first option is a possibility to consider and this position is very important because it means that *nirvāṇa* attainment is permanent. The concept of *nirvāṇa* is so depicted in the teachings of the Buddha. If it is posited that there is a possibility of losing *nirvāṇa* after attaining it once, then the aspirant needs to strive for it again. However, such an idea is surely not present in the teachings of the Buddha. *Nirvāṇa* attainment is permanent. And in the ultimate sense, what we can attain permanently is the one which is already inside us. That is, we must be in an enlightened state, by default. Enlightenment must not come from outside.

The Buddha in *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* states the same. Chandradhar Sharma in his important work 'The Advaita Tradition in Indian Philosophy' opines as follows.

"In a celebrated passage in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, the ailing Buddha says to Ananda: 'O Ananda! I have taught the Dhamma (Dharma) without any reservation and have not kept anything secret like a tight-fisted teacher (āchārya-muṣṭi). Now I am eighty years old and am somehow pulling on (the body) like an old tattered cart bound with ropes. I am going to leave the world soon. But there is no cause for grief as the light of Dharma is there. Ananda! my message for all of you is this: Let the Self be your light (attadīpa, Skt. ātma-dīpa), let the Self be your shelter (attasarana, Skt. ātma-sharaṇa); let the Dharma (the real) be your light (dharma-dīpa, Skt. dharma-dīpa), let the Dharma be your shelter (dharma-sarana, Skt. dharma-sharaṇa); do not seek light and shelter outside.'"

(Sharma 2007: 30)(spellings/diacritics as in the original)

Even if, as some scholars do, the word *atta* (ātma) in *atta-dīpa* is interpreted as meaning just oneself without any reference to an ontological reality called 'Self' and the phrase '*atta-dīpa*' is taken to mean 'you yourself are your light', it has to be admitted that the Buddha is asking his disciples to seek light within and not outside. Now, if there is no true 'Self', then who is to seek the light and where? And if all objects as the Buddha says are perishable and miserable and the light is to be sought only in the subject, then the reality of the transcendent subject is clearly implied in this passage"

This is very similar to the *Brahman* concept of the Upaniṣad-s<sup>12</sup>. The Upaniṣad-s says, all are *Brahman*. So we are divine by default. But we are not aware of our divine status. There must be something which prevents us from knowing our original divinity and which can be overcome through some specific methods. What prevents is *avidyā*. We must overcome *avidyā* and realize *Brahman* inside us. This Upaniṣadic concept of *avidyā* and *Brahman* is appearing in Buddhism as *avidyā* and *nirvāṇa*. In the Upaniṣad-s the locus of *avidyā* is in the *Brahman* (according to Advaita Vedānta)<sup>13</sup>. In that case one needs to understand where *avidyā* resides in the Buddha's teachings.

The Buddha states that the Twelve Chains of Causation<sup>14</sup> starts from *avidyā*<sup>15</sup>. But *avidyā*, being unreal (because we can destroy/avoid it by following noble eight-fold path), cannot exist by itself. *Avidyā* must be rooted in a Reality which can exist by itself. The Buddha says that all things in the mundane world are relative, and hence unreal, and are the cause of pain. So *avidyā* cannot be rooted in the mundane world. This then means, there is no Ultimate Reality, other than *Nirvāṇa*, about which the Buddha has preached. From this, the natural conclusion is that *Nirvāṇa* must stand together with *avidyā* at the beginning of the twelve chains of causation which is akin to the *Brahman-avidyā* concept of the Upaniṣad-s.

The characteristics of *nirvāṇa* are also similar to that of *Brahman/paramātmā*. Chandradhar Sharma continues.

"*Nirvāṇa*, like the Upaniṣadic *ātmā*, is repeatedly described by the Buddha as calm (*shānta*), immortal (*amṛta*), unproduced (*akṛta*), uncaused (*asamskṛta*), unborn (*ajāta*), undecaying (*ajara*), undying (*amara*), eternal (*nitya*), abiding (*dhrुva*), unchanging (*shāshvata*), highest joy (*parama sukha*), blissful (*Shiva*), desireless (*trṣṇā-kṣaya*), cessation of plurality (*bhava nirodha; prapanchopashama*) and the fearless goal (*abhaya pada*)<sup>16</sup>. All the epithets (or their synonyms) which the Upaniṣadic seers use for the *Ātmā*, Buddha uses for *Nirvāṇa*. *Ātmā* and *Nirvāṇa* stand for the Inexpressible and the Ineffable Absolute which is transcendent to thought and is realized through immediate spiritual experience (*bodhi* or *prajñā*)".

(Sharma 2007: 29) (spelling/diacritics as in the original)

S. Radhakrishnan, in his *magnum opus*, *Indian Philosophy* quotes a verse of the Buddha, from the *Udāna* which is similar to the characteristics and idea of *Brahman*.

"There is an unborn, an unoriginated, an unmade, an uncompounded; were there not, Oh mendicants, there would be no escape from the world of the born, the originated, the made and the compounded."

(Radhakrishnan 2013: 319)

We can thus conclude that the concept of *Nirvāṇa* is very much similar to the Upaniṣadic *Brahman*.

## ***Vyāvahārika and Pāramārthika in Vaidika and Buddhist Systems***

In a number of hymns, the Buddha has asserted that he had attained a state that is difficult to attain by others. Quoting from *Brahmajāla Sutta*, Davids (1923: 30)

"These, O brethren, are those other things, profound, difficult to realize, hard to understand, tranquillizing, sweet, not to be grasped by mere logic, subtle, comprehensible only by the wise, which the Tathāgata, having himself realized and seen face to face, hath set forth; and it is concerning these that they who would rightly praise the Tathāgata in accordance with the truth, should speak."

In this statement, the Buddha gives many epithets to the highest state that he realized – hard to understand, not to be grasped by mere logic, comprehensible only to the wise, and so on. All of these can also be applied to Upaniṣadic *Brahman* without a single exception. When the Buddha says that this state is *not to be grasped by mere logic*, it clearly indicates that the highest state is transcendental, not empirical.

The quote from *Brahmajāla Sutta* also shows that, like *vyāvahārika* and *pāramārthika* of Vedic literature, there are two levels/planes of existence in the Buddha's teachings too. Since the Buddha has realized a state which is difficult for others to grasp, he must be on a plane higher than the common people. Others can attain this highest level only by destroying *avidyā*. Thus two levels of consciousness are present in this conception, just like the *vyāvahārika* and *pāramārthika* of Vedic literature.

Another principle which points to the two levels of existence is '*nāma-rūpa*'. The Tathāgata has given discourses about *nāma-rūpa* (name and form) many times. In his discourses, he states that the objects that we see in the mundane world exist just as *nāma-rūpa*. Everything in the mundane world is in constant flux. They are in *coming into* and *passing*

by state always, and hence have no ultimate existence. They are devoid of essence and consequently the mundane world is expressible only in *nāma-rūpa*. This constant state of flux – being the state of the mundane world – means that it has to be rooted somewhere. This somewhere is then most certainly, the unchanging, transcendental plane. Here again, we encounter the concept of two planes of existence which mirror the Upaniṣadic worldview.

## The Buddha's Opinion on the *Apauruṣeyatva* of *Veda*-s

It is often believed that the Buddha rejected the authority of *Veda*-s and that led him to set up a new religion. In fact, this is a baseless argument.

Basing his opinion on early Buddhist texts, mainly *Anguttara Nikāya* and *Brāhmaṇa-dhammika-sutta*, Robert Spence Hardy (Hardy 1866: 43-44) comments that, the Buddha himself admitted that the *Veda*-s in their 'original' form are *apauruṣeya*, but that later certain Brahmins corrupted it by adding sacrificial hymns, due to which the Buddha ceased revering the *Veda*-s. Quoting from the book –

"the Buddha denied that the Brahmins were then in the possession of the real *Veda*. He said that it was given in the time of Kāsyapa (a former supreme the Buddha) to certain rishis, who, by the practice of severe austerities, had acquired the power of seeing Divine Bliss. They were Attako, Wāmako, Wāmadewo, Wessāmitto, Yamataggi, Angiraso, Bhāraddwājo, Wāsetto, Kassapo and Bhagu. The *Vedas* that were revealed to these rishis were subsequently altered by Brahmins, so that they are now made to defend the sacrifice of animals, and to oppose the doctrine of Buddha. It is on account of this departure from the truth, that the Buddha refused to pay them any respect."

(spellings/diacritics as in the original)

If the *Veda*-s were corrupted by Brahmins, then there must be a version of the *Veda*-s which are not corrupted. According to the Buddha this version is revealed to the previous Buddhas, and hence they must be *apauruṣeya*.

*Brāhmaṇa-dhammika-sutta* is very important in this respect. This *sutta* discusses the state and status of Brahmins in ancient times, especially

before the Veda-s get corrupted. Quoting from *Brāhmaṇa-dhammika-sutta, Sutta Nipāta* (Mills 2015: 71-75).

“Thus have I heard: At one time the Radiant One dwelt at Sāvatthī, in the Jeta Grove, Anāthapindika’s park. Then many decrepit old Kosalan brahmins, aged, elderly, advanced in years, attained to old age, those indeed of palatial abodes, went to the Radiant One and exchanged greeting with him. When this courteous and amiable talk was finished they sat down to one side. Sitting there these Brahmins of palatial abodes said,

“Master Gautama, are there now to be seen any Brahmins who practice the Brahmin Dharma of the Brahmins of old?”

“No, Brahmins, there are no Brahmins now to be seen who practice the Brahmin Dharma of the Brahmins of old.”

“It would be excellent if the good Gautama would speak to us upon the Dharma of the Brahmins of old if it would not be too much trouble.”

“Then Brahmins listen well and bear in mind what I shall say”.

“Indeed, venerable” said those Brahmins of palatial abodes to the Radiant One. He spoke as follows:

In ancient times the sages then  
austerely lived, were self-restrained,  
let go five bases of desire  
to fare for their own benefit.

Brahmins then no cattle had,  
no gold, no grain they hoarded up,  
their grain, their wealth was Vedic lore—  
this the treasure they guarded well.

.....

Unbeaten were Brahmins and inviolate—  
guarded by Dharma-goodness then,  
none hindered or obstructed them  
when they arrived at household doors.

Until the age of eight-and-forty  
they practiced celibate student life—  
the brahmins of those ancient times  
fared seeking knowledge and conduct good.

Brahmins then did not indulge  
in sexual intercourse out of time,  
during menstruation,  
but only when wives were free from this.

.....

Having begged rice, butter and oil,  
with cloths and bedding too,  
they sought and stored these righteously,  
and from them made a sacrifice:  
during that sacrificial rite  
cattle they never killed.

.....

Givers of good and strength, of good  
complexion and the happiness of health,  
having seen the truth of this  
cattle they never killed.

Those Brahmins then by Dharma did  
what should be done, not what should not,  
and so aware they graceful were,  
well-built, fair-skinned, of high renown.  
While in the world this lore was found  
these people happily prospered.

But then in them corruption came  
for little by little they observed  
how rajahs had to splendors won  
with women adorned and elegant,

.....

filled with crowds of women fair  
and ringed by herds of increasing cows—  
all this the eminent wealth of men  
the Brahmins coveted in their hearts.

Then they composed some Vedic hymns  
and went chanting to Okkāka king:  
“Great your wealth and great your grain,  
make sacrifice to us with grain and wealth”.

That rajah, Lord of chariots,  
by Brahmins was persuaded so  
he offered all these sacrifices:  
of horses, men, the peg well-thrown,

the sacrifice of soma drink  
the one of rich results—  
while to the Brahmins wealth he gave:

.....

When they had all this wealth received  
to hoard it up was their desire  
for they were overwhelmed by greed—  
their craving thus increased—  
so they composed more Vedic hymns  
and chanting went to Okkāka king.

“As water is, and earth, as well  
as gold, as grain as well as wealth,  
in the same way for human beings,  
and cattle are necessities;  
Great your wealth and great your grain,  
make sacrifice to us with grain and wealth”.

That rajah, lord of chariots,  
by Brahmins was persuaded—so  
in sacrifice, he caused to kill  
cattle in hundreds, thousands too.

But neither with hooves nor horns  
do cows cause harm to anyone,  
gentle they are as sheep  
yielding us pails of milk;  
in spite of this the rajah seized  
their horns, slew them by the sword.

.....

This adharmic wielding of weapons,  
descended from times of old:  
in this are the innocents slain,  
while ritual priests from Dharma fell.”

The opinion of the Buddha about the ancient life of brahmins is very clear here. The Buddha's opinion on the infallibility of the Veda-s can also be derived from this *Sutta*. The *Sutta* says that brahmins were **austerely lived, self-restrained, unbeaten, inviolable, guarded by Dharma and so on**. Because of these qualities, they were respected by people. To summarize the author: What is really implied here is that, in ancient times Brahmins possessed the non-corrupted version of the Veda and animal sacrifices were not prevalent then. Later they

came under the influence of the lavish life style of the kings and began to long for wealth. They altered Vedic literature and approached the kings and persuaded them to perform sacrifices so that they acquire wealth themselves. They inserted hymns that support and validate animal sacrifice. Hundreds of animals were killed thus in the sacrifices. Gods and demons objected to this. But Brahmins did not accede and thus began to be disrespected by people and the Buddha.

These words emphasise that, the Buddha did revere the original Veda-s, where devoid of animal sacrifice. He also valued the ancient Vedic sages as indicated in the *Brāhmaṇa-dhammika-sutta*. It is only after “the insertion of sacrificial hymns” that the Buddha objected to the Veda-s, hesitating to pay them the respect they formerly commanded. The Buddha was very much aligned to the knowledge based portions of the Vedic compendium, the *Upaniṣad-s*<sup>17</sup>. Almost all the teachings of the Buddha can be traced back to the *Upaniṣad-s*<sup>18</sup>. He never rejected the Upanisadic *Brahman* in any of his *suttas*<sup>19</sup>. *Karma siddhānta*, *saṁnyāsa*, morality<sup>20</sup> and so on are all pre-Buddhistic in origin.

## Implications

Pollock’s effort to pit Buddhism against Hinduism is just the beginning of a grand narrative. In the coming years more such ‘inventions’ will come forth from the neo-Orientalist school. Their Indian counterparts, with no access to religious studies as a discipline in the largely anglicized mainstream education, built on Western theories will support such claims whole heartedly. If not countered with facts, these Western narratives will exacerbate the divide between two systems of thought that sprung from the same dharmic source.

Rajiv Malhotra in his book *The Battle for Sanskrit* has highlighted several red flags with regard to Pollock’s theses regarding the differences between Hinduism and Buddhism. According to Malhotra (2016: 382), “He [Pollock] obsessively looks for things he can interpret as ‘norms’ in both systems and then tries to put them in mutual contradiction as much as possible”. This is also borne out by my own extracts from Pollock’s work which I have quoted above in reference to the philosophical meeting points that I want to highlight. Malhotra then goes on to explain the mischief propagated by Pollock and his group of neo-Orientalists with respect to chronology, the adoption of Pali

as the language of propagation, and various other distortions which would never be accepted by traditionalists. It is clear that by working furiously to deconstruct and exaggerate differences between dharmic streams of thought, the neo-Orientalists are trying to fragment the inherent unity of thought among the various dharmic offshoots at the foundational level. Once this is accomplished, their aim could be to pit the various offshoots irrevocably as hostile to each other and thus create the basis for more fragmentation and exclusivity claims. This could then serve geo-political interests or help predator faiths to take advantage of the falsely exaggerated faultlines. At the least, it serves to impose universalistic modes of interpreting events that are not native to the traditions. This universalism has not helped to unify the world in any way as we can see that conflicts are only increasing in every part of the world. This kind of deconstruction denies Indians the opportunity to develop alternate ways of interpreting their own traditions using their own categories which could potentially benefit the world.

The Buddha valued many Vedic doctrines. As seen before, most of the doctrines of the Buddha were derived from Vedic literature, the difference being that the Buddha used a different terminology for his doctrine.

## Conclusion

Pollock tries very hard to establish that there are foundational differences between Buddhism and Vedic tradition. His fundamentally flawed conclusions receive endorsement and encouragement from a wide range of scholars including deracinated Indians. Through this paper, I have shown how heavily Buddhism depends on the Vedic literature, especially the Upaniṣad-s. *Pratitya-samutpāda* and *anātman* theories of the Buddha are not in conflict with the Vedic tradition. On the contrary, these theories show an uncanny similarity with the Vedic tradition. This being the case, I believe it is time to re-evaluate this notion of irreconcilable difference between Hinduism and Buddhism using our own sources for reference, so that we can once more unite the dharmic systems under one umbrella which will make them uniquely positioned to take on the challenges that the future holds for all of humanity.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutman. To what is One, sages give many a title they call it Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan.

- *Rgveda*. 1.164.46

<sup>2</sup> “Buddha carries on the tradition of absolutism so clearly set forth in the Upaniṣads. For both, the Real is the Absolute which is at once transcendent to thought and, immanent in phenomena. Both take *avidyā*, the beginningless and cosmic Ignorance as the root-cause of phenomenal existence and suffering. Both believe that thought is inherently fraught with contradictions and thought-categories, instead of revealing the Real distort it, and therefore, one should rise above all views, all theories, all determinations, all thought-constructions in order to realize the Real. For both, the Real is realized in immediate spiritual experience. Both prescribe moral conduct and spiritual discipline as means to realize the Real, the fearless goal, the abode of Bliss”.

(Sharma 2007: 31-32)(spelling and italics as in the original)

<sup>3</sup> These fourteen questions are – Is the world eternal? Or not? Or both? Or Neither?; Is the world finite? Or not? Or both? Or neither?; Does the Tathagata exist after death? Or not? Or both? Or neither?; Is the soul identical with the body? Or not?

- *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* 25-27

<sup>4</sup> “If I, Ananda, when the wandering monk Vachhagotta asked me: ‘Is there the ego?’ had answered: ‘The ego is’ then that, Ananda, would have confirmed the doctrine of the Sramanas and Brahmins who believe in permanence (of the ego). If I, Ananda, had answered: ‘The ego is not’, then that, Ananda, would have confirmed the doctrine of the Sramanas and Brahmins, who believe in annihilation (of the ego).”

*Saṃyutta Nikāya* - 44, 10 (Oldenberg 1882: 272-273)

<sup>5</sup> Certain scholar opines that Buddha's silence was due to his absolutist stand about Ultimate Reality. Thus, Chandradhar Sharma (2007: 17) says: "The 'silence' of Buddha on the fourteen metaphysical questions does not indicate his ignorance of metaphysics or his agnosticism or his nihilism. It indicates his absolutism by revealing that contradictions are inherent in thought and can be solved only by rising to immediate spiritual experience".

<sup>6</sup> "To develop his theory, Buddha had only to rid the Upaniṣads of their inconsistent compromises with Vedic polytheism and religion, set aside the transcendental aspect as being indemonstrable to thought and unnecessary to morals, and emphasis the ethical universalism of the Upaniṣads. Early Buddhism, we venture to hazard a conjecture, is only a restatement of the thought of the Upaniṣads from a new standpoint."

Radhakrishnan (2013: Vol.1 303)

<sup>7</sup> "The Tathāgata sometimes taught that the *ātman* exists and at other times he taught that the *ātman* does not exist. When he preached that the *ātman* exists and is to be the receiver of misery or happiness in the successive life as the reward of its own Karma, his object was to save men from falling into the heresy of Nihilism (*Uccheda-vāda*). When he taught that there is no *ātman* in the sense of a creator or perceiver or an absolutely free agent, apart from the conventional name given to the aggregate of the five *skandhas*, his object was to save men from falling into the opposite, heresy of Eternalism (*Śāśvata-vāda*). Now which of these two views represents the truth? It is doubtless the doctrine of the denial of *ātman*. This doctrine, which is so difficult to understand, was not intended by Buddha for the ears of those whose intellect is dull and in whom the root of goodness has not thriven. And why? Because such men by hearing the doctrine of *anātman* would have been sure to fall into the heresy of Nihilism. The two doctrines were preached by Buddha for two very different objects. He taught the existence of *ātman* when he wanted to impart to his hearers the conventional doctrine; he taught the doctrine of *anātman* when he wanted to impart to them the transcendental doctrine."

(*Prajñāpāramita Sūtra, Nāgārjuna*).

"The existence of the *ātman* and of the *Dharmas* (i.e., of the Ego and of the phenomenal world) is affirmed in the Sacred Canon only provisionally and hypothetically, and never in the sense of their possessing a real and permanent nature." (*Dharmapāla* in his commentary on the *Vijñānamātra-śāstra*).

Sogen (2009: 19).

<sup>8</sup> Upaniṣad-s says *sarvān khalu idarī brahma*. Everything in this universe is Brahman including human beings. That means we are already Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, by essence. Yet, ironically, Upaniṣad-s instructs us to 'attain Brahma-Vidyā and realize Brahman'. People may feel this is contradictory. But in fact, this is not so because Upanisad-s only indicates that there is an unknown entity in us that prevents us from knowing that we are Brahman. This unknown entity is called *avidyā*.

<sup>9</sup> "These, O brethren, are those other things, profound, difficult to realize, hard to understand, tranquillizing, sweet, not to be grasped by mere logic, subtle, comprehensible only by the wise, which the Tathāgata, having himself realized and seen face to face, hath set forth; and it is concerning these that they who would rightly praise the Tathāgata in accordance with the truth, should speak."

- *Brahma Jāla Sutta*. Davids (1923: 30).

<sup>10</sup> “The Upanisadic seers and the Advaita Vedāntins use the word *ātmā* in the sense of the pure transcendent subject, which is at once pure consciousness and bliss. Buddha and the Buddhists, on the other hand, use the word *ātmā* in the sense of an empirical ego or in the sense of an eternal individual substance and reject its ultimate reality, while accepting its empirical validity..... In Buddha and Mahāyāna, the denial of the self is its denial as an eternal substance; it is not the denial of the absolute Self. Anātmavada or nairātmyavāda is really the nirahaṅkāra-nirmama-vāda of Vedānta. It denies neither the empirical validity of the ego nor the ultimate reality of the Absolute Self. It is the denial only of the false notion which mistakes the empirical ego as an eternal spiritual substance and attempts to objectify the subject and realize it through thought-categories. To take the self as an eternal substance is to cling to it eternally and this is *avidyā* which is the root-cause of all attachment, desire, misery and bondage.”

Sharma(2007: 26, 27) (*spellings/diacritics and italics as in the original*)

<sup>11</sup> “There is, O Bhikkhus, an unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed. Were there not, O Bhikkhus, this unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed, there would be no escape from the world of the born, originated, created, formed. Since, O Bhikkhus, there is an unborn, unoriginated, uncreated, unformed, therefore is there an escape from the born, originated, created, formed.”

Strong (1902: 112)

<sup>12</sup> It is not just *nirvāna* that is similar to Upanisadic Brahman. *Vijñaptimātra*, the Highest Reality posited by Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna, is also very similar to Brahman. Surendranath Dasgupta writes:

“As a ground of this ālayavijñāna we have the pure consciousness called the *vijñaptimātra*, which is beyond all experiences, transcendent and pure consciousness, pure bliss, eternal, unchangeable and unthinkable. It is this one pure being as pure consciousness and pure bliss, eternal and unchangeable like the Brahman of the Vedānta, that forms the ultimate ground and ultimate essence of all appearance; even the ālayavijñāna is an imposition of it, as are all the different states of it which make the world-order possible..... Thus we see that the ultimate reality is one, being self-identical, pure consciousness and pure bliss, which is thus different from the Tathatā of Aśvaghosha and very similar to the Brahman of the Upanishads.”

Dasgupta (1933:119-120) (*diacritics/spellings and italics as in the original*)

<sup>13</sup> Post-Śaṅkara Advaitin-s are divided on this topic. This topic is outside the purview of this paper.

<sup>14</sup> Twelve Chain of causation – 1) Beginning less and cosmic Ignorance, *Avidyā*. 2) Impressions of kārmic forces, *Saṅskāra*. 3) Individual consciousness, *Vijñāna*. 4) Psycho-physical organism, *Nāmarūpa*. 5) Six sense-organs including *manas*, *Śadāyatana*. 6) Sense-object-contact, *Sparsa*. 7) Sensation, *Vedanā*. 8) Desire for sense-enjoyment. *Trṣṇā*. 9) Clinging to sense enjoyment, *Upādāna*. 10) Will to be born for experiencing sense-enjoyment, *Bhava*. 11) Birth including rebirth, *Jāti*. 12) Disintegration and death, *Janana-maraṇa*

- *Mahānidāna Sutta*.

<sup>15</sup> “Although there must have been existed a complicated process in formulating the Twelve Link formula, it is undeniable that it is analogous in its way of formulation to the formulas set forth by other philosophical systems of India, such as Sāṃkhya-Yoga.”

Nakamura (1987: 69)

<sup>16</sup> *Udāna*, 73; *Suttanipata*, *RatanSutta*; *Itivuttaka*, 112; *Dhammapada*, 18, etc.

<sup>17</sup> “The only metaphysics that can justify Buddha's ethical discipline is the metaphysics underlying the Upaniṣads. Buddhism is only a later phase of the general movement of thought of which the Upaniṣads were the earlier.”

- Radhakrishnan (2013: 470)

“The Śākyan mission was out 'not to destroy, but to fulfill', to enlarge and enhance the accepted faith-in-God of their day, not by asseverating, but by making it more vital.”

Rhys-Davids(1932: 194)

<sup>18</sup> “The Upaniṣadic seers and Buddha both are opposed to the view of realistic pluralism that the self is an ultimate individual substance and that there is a plurality of such eternal selves. Buddha carries on the tradition of absolutism so clearly set forth in the Upaniṣads. For both, the Real is the Absolute which is at once transcendent to thought and, immanent in phenomena. Both take *avidyā*, the beginningless and cosmic Ignorance as the root-cause of phenomenal existence and suffering. Both believe that thought is inherently fraught with contradictions and thought-categories, *instead of* revealing the Real distort it, and therefore, one should rise above all views, all theories, all determinations, all thought-constructions in order to realize the Real. For both, the Real is realized in immediate spiritual experience. Both prescribe moral conduct and spiritual discipline as means to realize the Real, the fearless goal, the abode of Bliss.... Both believe in the established canon of logic that it is the unreal alone which can be negated. For both, that which is negated in *avidyā*, the imposed empirical character of the 'I', and that which is retained is the Absolute. Both use the negative dialectic, the '*neti neti*' (not this, not this) for indirectly pointing to the nature of the Inexpressible. All the epithets which the Upaniṣadic seers use for Ātmā or Brahma (or their synonyms) Buddha uses for *Nirvāṇa*. Ātmā and *Nirvāṇa* both stand for the ineffable non-dual Absolute. It must, however, be admitted that while the Upaniṣadic seers openly identify the Absolute with the Pure Self which is at once pure consciousness and bliss, Buddha, true to his negative logic, does not expressly identify the Absolute with the Pure Self, though the implication is clearly there. He identifies the Absolute with *Nirvāṇa*. Buddha's omission to identify the Absolute with the Transcendent Self has led to the misunderstanding of his *anātmavāda*. But though Buddha does not expressly identify the Absolute with the Pure Self, nowhere has he expressly denied it. His descriptions of *Nirvāṇa* are similar to the descriptions of the Upaniṣadic Ātmā and leave no doubt that he is carrying on the tradition of the Upaniṣadic absolutism.”

- Sharma (2007: 31-32) (*diacritics/spellings and italics as in the original*).

<sup>19</sup> “At first sight nothing can appear more definite than the opposition of the Buddhist an-attā, 'no-Ātman,' and the Brāhmaṇā Ātman, the sole reality. But in using the same term, Attā or Ātman, Buddhist and Brāhmaṇā are talking of different things, and when this is realized, it will be seen that the Buddhist disputation on this point lose nearly all their value. It is frankly admitted by Professor Rhys Davids that,

'The neuter Brahman is, so far as I am aware, entirely unknown in the Nikāyas, and of course the Buddha's idea of Brahmā, in the masculine, really differs widely from that of the Upanishads.'

There is nothing, then, to show that the Buddhists ever really understood the pure doctrine of the Ātman, which is 'not so, not so'. The attack which they led upon the idea of soul or self is directed against the conception of the eternity in time of an unchanging individuality; of the timeless spirit they do not speak, and yet they claim to have disposed of the theory of the Ātman! In reality both sides were in agreement that the soul or ego (manas, ahamkāra, vijñāna, etc.) is complex and phenomenal, while of that which is 'not so' we know nothing."

- Coomaraswamy (1916: 199) (*diacritics/spellings and italics as in the original*)

<sup>20</sup> "Hence let a man take care to himself. A man who steals gold, who drinks spirits, who dishonors his Guru's bed, who kills a Brāhmaṇa, these four falls, and as a fifth he who associates with them. But he who thus knows the five fires [Pañcāgnī] is not defiled by sin even though he associates with them. He who knows this is pure, clean, and obtains the world of the blessed.' Herein one can trace the origin of Pārvatī's doctrine of four-fold restraint (cāujjāma saṁvara), Mahāvīra's five great vows (pañca mahāvayas) and of Buddha's five moral percepts (pañca-śilas)."

- Barua (1921: 96) (*diacritics/spellings and italics as in the original*)

# Chapter 5

## Vedic Roots of Buddhism

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All the Indian philosophical systems unanimously state that the ultimate goal of a human being is to attain to immortality or *nirvāṇa* or *mokṣa*. The importance of an ambience, culture and society conducive to the said philosophical inquiry, cannot be over-emphasized. In India, whenever different philosophies were propounded, the adherents would engage in debates with one other another, which in a healthy competition would improve both parties. But certain attempts have been made in the recent past to exploit differences in highly philosophical matters for petty political gains; and non-existent differences are artificially projected to make the gap seem much wider. Another mistake of the modern scholars in analyzing ancient societies and texts is to apply the modern lens of a sacred-secular division, while such divisions are blurred in ancient societies and thought-systems.

Here is presented an examination of Prof. Sheldon Pollock's thesis of Buddhism *vis-à-vis* Hinduism or the Vedic religion in matters concerning social structure, sacrificial rites, use of language, etc.. With the dating of important events and people of ancient and pre-modern India being messed up in the academic circles, the traditional chronology that Jaimini's *Pūrvamīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s and Bādarāyaṇa's

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\*pp. 163–188. In: Kannan, K. S and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*. Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

*Uttaramīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s are more-or-less contemporary or predate the Buddha is relied upon for the analysis here, since the *Uttaramīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s contain explicit references to Cārvāka, Sāṃkhya and Yoga darśana-s, though not to Buddhism and Jainism.

## 1. Introduction

The ancient Indian conception of history, called *itihāsa*, is quite different from the notion of history as commonly understood today. The popular definitions of *itihāsa* are:

1. *purāṇam itivrttam ākhyāyika-udāharanam dharmāśastram cetītihāsaḥ* (Arthaśāstra 1.5)
2. *dharmārtha-kāma-mokṣāṇām upadesa-samanvitam. purāvṛttam kathā-yuktam ithihāsaḥ pracaksate.* (Rājataranginī)

which make it closer to ‘historiography’ than history, the latter being commonly taken as a set of dates-and-events focusing heavily on chronology. Perhaps the accusation of Indians being ‘ahistoric’ stems from the non-recognition of this important difference; and various reasons are forwarded as to why Indians are so. (For details, please refer Sreedharan 2004:170-191)

In his book on the history of Sanskrit literature, Max Müller says thus about Indian history –

“... the inward life of the soul has so completely absorbed all the practical faculties of a whole people, and, in fact, almost destroyed those qualities by which a nation gains its place in history.

It might therefore be justly said that India has no place in the political history of the world. But,... it certainly has a right to claim its place in the intellectual history of mankind.”

(Müller 1860:31-32)

Stein notes that history as a science and art was not given the same place in India as was cultivated in Greece and Rome or in modern Europe; but he says that there is much material at our disposal for study, which include inscriptions, coins, antiquarian remains and the most important of all – the literary records. Again, he notes that poets of historical *kāvya*-s fell for singing the praise of patron kings rather

than being true to historical facts and events. However, he says that Kalhana in his *Rājataranginī* comes close in character to the chronicles of Medieval Europe, and the narration therein is from the point of view of an independent chronicler (Stein 1900:3-5).

There is a lack of agreement among scholars and researchers in history about the dates attached to various important events in Indian history. The claims of some *purāṇa*-s of the duration of the *catur-yuga*-s (the Four Eons) being 43,20,000 years is on one extreme, while the dating of early European scholars of *Rgveda* to 2,500 BCE is on the other extreme, attempting to cram the long Indian history into a very short time period. It seems most likely that the true time periods must lie in between the two, and an exhaustive research taking into account the literary records, inscriptions and archaeological evidence is much desired.

However, for the purposes of this paper, the actual dates are not so much of concern but some aspects of chronology are important. The traditional view is that Jaimini, who composed the *Pūrva-mīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s was a disciple of Veda Vyāsa. Bādarāyaṇa, the composer of the *Uttara-mīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s was either Vyāsa himself, or his disciple. Anyway, both *Pūrva*- and *Uttara-mīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s are contemporary since each one makes references to the other; and both predate the Buddha. But the commentators on them — Śabaravāmin and Śaṅkarācārya — come after the Buddha. Further, as supporting evidence, the *Uttara-mīmāṃsā* directly talks about Cārvāka, Sāṃkhya and Yoga *darśana*-s, but not Buddha and Jaina. Whether the Buddha and Mahāvīra are contemporaries, or who precedes whom — is not so important for this paper; but it is clear that Jainism predates Buddhism since Pārśvanātha, the 23rd *Tirthankara* of Jainism appears much before the Buddha. There is again no agreement among scholars about the date of Pāṇini, placing him anywhere between 6th to 4th century BCE; but going by the contents of Agrawala's book (Agrawala 1953), he must pre-date the Buddha.

The rest of the paper presents a very brief overview of the developments of Buddhism post-Buddha; then discusses Pollock's views and offers responses; and later presents a very brief sketch of the decline of Buddhism; and finally concludes.

## 2. Evolution of Early Buddhism

Banerjee says that “Gautama Buddha’s speeches, sayings, discourses and conversations were handed down orally through a succession of teachers” much like the *Veda*-s. Since the Buddha did not appoint anyone as the head of the *saṅgha*, a council was convened at Rājagrha under the leadership of Mahākassapa Thera immediately after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha, where the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* were settled (Banerjee 2001: 184). The second Buddhist council was convened a hundred years later during the reign of Kālāsoka, where violations enjoined on the *Vinaya* were discussed. There was a major disagreement between the monks from the western and eastern parts of the country, and the *saṅgha* split into *Mahāsaṅghika*-s and *Sthaviravādin*-s; who then started having councils separately. The third Buddhist council of the *Mahāsaṅghika*-s was held at Pāṭaliputra during the reign of Aśoka in the 236th year of the Buddha’s *nirvāṇa*, while the *Sthaviravādin*-s met at Jālandhara (Jullundur) during the reign of Kaniṣka. According to the commentary on the *Kathāvattu*, the original *saṅgha* has split into 18 sub-groups as shown in Figure 1 (Bapat 2001: 456-460). Thanks to the missionaries sent by Aśoka, the *Theravāda* sect of Buddhism flourished in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) with the Pali cannon of the *Tipiṭaka*-s preserved; while in India, the *Mahāyāna* sect flourished under the patronage of Kaniṣka and the literature was developed in Sanskrit.

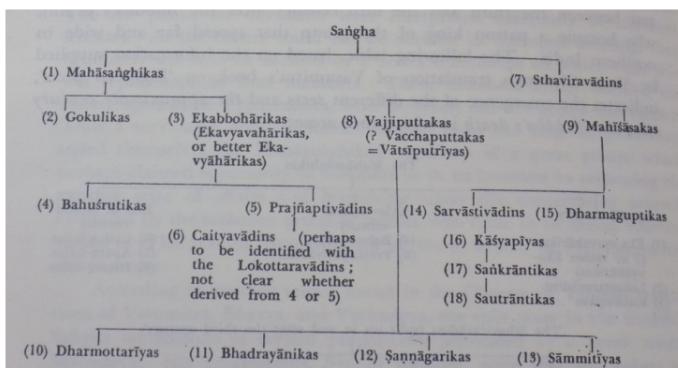


Figure 1: Eighteen subgroups of the Buddhist *saṅgha*

The Buddha's teachings emphasized the four noble truths and the eight-fold path; he called this the 'Middle-Path' as it "avoided the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification." However, he was averse to metaphysical speculation, such as the origin and end of the universe; and left ten such questions unanswered (Bapat 2001: 462-463). Among the six classical *avādīka* (heterodox) philosophies, four that are in the name of Buddhism viz. — *Sautrāntika*, *Vaibhāṣīka*, *Yogācāra* and *Mādhyamika* — have developed over time (*infra*). The first two philosophies are said to belong to *Hīnayāna* or *Theravāda* sect while the latter two to *Mahāyāna* sect. (Swami Satprakashananda 2005: 68n) The details of the eighteen sub-groups of the Buddhist *saṅgha* along with the above philosophies are discussed in detail in (Bapat 2001: 462-486). Hiriyanna says "while *Hīnayāna* was atheistic and considered the Buddha as essentially a human being, though divinely gifted, the *Mahāyāna* came to gradually deify him and adopted devout worship of him as a means to salvation... considerably influenced by theistic Hinduism." (Hiriyanna 1948: 83).

## 2.1 Divergence from Hinduism

Although the further sections of the paper seek to point out the proximity between Hinduism and Buddhism, there are a few differences between Hinduism and Buddhism as pointed out by Hiriyanna, which are worth mentioning here. Firstly, while the Upaniṣadic doctrine was meant for a select few (i.e., not preached to all freely), "the characteristic feature of Buddhism was that it admitted no esoteric truths and was meant for all who were not satisfied with leading a life of natural inclinations.... Its message was for the plain man, and gave a general uplift of great significance." Secondly, "while Brahmanism relied overmuch on the instruction given by others, Buddhism laid particular stress on self-reliance and self-effort in knowing the ultimate truth." "For the rest, Buddhism was the same as Brahmanism... and believed in the same cosmological and eschatological views, including the doctrine of karma<sup>1</sup>." (Hiriyanna 1948: 73)

## 2.2 Limitation of Buddhism

Mookerjee notes that —

“The Buddha was skeptical of the ceremonial part of the Vedic religion as the vehicle of salvation. This is also endorsed by the *Upaniṣad*-s and the *Bhagavadgītā*. But in the latter, we find a reconciliation between the practical life of the average man and the theoretical and contemplative life of the spiritual aspirant. The Vedic duties, which are obligatory and do not hold out any prospect of personal advantage, are to be observed as categorical imperatives. This subordination of personal ambition to impersonal duty is asserted to be an instrument of mental purification, which is the condition precedent of the emergence of inquisitiveness regarding the question of ultimate Truth and Destiny. This synthetic approach is absent in Buddhism.”

(Mookerjee 2001: 597)

Further, Mookerjee says that —

“It is a sad commentary on Buddhism as a religion and the separatist tendencies of its adherents that Sindhi monks had supported the Arab invaders and helped them in extirpating the Brāhmaṇa dynasty in Sind as early as 712 CE. It is also a surprise that the Buddhists committed to wholesale conversion whereas the Hindus survived this onslaught and preserved their ancestral faith... This facile changeover to an alien faith underlines the inherent weakness of the hold of Buddhism on the masses.”

(Mookerjee 2001: 596)

## 3. Pollock’s Views and Responses

While Max Müller states unequivocally that the entire faculties of (ancient) Indians were devoted to the ‘inward life of the soul’ to the exclusion of politics [§1]; Pollock seems to be hell bent on establishing the connection between culture, Sanskrit, *kāvya*, grammar etc. on the one hand and political power on the other; most likely, this is inspired by Gruen’s thesis on the connection between the hegemony of the Roman empire and Latin literature<sup>2</sup>. Presented in the rest of this section is an examination of the views of Pollock in the context of Buddhism, which he arrives at using his lens of ‘political philology’.

### 3.1 Axial Theory

Wittrock summarizes Jaspers' formulation of an Axial theory thus –

“Jaspers believed that the distinctive feature in the emergence of human history... is the manifestation of a specific capacity —... the capacity of human beings to reflect upon and to give expression to an image of the world as having the potential of being different from what it was perceived to be here and now. The emergence of such images of the world, based on critical reflection, marked... the transition from *Mythos* to *Logos*, a breakthrough in critical reflexivity and, indeed, the emergence of history in the sense of the epoch in human existence characterized by a reflexive, historical consciousness. He termed this period the Axial Age. In temporal terms he located it in the centuries around the middle of the first millennium BCE.”

(Wittrock 2005: 62)

While Pollock disputes spatial causality and temporal locality of this “axial” age, he completely endorses the above summary and says “...under this description, there can be no doubt that “axial” moments exist at various times in history, and that Buddhist thinkers produced one such moment in early South Asia, effecting as they did a fundamental conceptual revolution in each of the three domains...” namely — reflexivity, historicity, and agentiality. (Pollock 2005: 398) Further he says

“Jaspers asserted that one feature of the Axial Age is a new socio-political formation consisting in “the genesis of peoples who feel themselves a unity with a common language, a common culture, and a common body of myths.” But were we to accept this characterization, we would have to conclude that nothing like an Axial Age occurred, in India at least, prior to the twentieth century.”

(Pollock 2005: 399)

Although Pollock speaks of Sanskrit literary culture being spread from Afghanistan to Java and accepts the emergence of trans-local empires in India, he denies that a cultural unity emerged at that time. Quite on the contrary, Mookerji (2003:1-148) and Panikkar (1958:5-15) have argued that the cultural unity of India was firmly established irrespective (or in spite) of the political unity (of trans-local empires) of India. Hence it is clear from the above that Pollock is carefully cherry-picking only those features of the axial age asserted by Jaspers that is convenient to fit his theory, while ignoring other features

which can be easily established. In addition, Pollock completely omits any discussion of the epistemological basis for “reflexivity” (where the world has the potential of being different from how it is perceived here and now)! Such omissions and misfits are extremely dangerous given that Pollock says that his “studying them is meant as a form of ‘actionable history’, an attempt to produce statements about past events that can inform the conduct of present practices,” quoting Bennett. (Pollock 2005: 400)

### 3.2 Buddhism as Axial Moment

Pollock notes the difference of opinion about the axial moment in India with Eisenstadt categorizing Buddhism as a “secondary breakthrough” while assessing late Vedic thought as wholly “axial”; and Jan Heesterman arguing that it was the “gap” between Vedic revelation and ritual routinization that constituted India’s “axial turning point,” but gravitates to the following

“sociality of early Buddhism that led to the institutionalization of the “transcendental breakthrough”..., singling out three aspects in particular: the “republic”-like religious assembly (that is, the *saṅgha*); the democratizing promulgation of doctrine; and the development of a lay community of co-religionists (*upāsaka*).”

(Pollock 2005: 401)

Quite on the contrary, Aiyaswamy Sastri states the common features of the Śramaṇa sects such as *Añuvādin*-s, *Ājīvika*-s, Jainism (all of which pre-date Buddhism), and Buddhism itself as:

1. “They challenged the authority of the Vedas.
2. They admitted into their Church all members of the community irrespective of... *varṇa* and *āśrama*.
3. They observed a set of ethical principles.
4. They practiced a detached life with a view to liberating themselves...
5. They could take to a life of renunciation any time after passing over the minor age.”

(Sastri 2001: 389-390)

essentially pointing out that these features of Buddhism were not breakthroughs achieved by Buddhists themselves as claimed by Pollock. Furthermore, Vasudeva Sarana Agrawala points out that Pāṇini talks about a political republic (*gaṇādhīna*) and the religious *saṅgha* (*nikāya*) in addition to monarchy (*ekādhīna*) (Agrawala 1953: 424-427). Pāṇini also mentions the word “śramaṇa” (*Astadhyayi* 2.1.70) indicating the antiquity (pre-dating Buddha) of the word and therefore the sects going under that name. [see end of §1]

In addition, the *Uttaramīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s point out that while the *sūdra*-s are excluded from undertaking the study of the *Veda*-s, they have the *adhibhāra* to receive teachings in matters concerning the *Vedānta* (1.3.34-38). Śaṅkarācārya affirms this, citing the example of Vidura and Dharmavyādha, and proclaims in his commentary that *sūdra*-s too have *adhibhāra* for *mokṣa* at least via the *Itihāsa*-s and *Purāṇa*-s, if not directly via the Vedic recitations and rituals (Apte 1960: 207-212). This is consistent with the tradition which holds that the Vedic vision must be communicated through the *Itihāsa*-s and *Purāṇa*-s (*itihāsa-purāṇābhyām vedāṇi samupabṛihayet*).

Hence, it is clear that the aspects of the *saṅgha*, *upāsaka*-community and the democratizing promulgation of doctrine was not any breakthrough achieved by the Buddha or Buddhists – as claimed by Pollock, but were the practices already in vogue that were followed.

### 3.3 Authorlessness of the *Veda*

Pollock says:

“While there can be hardly any doubt that the principal thrust of the Buddhist critique was directed toward actually-existing elements of the thought-world of early Brahmanism, it also seems likely that... its foundational principles, may have first been conceptualized as a defensive, even anti-axial, reaction to Buddhism.... It is self-evident that no one would elaborate propositions of the sort we find *Mīmāṃsā* to have elaborated, such as the thesis of the authorlessness of the *Veda*, unless the authority of the *Veda* and its putative authors had first been seriously challenged.”

(Pollock 2005: 402)

The word *Mīmāṃsā* means “the reasoning which has to be adopted to understand the connotation of a word or a sentence.” (Tarkabhusan

2001: 160) It is true that *Pūrvamīmāṃsā* as a *darśana* has its own idiosyncrasies such as the claims that

1. the universe was never created nor will it ever be destroyed (“it has existed as it is from eternity”) (Tarkabhusan 2001: 164); and
2. *anupalabdhi* (non-perception) is a valid *pramāṇa* (Svāmī Paramānanda Bhāratī 2014: 24-26).

Pollock extracts the two features of ‘authorlessness’ and ‘ahistoricity’ of Veda discussed above based on the *Pūrvamīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s 1.1.29-31 (Pollock 1989: 608). But the truth is that the *Pūrvamīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s were composed by Jaimini long before the advent of the Buddha, and hence the statement that these features of (*Pūrva*-) *Mīmāṃsā* are a reaction to the Buddhist critique does not hold water [see end of §1]. And quite on the contrary, as Hiriyananda notes “it is Buddhism which began as a ‘religion’ and it was forced, not long after, to become a ‘philosophy’ since it had to defend itself against the metaphysical schools of Hindu and Jaina thought.” (Hiriyananda 1948: 72).

While Pollock claims that (*Pūrva*-)*Mīmāṃsā* holds the Veda to be authorless, the actual word used in (*Pūrva*-)*Mīmāṃsā* is *apauruṣeya*; i.e., the assertion is that the Veda is self-revealed. This is but a natural consequence of the (*Pūrva*-)*Mīmāṃsā* paradigm which does not accept *nirguna Brahman* or *Īśvara* and the idea that the universe was created. However, *Nyāya-darśana* does not accept this position and holds the Veda to be of divine origin (Tarkabhusan 2001: 152-156). Therefore, Pollock’s postulate that “a set of notions developed by *Mīmāṃsā*... may be said to have sought to deny the category of history altogether as irrelevant, or even antithetical, to real knowledge” (Pollock 1989: 607) need not be true, since it cannot be said that only the *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā* position held sway over all intellectuals of ancient/pre-modern India; especially when the *Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad* (2.4.10) itself proclaims that “the Vedas came into existence along with the creation from the Paramātman, the Supreme Creator as naturally as exhalation of a human being.” (Svāmī Paramānanda Bhāratī 2014: 22)

From an epistemological consideration, an interesting caveat may be observed here – just as the organs of perception – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin (*pratyakṣa pramāṇa*) and the law underlying

inference/logic — are not man-made, similarly the Veda being a *pramāṇa* is also not man-made. Therefore, we can assert that any *pramāṇa* cannot be man-made; but man at best can invent extensions to these *pramāṇa*-s such as telescopes, spectacles, hearing-aids etc<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.3.1 Ahistoricity

Pollock extends his earlier argument about the authorlessness of the Veda and continues —

“The Vedic corpus increasingly sought to escape confinement in any spatiotemporal framework.... Vedic texts are *apauruṣeya*, produced by no author human or divine, and existing outside of all history whether cosmic or terrestrial. Buddhist holy texts, on the other hand, typically specify the place, time, audience, and of course speaker—the Buddha—thereby enmeshing the very truth of the message in its concrete historicity.”

(Pollock 2005: 409)

Firstly, as discussed in §3.3, *apauruṣeya* need not mean the negation of divine origin of Veda according to *darśana*-s. Tradition holds the Vedic statements as timeless truths. For example, although Newton came at a certain point in history and lived in a certain place, his discovery — the law of gravitation — is not subject to any spatiotemporal confinement<sup>4</sup>. Hence, one view about the Veda-s is that the *r̄ṣi*-s to whom the *mantra*-s were revealed do come in history, but the *mantra*-s themselves are beyond time. Agrawala points out (through Kātyāyana’s *vārttika* on Pāṇini *sūtra* 4.3.105) that either Yājñavalkya appears later in time or certain portions of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* attributed to Yājñavalkya were revealed later. (Agrawala 1953: 329-332) Also, there are studies on the *R̄gveda* from a historical angle by (Talageri 2000), for example.

The *Tipiṭaka*-s got their final written form only after about two or three centuries after the *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha; and till that time, the Buddha’s teachings were transmitted orally [see §2]. Hiriyananda opines that the Buddhist canonical literature “may contain much that was actually uttered by Buddha; but there is no means of knowing for certain what those portions are” (Hiriyananda 1948: 72), especially in the light of divergent, if not contradictory, philosophies — ranging all the way from realism (*sarvāsti-vāda*) to idealism (*vijñāna-vāda*) to nihilism (*śūnya-vāda*) — going under the name of Buddhism.

In summary, the difference between Buddhism and Vedic religion is not as pronounced as Pollock is suggesting here.

### 3.4 Agentiality

Pollock says

“If Mīmāṃsā, the theory of the Veda, is about anything it is about the nature of deontic language, the obligation to act that the Veda places upon members of the vaidika community, the resolve (*sāṃkalpa*) one must make to act, and so on. But as Mīmāṃsā itself is very careful to explain—and indeed, is very rational when explaining—the truth-value of such paradigmatic Vedic commandments as “He who desires heaven must sacrifice” derives directly from the fact that their substance *exceeds* the rational, instrumental understanding—precisely the understanding that underpins any authentic form of agentiality. The Veda’s injunction to act is meaningful precisely because it enunciates something that transcends the phenomenal, something inaccessible to observation, inference, or other form of empirical reasoning—something, in fact, irrational.”

and continues in the footnote as

“Or, as the equally rationalistic Tertullian would have put it, *credibile quia ineptum est*<sup>5</sup>: It is reason that dictates belief in a thing in direct proportion to the thing’s improbability.”

(Pollock 2006: 405-406)(*italics as in the original*)

#### 3.4.1 Irrationality

Pollock essentially means that something that is inaccessible to observation, inference etc. is irrational, but Mīmāṃsā explains it very rationally; Pollock also draws parallel from Tertullian rationale<sup>6</sup> that “it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd” which he undertook to demonstrate that the flesh of Christ was real. (Sider 1980) It is to be noted that the inaccessibility of Christ’s body a couple of centuries after he “died” or “ascended to heaven” is very much different from the inaccessibility of the subject matter to perception and inference here and now; and therefore such a parallel is untenable. More importantly, the tradition very clearly expounds that although perception, inference etc. have no access to the subject matter of Veda, the Vedic statements cannot contradict perception, inference

etc.; therefore, the Veda is said to be supraational. In other words, correct understanding is that in which all apparent contradictions between *śruti* (Veda), *yukti* (logic/inference) and *anubhava* (common universal experience) are resolved<sup>7</sup>. A famous dictum current in the tradition is “*anubhava-anusārī śrutiḥ, śrutyānusārī yuktiḥ*.”<sup>8</sup>

Uttaramīmāṃsā has noted the limitation of *tarka* (logic) and explicitly stated “*tarkāpratiṣṭhānāt...*” (Brahma Sūtra 2.1.11); that logic can only be as good as the data available, if not worse. Hence, the knowledge gained through *anumāna* must be verified through *pratyakṣa* (Svāmī Paramānanda Bhāratī 2014: 20) and knowledge gained through *śabda* must be verified through *anubhava* to be doubt-free<sup>9</sup>.

### 3.4.2 Deontic Language

Pollock talks about “the obligation to act that the Veda places upon members of the *vaidika* community” and a Vedic commandment “He who desires heaven must sacrifice” above reference in successive statements, perhaps without noticing the apparent contradiction between the two phrases. It is self-evident here that the desire to attain heaven is the driving force behind the sacrifice and not the Vedic commandment. The Veda never commands anyone to have desire, but only reveals the connection between a *yajña* and its result. Hence, it is a gross misunderstanding to say that the Veda places obligation to act upon *vaidika*-s.

The Veda enjoins *nitya-naimittika-karman*-s which do not seemingly produce any tangible result, but they prepare the mind of the performer for inquiry into the ultimate reality; and therefore it follows that a person desirous of undertaking such an inquiry must take to *nitya-naimittika-karma*-s as a preparatory step [see §2.2].

### 3.4.3 Bourdieuian Doxa of *Vaidika* World

Pollock says that “The *vaidika* world seems to have been one of pure Bourdieuian doxa, where both the order of society and one’s place in it went without saying, and where accordingly the possibility of reordering society and self... was outside the conceptual scheme. (Even renouncing society and self was routinized as normative.)” (Pollock 2005: 406)

There cannot be anything farther from the truth than this. Altekar points out that the different classes of Vedic society was not the rigid hereditary caste system — “The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* [X-4:1:10] describes how some of the sons of Syāparṇa Sāyakāyana became Brāhmaṇa-s, some Kṣatriya-s and some Vaiśya-s. Priests often accompanied their patron kings to the battlefield... and Kṣatriya-s often sacrificed for others...” He further notes that the entire third *maṇḍala* of the *Rgveda* is ascribed to Viśvāmitra (who is said to be both a Ṛsi and a king); and that the Brāhmaṇa-s Gārgya Bālāki and Gautama are taught about the nature of Brahman by the Kings Ajātaśatru and Pravāhaṇa Jaivali respectively as spoken of in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* [2:1] and *Chāndogya* [5:3] Upaniṣad-s. Thereby, the Buddha and the Mahāvīra were not the only Kṣatriya-s to teach philosophy. (Altekar 2001: 226).

In the Vedic vision, true renunciation is born out of clear understanding and taking *saṃnyāsa* ceremoniously is but a symbolic, preparatory step; which was no doubt viewed as a ritual.

### 3.5 Semantic appropriation and Transvaluation

#### 3.5.1 Sacrifice

Pollock points out that

“In the Kūṭadanta Sutta, for example, a Brāhmaṇa is dissuaded from his original intention to offer a blood sacrifice... by the tale of a far more successful sacrifice where neither were any oxen slain, neither goats, nor fowls, nor fatted pigs, nor were any kinds of living creatures put to death.... But even this kind of sacrifice—where we can observe how non-violence is coupled with non-coercion... entrance into the Buddhist order, and Buddhist forms of meditation.”

(Pollock 2006: 402-403)

While it may be true that certain Vedic rites might include animal sacrifices of a “cruel, horrible and revolting” nature; many non-violent “sacrifices” or *Jñāna-yajña*-s are also present in the Veda-s; for example — The *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* (80th *anuvāka*) talks of a “yajña in which śraddhā (faith) is the performer’s wife, his body is firewood, his breast is the shrine”, (Bhattacharya 2001: 559) *kāma* (desire) is ghee, *manyu* (anger) is the animal to be sacrificed etc. The *Bhagavadgītā* (2.45) too talks of many other *yajña*-s such as *tapo-yajña*, *yoga-yajña*, *dhyāna-yajña*,

*japa-yajña* etc., and in more places than one suggests their superiority over mere *dravya-yajña* in progressing towards attaining the ultimate end of *mokṣa* (salvation). [see §2.2]

Hiriyanna also says that —

“The (Buddhist) canonical literature, no doubt, now and again criticizes Brahmanism, but mostly on its ritualistic side.... An important consequence of this rejection of ritual was the emphasis placed on morality which, though by no means ignored in Brahmanism, was somewhat assigned a subordinate place in it. The references to the Upaniṣadic doctrine, the other aspect of Brahmanism, are far fewer, showing that Buddhism did not diverge from it very much.”

(Hiriyanna 1948: 72)

In a slightly different context, which is presented as an attack on the *Puruṣasūkta* by the Buddha, Pollock says that “The sacrifice of the *Puruṣa* and the fixed social order that thereby emerged seem almost recombined in the *Mīmāṃsā* doctrine of the fixity of the right to sacrifice, *adhikāra*, which was reserved to the three twice-born orders.”; as if to suggest that the presentation of sacrifice of the *Puruṣa* leads to fixation of right to sacrifice to *dvija*-s (twice-born) only and is therefore discriminating against some people by not allowing them to sacrifice. Pollock perhaps fails to notice, while coming up with his explanation on *apauruṣeyatva* as authorlessness, that the *Puruṣasūkta* itself says that “from the *yajña* of *Puruṣa*, the *Rg*-, *Sāma*- and *Yajur-veda*-s, and the Vedic meters (*chandas*) were born”. [§3.3.1]

Swami Sharvananda presents the insight behind describing the creation of the cosmos as a *yajña* thus —

“the Vedic *Rṣi*-s looked upon the entire cosmic process as the performance of a great sacrifice, and believed that man’s spiritual nature can best be quickened if he tried to mould himself in consonance with that cosmic order.... In fact, this spirit of sacrifice, restraint, and harmony through love, and desire for the attainment of immortality in life came to be the dominant factors of the cultural life.... The last *sūkta* of the *Rgveda* breathes this out unequivocally thus: Assemble together, speak with one voice,... United be the thoughts of all... may all happily reside.”

(Sharvananda 2001: 198)

### 3.5.2 Negation of *Ātman*

Pollock says that

“...positive inversions or transvaluations in early Buddhism of core *vaidika* values are complemented by a range of pure negations; foremost among these is *an-atta* (*an-ātmā*), the denial of a personal essence whereby the fundamental conception of Upanishadic thought is canceled. All this evidence suggests that semantically Buddhism sought to turn the old *vaidika* world upside down by the very levers offered by the *vaidika* world.”

(Pollock 2006: 404)

Bhattacharya points out the reason for negation of *ātmā* by the Buddha thus: “In order to root out desire (*kāma*), attempts are made in the doctrine of the Buddha to show that there is neither the subject nor the object of desire, and if that be so, naturally desires can in no way arise.” On the other hand, the *Upaniṣad*-s say that “when a man understands both the subject (himself) and the object of desire as non-separate from Brahman (or *Ātman*), there can arise no desire (or fear, sorrow etc.)” (Bhattacharya 2001: 564-565) In other words, the Buddha seeks to deny the existence of both subject and object completely; while the *Upaniṣad*-s say that the subject and object borrow their existence from *Brahman*, and thereby have no existence of their own, separate from *Brahman*, and thus *Brahman* alone exists. Hence, it is clear that both the Buddha and the *Upaniṣad*-s are seeking the same end, but there is a difference in the sense in which the word *ātmā* is used.

In addition, it is to be noted that the process of negation — *neti, neti* (not this, not this) — occurs verily in the *Upaniṣad*-s and *Brahman* or *Ātman* is proclaimed as the self-evident truth which can never be negated. It may be interesting to note in this context that Śankarācārya is accused of being a *pracchanna-bauddha* (crypto-Buddhist); and while the Advaitic tradition does not accept this (Apte 1960: xxvii), it goes to speak of the proximity between Hinduism (especially Advaita Vedānta which rests on the three pillars of the *Upaniṣad*-s, the *Uttara-mīmāṃsā-sūtra*-s and the *Bhagavadgītā*) and Buddhism. Hence, it seems here that Buddhism has much in common with the vision of the *Upaniṣad*-s and *Gītā* than the differences which Pollock is trying to highlight.

### 3.6 Media of Preaching Buddhism

Pollock argues that, keeping the *Mimāṃsā* theory of language in mind,

“...the early Buddhists rejected the use of Sanskrit, the language of the gods, whether in favor of local dialects or Pali, a new hieratic competitor language. It is no small measure of the exhaustion of the Axial energies of early Buddhism that around the beginning of the Common Era in the north at least this old opposition was abandoned and the repressed returned: Buddhists turned to Sanskrit with a vengeance, translating their canon into the language.”

(Pollock 2006: 409)

Upadhye points out that “Vedic literature does give some glimpses of popular speeches; but no literature in them has come down to us. Classical Sanskrit... respectfully shelved all that was obsolete in the Vedic speech and studiously eschewed all that belonged to the popular tongue... Whenever a preacher or a prince wanted to address the wider public..., the tendency to employ a popular dialect of the day was but natural. That is how... Mahāvīra and Buddha preferred to preach in the local Prakrits of eastern India,” similarly Aśoka and Khāravela addressed their subjects in Prakrit. Again, he observes that the *gāthā* literature of the Buddhists is a good specimen of queer admixture of Sanskrit and Prakrit, suggesting that was no conflict between the two. (Upadhye 2001: 164-165)

Pollock tries very hard to establish that early Buddhists rejected the use of Sanskrit due to the theory of language of the *Mimāṃsaka*-s; and therefore the onus is on him to argue why the Buddhists later turned to Sanskrit. He forwards some arguments such as —

- Sanskrit is the language of learning
- syndrome of competition with Brahmanical communities for popular esteem
- technical precision of Sanskrit
- many *Brāhmaṇa*-s such as Nāgārjuna, Nāgasena etc. converted to Buddhism,

and finding none of them satisfactory, only says in conclusion that at least Buddhists used Sanskrit for the first time to compose literature outside of the *Veda*-s. (Pollock 2006: 53-59)

Citing the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, Bapat says that “the Buddha had permitted his followers to use their own speech for the purpose of instruction and preaching.” He further says that the *Sarvāstivādin*-s adopted Sanskrit since people in the north-western part of India were conversant with the same; while the *Mahāsaṅghika*-s adopted Prakrit as the people in the eastern regions (Magadha and Aṅga) were familiar with the same (see Figure 1). (Bapat 2001: 460-461) Hence, the choice of language for preaching seems to be very pragmatic, rather than due to sectarian (or religious) differences, or for the sake of rejection of an esoteric linguistic theory.

If by “literature outside of the Vedas”, Pollock means that literature which rejects the Vedic authority, or is critical of the Veda, then perhaps only non-adherents of Vedic religion can compose such literature. On the other hand, if it means that literature which does not necessarily have to criticize or reject the Veda, then there is abundant literature in Sanskrit pre-Buddha including the *sūtra*-s of various *darśana*-s — Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Pūrva-mīmāṃsā, Uttaramīmāṃsā etc. Agrawala says that “Pāṇini’s reference to Vāsudeva as an object of bhakti throws light on the antiquity of the bhakti cult,” hence at least the core portion of the *Mahābhārata* (or *Jaya*) including the *Bhagavadgītā* was composed before the advent of Buddha.

### 3.7 Caste and Social Reform

Pollock says that

“Buddha explains the entirely contingent nature of all social categories, and the process of social evolution through which this contingency manifests itself. The Brahman is not superior biogenetically; indeed, “Brahman” is shown (by etymology) not even to be a natural kind, he is simply one who “keeps away from bad things,” as the true Śūdra is anyone who “leads a cruel, mean life.” The target of this discourse is of course the discourse of the celebrated Rigvedic text, the *Puruṣasūkta*...”

(Pollock 2006: 407)(spelling/italics as in the original)

Nowhere do the Veda-s speak of a *Brāhmaṇa* as biogenetically superior. It has been shown in §3.4.3 above that *Brāhmaṇa*-s have been taught by *Kṣatriya*-s, and also, how the classes were fluid initially. Agrawala mentions that Pāṇini has a *sūtra* describing the *bhāva* (nature) and *karma* (conduct) which should characterize a *Brāhmaṇa*, and also

speaks of a degraded *Brāhmaṇa* as *ku-brāhmaṇa* (Agrawala 1953: 74). Commenting on the Buddhist critique of the caste system, Mookerjee says

“The Buddhists were hard critics of caste, particularly of the Brāhmaṇa caste and the hereditary privileges incidental to caste hierarchy.... It is however, a mistake, which has become a confirmed belief among the modern social reformers, to suppose that the Buddha was a social reformer. It is true that he stood against the Brāhmaṇa’s claim to superiority.... But he did nothing to interfere with the social organization of the time.... It is again, a superstition to presume that the Buddha was a democrat or an advocate of socio-political equality. He was a perfect stranger to these modern ideas, and the political ideal of a *cakravartin* (emperor) ruling over the whole of India was dearest to his heart. So far as the Order was concerned, it was organized on the basis of equal rights subject to the abbot. And so long as he lived, he maintained his supremacy in the Church.”

(Mookerjee 2001: 585-586)

One of the prominent social reformers of early 19th century, Swami Dayananda Saraswati who established the Arya-Samaj, vowed his allegiance to the Veda-s and yet was critical of the caste system then practiced; which clearly shows that the vulgarized rigid hereditary caste system based on birth that was then practiced is not prescribed by the Veda-s (Gore 2011: 128).

Mukherjee notes that —

“Continuity of the caste system in India, from ancient down to the modern times, is a grand riddle for the social and economic historians as well as the sociologists. Max Weber, the famous sociologists has tried to analyze social stagnation in India in terms of the metaphysical aspects of its caste-system. But the Indian caste-system has not been wholly influenced by religious or metaphysical considerations. It has several social or economic bases. One of the reasons of the continuity of the caste-system in modern India is thus the fact that it has permitted sufficient upward and lateral mobility within the caste-system as a whole.”

(Mukherjee 2011: 611-613)

### 3.8 Conversion

Pollock stresses voluntarism of early Buddhism (and Jainism) through the idea of “*śaraṇāgamana*, taking refuge in the Buddha” or conversion, and says that although “historically exogenous communities were eventually incorporated in some measure in the *vaidika* social sphere, nowhere and never did this process have an evangelical dimension.” (Pollock 2006: 406).

The *vaidika* society has the *samskāra* of *upanayana* from when the study of *Veda*-s is undertaken. For a *vaidika*, the *Veda*-s is itself omniscient or are the words of an omniscient God; and therefore, he surrenders to the very words (of God). Only when such *śraddha* is lacking will he seek any means outside of the *Veda*-s. In addition, there are a number of deities described in the *Veda*-s themselves, or in the later *Purāṇa*-s and *Itihāsa*-s, to whom one can surrender, and there are many choices from which to pick an *iṣṭa-devatā*. Or else, one can even surrender to one’s guru who is the guiding light in one’s life and spiritual progress. Hence, it does not seem correct to say that the voluntarism of Buddhism (or Jainism) alone is stressed through the idea of *śaraṇāgamana*. However, as noted in §2.1 above, voluntarism perhaps might be taken as laying emphasis on self-effort to the negation of taking instruction from others, but the idea of *śaraṇāgamana* (surrender) itself does not seem to gel well with the ideology of self-effort.

While talking about the spread of Buddhism, Swami Vivekananda says —

“I have every respect and veneration for Lord Buddha, but mark my words, the spread of Buddhism was less owing to the doctrines and the personality of the great preacher, than to the temples that were built, the idols that were erected, and the gorgeous ceremonials that were put before the nation. Thus Buddhism progressed. The little fire-places in the houses in which the people poured their libations were not strong enough to hold their own against these gorgeous temples and ceremonies; but later on the whole thing degenerated.”

(Vivekananda 2007: 132)

At this point, it is interesting to note what Max Müller has said about conversion and Buddhism —

“History seems to teach that the whole human race required a gradual education before, in the fulness of time, it could be admitted to the truths of Christianity. All the fallacies of human reason had to be exhausted, before the light of a higher truth could meet with ready acceptance.... That religion, the religion of Buddha, has spread, far beyond the limits of the Aryan world, and, to our limited vision, it may seem to have retarded the advent of Christianity among a large population of the human race. But in the sight of Him with whom a thousand years are but as one day, that religion, like all the ancient religions of the world, may have but served to prepare the way of Christ, by helping, through its very errors, to strengthen and to deepen the ineradicable yearning of the human heart after the truth of God.

Though the religion of the Buddha be of all religions the most hostile to the old belief of the Brahmans,—the Buddhists standing to the Brahmans in about the same relation as the early Protestants to the Church of Rome,—yet the very bitterness of this opposition proves that Buddhism is peculiarly Indian. Similar ideas to those proclaimed by Buddha were current long before his time, and traces of them may be found even in other countries.”

(Müller 1860: 32-33)

Max Müller, perhaps in a strange way, notes the proximity between Hinduism and Buddhism by comparing them with Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity. It is not apparently clear if Max Müller has noticed the lack of the hold of Buddhism on the masses [as discussed in §2.2 above] and is therefore saying it prepares the way for conversion to Christianity; or he is simply asserting his supremacist attitude.

## 4. Decline of Buddhism in India and Recent Revival

Mookerjee (2001: 576) notes that “Buddhism, as preached by the sage of the Śākyā clan and as it appears in the recorded versions of the Pali cannon, was not meant to be a full-fledged religion covering the entire gamut of human interests. The Buddha “claimed to have discovered a path to salvation from the evanescent, miserable existence in the world, and he preached this to all and sundry.... He left the nature of ultimate reality... an open question.” Further, he says that Buddhism’s progressive deviation from the ancient moorings increasing the number of gods and goddesses in the pantheon and rise in ritualism reduced its popularity among the intellectuals. While

talking about *bhakti* and the *purāṇa*-s, Swami Vivekananda says “we ought to be grateful to them [Purāṇa-s] as they gave us in the past a more comprehensive and better popular religion than what the degraded later-day Buddhism was leading us to.” (Vivekananda 2007: 332). The decisive blow to Buddhism most likely came from the destruction of monasteries and massacre of Buddhist monks at the hands of the Turks (Mookerjee 2001: 579, 595). Although there are not too many adherents of Buddhism in India, yet the Buddha is very much revered nonetheless and also considered as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Also, some of the high points of Buddhism are assimilated into what is popularly known as Hinduism today, and Buddhism continues to live in that sense.

Fast forwarding to British India, Barua points out that *Mahāyāna* Buddhism being liberal in nature, had managed to survive in some pockets in the Himalayan regions and the Chittagong area, but a need was felt in the 18/19th centuries CE to revive the more conservative *Theravāda* sect. During the same time frame, Dr. Ambedkar was fighting for the cause of the depressed classes; and also demanded a separate electorate for the depressed classes. In a turn of events, when only reservations for the depressed classes were sanctioned; Dr. Ambedkar finally led his followers through mass conversion to *Theravāda* Buddhism in 1956 at Nagpur. (Barua 2011: 708-709)

## 5. Conclusion

The paper presents some of the views of Pollock about Buddhism being a sort of revolution against the prevailing Vedic religion and society. An analysis of the said views presented here shows that only those features of the axial age are carefully selected which can then be applied to another careful selection of features of a perceived conflict between Buddhism and the Vedic religion, between Sanskrit and Prakrit to present his preconceived notions as if they are the logical conclusion of some carefully well-examined arguments.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> However, the *vaidika*-s question the Buddhists about the basis of their belief in the doctrine of *karma* when they reject the authority of the Veda.

<sup>2</sup> Gruen (1990: 79–123). However, Malhotra (2016) points out that there are more differences between Roman and Indian cultures than similarities, so such parallels need not necessarily be true.

<sup>3</sup> This understanding is thanks to Dr. Rama Phaniraj.

<sup>4</sup> It may be the case that Newton’s formula of the force of attraction between two masses  $m_1$  and  $m_2$  separated by distance  $r$  given by  $F = Gm_1m_2/r^2$  might need correction in some cases, but the fundamental existence of the force of gravitation itself is unnegatable.

<sup>5</sup> “*Prorsus credibile est, quia ineptum est*” can be translated: “it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd”. The context is a defence of the tenets of orthodox Christianity against docetism: “The Son of God was crucified: there is no shame, because it is shameful. And the Son of God died: it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And, buried, He rose again: it is certain, because impossible.” — (De Carne Christi 5:4) (Connor 2014: 140)

<sup>6</sup> This actually follows from Aristotelian logic, about which Robinson says “The scenario Aristotle is imagining is one in which there is an incredibly unlikely event in the past that the rhetor wants or needs to claim actually happened; to that end the rhetoric should invoke its very improbability (unlikelihood, incredibility) as an argument in favor of the story’s accuracy, its truthiness.” Robinson (2016: 236).

<sup>7</sup> A common example given for the sake of understanding is — we see the Sun rising and setting everyday, but science says the Sun is stationary in the solar system; and we understand through the help of science that it is the rotation of the Earth which makes the Sun appear to rise in the East and set in the West.

<sup>8</sup> As the *śruti* is in line with *anubhava* (everybody's common experience), so should *yukti* (logic) be in line with *śruti*.

<sup>9</sup> It might be argued that the existence of other *loka*-s and cannot be verified by experience; but if one's daily experience of different time-space realms in waking and dream, in deep-sleep, and the continuity of the individual's existence across the three states is analyzed carefully, one cannot reject the possibility of other *loka*-s and *punarjanman*.

# Chapter 6

## Brāhmanism, Buddhism and Mīmāṃsā

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### Abstract

Western research seems to needlessly target “Brahmans” or priests as power-mongers. Modern life is very different to ancient times and India does not have a problem adapting to contemporary ways, but Western studies seem to find justification in raking up issues in distorted perspective and portray Indian society in a warped manner. Nowhere in Sanskrit treatises do we see exploitation of any community on the divisions of caste as a basis. Western study typically presents a set of data derived not from original research, but by partially re-stating the Mīmāṃsā’s own *pūrva-pakṣa* (objections) as their modern conclusions, showing the philosophy in poor light. Modern researchers do not grasp the context or present all sides of the arguments. Among several statements of fact, the personal view of the researcher, which actually has no basis and is unwarranted, is slipped in and made to look convincing. The writings of Johannes Bronkhorst

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\*pp. 189–209. In: Kannan, K. S and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*. Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

and Sheldon Pollock are seen to form damaging conclusions on false, concocted and misrepresented bases. Unless the reader is well-versed in the subject, it is difficult to spot the aberration. This paper attempts to academically evaluate a few issues, notably, *apauruṣeyatva* of Mīmāṃsā.

## 1. Classical Studies in Modern Times

Mīmāṃsā is relatively far less studied even by Indian scholars and is still taught in the traditional way, following the rigorous *paramparā* of many centuries, where teacher and student converse only in Sanskrit in order to retain the high level of precision in terminology. Unfortunately for Sanskrit studies, awareness levels are so low today among the general public, that we think that anybody can pick up any portion of study as part of university research and then claim expertise in it. It is apparent that modern methodology is considered adequate to delve into any subject and form conclusions based on the scholar's own analysis.

Native to India and also English-speaking, we are yet not native English speakers and have our limitations of time and interest to devote to studying Western Indologists' views on Mīmāṃsā. Most traditional scholars well-versed in Mīmāṃsā are not well-versed in English and do not read western writing in high-flown language; they do not contradict western writing and this perhaps leads to the impression that western study is on the right track. My own interest has been in studying the Sanskrit texts themselves, in good measure owing to the beautiful ring of the language; study of Physics, not Western humanities, formed my major in University along with Sanskrit studies which I continued to pursue into research level. This paper shall concern itself with observations on methodology and perspective on a few broad issues in Mīmāṃsā.

## 2. Basic Principles of Mīmāṃsā

The Veda-s contain hymns and prose passages discussing past events, secrets of the cosmos and liturgical procedures. Mīmāṃsā as a science has very ancient origins, formulated to methodically interpret the Vedic utterances in the proper, approved manner (*āmnātah*, as Bhartrhari says in *Vākyapadiya* I. 2) as one can easily fall into a pattern of misinterpretation and wrong application. Across a large

geographical expanse over many generations, it is not possible to maintain uniformity of interpretation of scripture without rules to follow. In the context of *yajña*, the rules of procedure are often stated clearly in Veda for a particular instance and have to be extrapolated for other rituals. Mīmāṃsā rules become crucial in such cases, where rules stated for the *prakṛti*, i.e. the ritual in context of discussion, have to be adapted for *vikṛti*, or extended application.

As one of the greatest writers of modern times on Mīmāṃsā, Prof. K. T. Pandurangi writes -

“The area of semantics is deeply probed by philosophy, psychology, anthropology and other human sciences that deal with the mind. It is the behavior of the mind that is reflected in the behavior of languages. Mīmāṃsā philosophy that gives utmost importance to sabda-pramana is deeply concerned with language. It studies all aspects concerning the import of language. Its studies belong to a period of our intellectual history when psychology, sociology, human sciences, etc, were not bifurcated from philosophy. Therefore its handling of the problems of language involves the approach of these disciplines also. Mīmāṃsā reveals remarkable insight on these aspects.

“Purva-Mīmāṃsā considers language to be autonomous at three levels: (i) the relation between word and meaning, (ii) sentence-meaning, (iii) the purport of a passage or discourse. The relation between word and meaning is natural. It is not fixed by any agency or God. When a meaningful expression is expressed its meaning is also expressed. It is comprehended through elders’ conversation from generation to generation.”

(Pandurangi 2006: xx, 132)

So on one hand Mīmāṃsā has a marvelous science of sentence interpretation and on the other a system of philosophy. It advocates true self-understanding, maturity of knowledge gained from the study of *Upaniṣad*-s in order to live a contented life without superstition and to develop renunciation from the inevitably ephemeral pleasures of the world. Knowledge, a disciplined life, fulfilling obligations and contentment are advocated for their intrinsic value in giving peace of mind leading to salvation. Mīmāṃsā promises no pearly gates, golden thrones or rows of virgins welcoming the hero with open arms in the afterlife.

“Parthasarathi describes the state of Mokṣa as ‘svastha’, i.e. the state of remaining unto himself. .... At this stage, not only the pleasure

and pain are eliminated but all other qualities such as desire, initiative, religious merit, etc, are also eliminated.”

(Pandurangi 2006: 567)

“The role of *ātmajñāna* is stated in the *Mīmāṃsā* terminology as *kratvartha*. The knowledge of *ātman* as distinct from the body enables a person to undertake sacrifices which yield results in the other world and after this birth.”

(Pandurangi 2006: 569)

The *karma* theory is very important to explain the vagaries of life. (The concept of divine retribution in one way or other is held almost everywhere in the world.) The *ātman* is defined ultimately by volition, which is its chief attribute. So, as M. Hiriyanna points out, Indian philosophy lays greater emphasis on free will than fate and is not deterministic in its outlook (Hiriyanna 1994: 109). The individual soul takes responsibility for its actions and the just deserts that follow. Emancipation, *mokṣa* is when the soul revels in its innate glory, transcending the sorrows of the world. The saying, *muktir naijasukhānubhūtir amalā* from a verse by Śrī Vyāsatīrtha (Archak 2004: 22) is well-known in Dvaita Vedānta tradition, meaning that *mukti* is the state of bliss natural to *ātman* without external joy or pain. This is also the view accepted by *Mīmāṃsā* (Dravid and Narayanan 2016:322).

### 3. The Western Viewpoint

Western research seems to needlessly target “*Brāhmans*” or priests as power-mongers. Priests and Vedic scholars formed a minority of the population. In a society formed of producers such as farmers, artisans and craftsmen, administrative servants, military soldiers, feudal lords, traders, rulers, teachers and priests, how much of the economy could have been appropriated by the “*Brāhmaṇ-s*”? “*Brāhmaṇa-s*” as the word indicates, are the priests concerned with Vedic – rituals and the study and teaching of Veda and ancillary subjects. It is derived from the word “*Brāhmaṇa-s*” – the prose passages in the *Veda-s* that deal with knowledge of “Brahman”. Modern studies which are directed towards portraying them as imposing Vedic religion on society seem to be only divisive in their intent as there is no basis for such a view. The priests formed a part of society with its full acceptance and support. That the *Brāhmaṇa* priest, despite the disciplined life imposed on him to pursue studies of the *Veda-s* was held in great

esteem and placed at the apex of society goes to show that classical Indian society was knowledge-driven and did not hold military or economic prowess as supreme. In the frequent military skirmishes that occurred over collection of tax and tributes, the *Brāhmaṇa* living quietly in the ashrams or towns, teaching youngsters the traditional learning, conducting temple worship or Vedic rituals was spared the atrocities of war and not murdered for material gain. This was again a reflection of the respect the *Veda*-s were held in, which found place in the *Brāhmaṇa* as a transferred epithet.

This view may appear too idealistic but in fact points out the basic principles behind *varṇāśrama vidhāna* in its origins. Dr. Pollock has traced the ills of modern caste problems in India to the tenets of Mīmāṃsā but there is no basis for such allegations. Firstly, these are problems of economics and lack of education, not caste problems as the Westerner may like to believe. Keeping economic assets within the community and cultural affinity rather than religious sentiment was behind caste feelings in bygone times, as perhaps even today. Secondly, the tenets of Mīmāṃsā have nothing to do with caste equations - that was the purview of *Dharma* śāstra-s which were descriptive codes rather than prescriptive formulations as is widely and wrongly believed. Prabhakara Mishra, one of the greatest Mīmāṃsaka-s has famously said that *Brāhmaṇatva* is not a *jāti* but an *upādhi*, in the 7th century CE. That is, one is not born a *brāhmaṇa* but becomes one due to circumstances and training from infancy. (Pandurangi 2004: 79). Western scholars tend to ignore such viewpoints,

### 3.1 Some Examples from Writings of Bronkhorst

From “The origin of Mīmāṃsā as a school of thought: a hypothesis” written by Dr. Johannes Bronkhorst - 1

“However, Mīmāṃsā...is more than merely the outcome of a continuous development of the ideas and concerns which we find in the ritual Sutras. At some period in its history Mīmāṃsā underwent one or more dramatic breaks with its predecessors, which allowed it to become an independent school of thought.”

(Bronkhorst 2001: 1)

There is much speculation on the researcher’s part that is presented here as scholarly study. It is not possible to truly find evidence of

any dramatic reason that others did not know, unless we meticulously present data to support a pre-conceived notion. Such research cannot be considered serious study of *Mīmāṃsā*.

“*Mīmāṃsā* never fully replaced the ritual traditions of the Vedic schools. We know, for example, that Bhartṛhari a philosopher from the fifth century C.E., though acquainted with *Mīmāṃsā*, refers for ritual details to the handbook of his own Vedic school, that of Manava-Maitrayaniyas (Bronkhorst 1985; 1989; 105 (375-376)). Other authors explicitly prescribe that sacrifices should adhere to the manuals of their own schools (Deshpande 1999). The *Mīmāṃsāsutra* itself (2.4.8-9), finally, first records the position according to which there are differences between the rituals in different Vedic schools, then rejects it. All the passages reveal a certain amount of resistance against *Mīmāṃsā* that was apparently felt by a number of orthodox Brahmins, presumably from the very beginning.”

(Bronkhorst 2001: 3)

It appears that the Westerner thinks he understands all aspects of Vedic ritual across the Indian subcontinent, across the centuries. We have already seen that there were different lines of thinking and it would naturally reflect in the practices of different parts of the country. Even today, the great variety underlying our dress, food, festivals, traditions of celebrating events such as weddings, birthdays, childbirth, etc are so diverse. Why should Vedic ritual practices be exactly the same? As in classical dance and music that all follow the same principles of *Nātyaśāstra*, we see great variety even while adhering to the same basic principles. In the case of Vedic rituals too, there could be differences based on timings, seasons, availability of fruits, vegetables and animal species for sacrifice. The Vedic rituals were also of different kinds, which the Western scholar fails to see - those that were mandatory or obligatory and those that were optional. The routine rituals did not have elaborate arrangements or large expenses. Again, *Kalpa Sūtra*-s and *Grhya Sūtra*-s defined rituals in addition to those that *Mīmāṃsā* discusses. So there is bound to be a great dismaying variety which academic scholars cannot understand.

To examine the above quoted passage, are we to understand “*Mīmāṃsā*” as different to “the Vedic schools” or as part of them? How does the modern scholar define “*Mīmāṃsā*” as different to other “Vedic schools”? It is impossible to surmise that Bhartṛhari followed a particular “handbook,” based on a quotation. How do we know that

the sentence he quotes did not find common occurrence in several if not all texts, as was most likely the case? It is well-known that many maxims current in the tradition were quoted by many important writers of *śāstra*; modern researchers cannot use these to date the writers or their texts.

Indian philosophical writing is full of debate; this style of writing using *pūrvapakṣa* and *siddhānta* in no way endorses the last sentence quoted above from Bronkhorst, as would be apparent to anybody who is well-versed in the method of Sanskrit *śāstra*.

Further, Bronkhorst enquires –

“The schools of philosophy that arose beside Mīmāṃsā believed in the beginninglessness of the universe, to be sure, but they all accepted, unlike Mīmāṃsā, the periodic destruction and recreation of the world? Why then did Mīmāṃsā invent and accept this strange set of doctrines? What could the Mīmāṃsakas possibly gain by doing so? Predictably, none of our sources propose any answers, for these doctrines are not presented as new inventions but as eternal truths. But we are entitled to ask what benefit these strange doctrines brought with them.

What could be the advantage for the Brahmins concerned in accepting them?”

(Bronkhorst 2001: 3)

It would have been considered equally strange if every single school of thought adhered to the same set of ideas. In a great university such as Nalanda, it is doubtful that all the teachers taught the same philosophy. India was known to have many diverse views in every age as it does even today. A person’s theoretical views may even evolve over his or her own lifetime and influence the practical decisions to varying degrees. Coming to Mīmāṃsā, it was first developed as a science of interpretation of sentence-meaning, not as a complete world view invented, packaged and offered to consumers as might seem to a modern scholar. In accordance with its philosophy of language, the Mīmāṃsā takes this stand on the origin of the Veda-s and the stable state of the world. Most other schools have their own explanation of what happens to the Veda-s during *pralaya*.

In the Mīmāṃsā view, since *śabda* is a real, eternal entity with independent ontological status, it does not undergo dissolution in time of *pralaya* even. When the other philosophies question how anything can escape dissolution at *pralaya*, Mīmāṃsā solution is not to accept

the end of the world at all. It takes a bold stance rooted in practicality. It is all very well to single out Mīmāṃsā as unconventional on this issue, but let us not forget that none of us humans have been witness to *pralaya* or creation.

“*sargādipakṣopanyāsaḥ tannirāśa । - yadi paramevam? - sargādikāle bhagavataa prajāpatinā sarvameva sthāvarajaṅgama, dharmādharmau ca srṣṭvā .....vedāśca pratipādītāḥ, .....śabdārtha pratipatti rvyavahāraśceti ।*  
 “*tadapyayuktam - itthambhāve pramāṇābhāvāt ।*” (Śāstradīpikā: 219)  
 “*na kadācidanīdrśam jagat ।*”

(Dravid and Narayanan 2016: 292)

The tenets of Mīmāṃsā are valid in a constant world. The correct way to interpret this point is to appreciate the Mīmāṃsā’s practical perspective in not taking into account the end of the world. It lays greater emphasis on our existence in this world which surely has its end! It was essential that a school of thought provide a cogent system that did not contradict itself. Rather than a theory of Mīmāṃsā being a sudden upstart that rose to pocket the fees, why does the Westerner not see it as a logical solution offered to defend the Veda-s against irreverent allegations, much to the solace and gratitude of the faithful populace? It was not uncommon for a school of thought to take a particular stand that suited its framework better on logical issues, e.g. accepting different number of *pramāṇa*-s, *samavāya sambandha*, etc.

Bronkhorst’s enquiry into what the Brahmins concerned stood to gain from it is not significant and goes outside the purview of academic study. But it is worth noting how the Western researcher selectively uses the word “Brahman” and the newly fabricated but unexplained “Brahmanism”.

### Discussion On Vākyapadīya

In his paper, “Studies on Bharṭṛhari, 9: Vākyapadīya 2.119 and the Early History of Mīmāṃsā” at the outset in the Abstract, Bronkhorst writes

“..Interestingly, Śabara’s classical work on Mīmāṃsā has abandoned this position, apparently for an entirely non-philosophical reason: the distaste felt for the newly arising group of Brahmanical temple priests.”

(Bronkhorst 2012: 411)

This illustrates how the Western scholar oversteps his bounds and inserts his own prejudices or compulsions of novelty into what is made to look like academic study. He is writing about the possible distaste of a section of people towards others nearly two millenia ago, phrasing it with “apparently” to be on the cautious side, while clearly attempting to present a biased picture.

### Vākyapadīya of Bhartṛhari:

astyarthah sarvaśabdānāmiti pratyāyyalakṣaṇam ।  
 apūrvadevatāsvargaiḥ samamāhurgavādiṣu ॥ II. 119  
 prayogadarśanābhyaśādākārāvagrahastu yah ।  
 na sa śabdasya viṣayaḥ sa hi yatnāntarāśritah ॥ II. 120

(Iyer 1983: 58)

The article discusses Bhartṛhari’s *kārikā*-s 119-120 from *Vākyapadīya* Kāṇḍa II. shown above and which he translates as -

“They say that the characteristic of what is to be conveyed is that all words have things [corresponding to them]; this applies to [words] such as ‘cow’ as much as to [the words] *apūrva*, *devatā* and *svarga*. The grasping of the form ( *ākāra* ) as a result of repeatedly observing the use of a word, on the other hand, is not the realm of words, for it is based on a different effort.”

(Bronkhorst 2012: 412)

He says later -

“The second half of the above observation - “there are things corresponding to all (Sanskrit) words - will occupy us in this article. It is the most startling half, at least from a modern point of view. It is demonstrably untrue for the languages we now use, which have many words - such as “Martian”, “angel” - that do not refer to any existing entities, not at least according to an important part of their users. It presupposes a language stable in time, and which has no place for new words coined by its users. This may very well be the image that many Sanskrit users had of their language.”

“It is clear from this response that the author of the criticized passage believed that various religious and mythological expressions correspond to reality simply because those expressions are part of the Sanskrit language.”

“We may conclude that Uddyotakara, as Vātsyāyana before him, did

indeed believe that all Sanskrit words (or at least nouns) designate something that exists in the “outside world”.

(Bronkhorst 2012: 413)

We would like to point out here firstly, that Bhartrhari is illustrating how language functions by recalling the idea associated with the word upon hearing it; he uses words that have a conceptual meaning rather than those referring to tangible, material entities such as “pot” or “cow” whose understanding is based on our having perceived them with sense of sight, touch etc. Bhartrhari’s focus in the *Vākyapadiya* is to show how language functions for every different school of thought and he shows no favoritism or hatred to the ontology of any school. He opposes the *Mimāṃsā* theory of language on several counts, chiefly the divisibility of the sentence-meaning. *Mimāṃsā* on the other hand severely criticises the *sphoṭa* theory of Bhartrhari. But they are in concurrence on almost every other linguistic issue. In our present context Bhartrhari brilliantly (as always) points out that words such as *apūrva*, etc serve their purpose through mental idea, as nobody has seen it as an object.

Bronkhorst uses this argument to show that the *Mimāṃsaka*-s held these things (*apūrva*, *svarga*, *devatā*) as “objects” and then goes on to argue that people were to believe these things existed simply because it was said in Sanskrit. We cannot agree with this view as being sound or derived from the Sanskrit arguments. Firstly, the word *artha* means many things – object, meaning, purpose, goal, wish, etc. In Bhartrhari’s context here, it more precisely corresponds to “meaning”. Bhartrhari gives these examples (which are used by common people, not only scholars) expressly to show that people understand word-meanings even without seeing transactions concerning these objects in the process of learning language as explained by *Mimāṃsā*. Secondly, Bronkhorst extrapolates to show that the *Mimāṃsaka* believed that these entities were objects, as their names (the words) were in Sanskrit. This is not warranted, as there is a simpler explanation to the situation. (Logical reasoning demands that a complicated solution is not to be favoured over a simpler solution.)

There are words such as *manas*, *sukha*, *duḥkha*, *cintana* etc which are abstract but nobody doubts their existence. Note that the word “*artha*” is used, not “*bāhyārtha*” which would refer to “external object”. Puṇyarāja, in his *Vṛtti* on the *Vākyakāṇḍa* of *Vākyapadiya* says,

“*buddhyārūḍhastu śabdasyārtho, na bāhyah!*” (Iyer 1983: 58). That is, the meaning of a word is conceptual, in the mind, not an external object. Bronkhorst’s translation violates this principle. It is not as if the Mīmāṃsaka believed in a material object (a gross body, possessing mass) such as *apūrva*. When a word such as “heaven” is used in a sentence, both speaker and hearer are quite sure what is meant. In another place, Bharṭṛhari gives the example of “*apsaras*” to illustrate a similar point. (Tripathi 1977: 573)

These words are to be understood exactly as we do “Martian” or “angel”, in Bharṭṛhari’s example. On what basis does Bronkhorst differentiate? According to him, the principles of Sanskrit words cannot be applied to other languages!! Here we have a misrepresentation of *śāstra* - the masters of yore never said that. Although they wrote in Sanskrit and commented on Sanskrit grammar, expecting the language to conform to exacting standards, they have never barred any relevant linguistic theory from being applied to other languages. Mīmāṃsā is explicit that the world will not obey *śāstra* and that *śāstra* should follow real norms that exist in the world, but the modern researcher of the subject is not aware of such maxims. Here we find a fundamentally skewed perspective to Sanskrit studies – applying principles in a misguided manner and instead of showing how universal concepts in classical studies can make sense even today, the Western scholar goes out of his way to portray issues as warped, on artificially constructed evidence.

Common words such as “cow”, “pot” etc. would have to follow the same linguistic rules in any language, but those such as ‘*apūrva*’, ‘*devatā*’ and ‘*svarga*’ which are not essential in the Westerner’s world-view are selected to show seeming weakness in the theory. There is no weakness in our linguistic theory, neither has the Mīmāṃsaka any weird notions.

Despite his detailed discussions in this paper, Bronkhorst does not appear to have grasped the meaning of the two *kārikās* on which his paper is based. We now look at what they convey. *Kārikā 119* says that it is known that all words convey meaning, by *pratyāyya-pratyāyaka* relation and this is exactly the same in “*apūrva-devatā-svarga*”, as it is in such words as “cow”.

Bharṭṛhari has in several places pointed out that the word conveys meaning only through generalities, never with specific attributes. The

power of a word, its *pratyāyakatva*, is in the general meaning. The fact that the hearer gathers more upon hearing the word, is due to other factors, such as familiarity with the objects mentioned, etc. This is pointed out in *kārikā* 120 which says that the fact that more information is recalled upon hearing a word, such as the form of the object (or thing) that it may correspond to, is due to other reasons such as use (*prayoga*), having seen it (*darśana*) and familiarity (*abhyāsa*); it is not the capacity of the word itself, but is based on other efforts.

So in *kārikā* 119, Bhartṛhari says that the core function of the word ‘cow’ from which we understand the familiar, tangible animal, cow, is exactly the same as in words such as ‘*apūrva*’, ‘*devatā*’ and ‘*svarga*’, where the tangible form is not alluded to or conveyed. As an illustration, when an office colleague overhears a friend being told, “Burglars broke open your front door,” he would only understand the import of the sentence in a general sort of way, but cannot envisage the size, colour and heaviness of the door, nor the type, number and strength of the locks on it, unless he has seen them before (*yatnāntara*) – through “other efforts”.

Whereas Bhartṛhari is explaining that the word “cow” conveys as abstract a sense as the words, “*apūrva*”, “*devatā*” or “*svarga*”, Bronkhorst interprets it as the words, “*apūrva*”, “*devatā*” and “*svarga*” having as concrete a referent as the word “cow”, which is diametrically opposite to the actual meaning. In this case, he is 180 degrees off the mark!

There is no *pūrva-pakṣa* in this case under discussion but Bronkhorst builds an elaborate thesis on Mīmāṃsaka’s hatred of temple priests, etc. without even discussing the main concept in the linguistic theory. While the Indian tradition has always welcomed innovative thinking and the development of theoretical concepts, modern researchers’ imagination proceeds not on academic lines, but on theorizing on motives of long ago!

### 3.2 Some Examples from Writings of Pollock

#### *Apauruseyatva* of Veda-s

Pollock writes that the Buddhists held that language was a human invention but Mīmāṃsā held that it was eternal and had no human author (Pollock 2006: 53, 55). This concerns the important issue of *apauruseyatva* of Veda. It was not only the Buddhists who suggested

that language was a human invention — it was common perception of all schools that brought up the discussion of human speech being the starting point of verbal testimony. Starting from the *Śābara Bhāṣya*, all important texts of Mīmāṃsā discuss this issue in detail. We now look at some key arguments on the subject and try to appreciate the brilliance of Mīmāṃsā’s logic.

In testing the veracity of Vedic statements, the validity of language as a means to knowledge and the validity of verbal testimony is first analyzed. How do we comprehend the meaning of an utterance as valid? If one were to be directed by a person that the trees on the riverbank down the road were laden with fruit and went there seeking the fruits and actually found them, one ascertains the truth of the statement. But if one were to go there and find no trees with fruits, then the statement is false as it does not correspond to reality. A statement could be false if 1) it is uttered based on mistaken notions or false knowledge of the speaker, or 2) due to his intention to deceive. So normally, we rely on what reliable people tell us, who are knowledgeable and trustworthy. The truth of the statement hence depends on the virtue of the speaker in terms of being endowed with correct knowledge and also honesty. In case of error in the statement, the reason is invariably traced to the defect of the speaker, which has to be known in order to validate or invalidate his utterance. While a statement can convey meaning by rules of the language, the validity or credibility depends on the speaker. We do not believe everything we hear, but only the words of *āpta*, a trustworthy person who speaks the truth. (Dravid and Narayanan 2016: 98, 392)

In the case of the Veda-s, Nyāya holds God who is omniscient and without blemish, as the author of the Veda-s; the Veda-s are therefore completely reliable and their validity is beyond question. The Veda-s are also imperishable and eternal in each cycle of creation; God composes them in the same form in every new cycle of creation. But Mīmāṃsā does not admit of a personal god endowed with the necessary characteristics to compose the Veda-s, for lack of evidence. Rather than resort to doubtful explanations, they consider Veda-s as valid by themselves, there being no reason to doubt their teaching.

Here it is important to understand what “permanent” or “eternal” (*nitya*) means. Both Vyākaraṇa and Mīmāṃsā uphold the *nityatā* of *śabda*, i.e, word, meaning and the relation between them. Patañjali

in *Mahābhāṣya* and Bhartrhāri in *Vākyapadīya* enunciate the concept of *pravāhanityatā*, i.e. the principle by which a river current is considered a permanent body of water despite the water flowing past and changing every moment at any point. This is the permanence of a word. Although it may be uttered a hundred times and sound being evanescent, disappears everytime, the permanent form that is associated with it is recognized each time it is spoken or heard. [Incidentally, modern acoustics and wave patterns do tell us that a word actually has a form associated with it, which is used in modern electronics today that enable a person to speak commands into a computer].

When *Vyākaraṇa* and *Mīmāṃsā* say that words are *nitya*, *śabda* is *nitya* and so are the *Veda*-s, it means that they have been so as far back as one understands and therefore there is no point in enquiring after their origins and that the principles of that school (*Vyākaraṇa* or *Mīmāṃsā*) apply in a situation where the origin or end of the entity is not relevant. It defines the framework so to speak of the tenets of that particular school in explaining the avowed standpoint. (For instance, in the Classical Mechanics branch of Physics enunciated by Newton, matter is deemed different to energy and their inter-convertibility is not taken into account.)

Coming to the discussion on this matter, the Buddhists uphold only the teachings of Lord Buddha and reject the *Veda*-s. They are questioned on what basis can one replace the well-established, prevalent and ancient Vedic rituals by rites that are introduced by the Buddhists. What is the reason for holding their tenets as authoritative? They reply that as Lord Buddha was most noble in character and enlightened, he was *sarvajña*, i.e, omniscient. Hence his teachings are valid beyond question. But the *Mīmāṃsaka* raises objection that the omniscience of Lord Buddha cannot be verified by us, living in a far-removed time and place. We only have the word of other disciples, also removed in time and place. It is reasonable to draw the inference that just as there is nobody omniscient in the present time, so it must be in all times past. Moreover, the disciple himself not being omniscient, how can he comprehend the Buddha's omniscience? Kumārila Bhaṭṭa points out that while the Buddhists speculate/posit *sarvajñatva*, we (*Mīmāṃsaka*-s) speculate/posit *apauruṣeyatva*, but between the two, our method is simpler!

*sarvajñakalpanānyaistu vede cāpauruseyatā |  
tulyatā kalpitā yena tenedām sampradhāryatām ||*

- *Śloka-vārttika* II. 116 (Rai 1993: 61)

Dharmakīrti, a great Buddhist philosopher and contemporary of Kumārila, says that although omniscience cannot be proved, it is enough that the Buddha understood what *dharma* was and taught people what he knew. This is accepted by Mīmāṃsaka-s, but even then they argue, “where is the evidence that *Bauddha Āgama*-s should replace the Vedic tenets?” A person’s teachings enable us to infer what he himself understands, but that in itself is not a validation. Moreover, the Buddha wrote no books or even uttered the canons directly. When in deep trance, *samādhi*, he could not have spoken sentences. Sermons written by disciples at a later date would only reflect that disciple’s knowledge and its validity would be limited by the attributes of that person. The Buddhists say that by the prowess of the Buddha, even the plastering in the wall and the boulders in the vicinity reverberated with the master’s teachings. This, the Mīmāṃsaka-s are unable to accept and Kumārila calls it a matter of faith outside the range of logic, to depend on rocks and walls to deliver sermons.

*sānnidhyamātratastasya puruṣaścintāmaṇeriva |  
niḥsaranti yathākāmarū kuḍyādibhyo. api deśanāḥ ||*

*Śloka-vārttika* II. 138

*evamādyucyamānan tu śraddadhānasya śobhate |  
kuḍyādiniḥsṛtavācca nāśvāso vedanāsu naḥ ||*

*Śloka-vārttika* II. 139 (Rai 1993: 65)

The logical standpoint of the Mīmāṃsā on there being no author of the Veda-s may have easily been misunderstood as a notion of the Veda-s floating permanently and eternally among the distant stars but that is not the true explanation! We cannot assume that the great intellectuals of ancient India were so naive as to propagate irrational ideas or that the public were so gullible as to be led by them. There was always logic to support the views and although it took a lot of

training to be able to debate, there was not one profound philosophical concept that the common man was not aware of. If we were to pause to understand how God could have handed the tablets with the Ten Commandments inscribed on them to Moses, progress in reading the Bible would be slow indeed!

#### 4. A Few Other Issues

Prof. Pollock's writing usually appears to set out with some agenda rather than any genuine curiosity about any issue in Sanskrit studies. In the beginning of his chapter titled "Axialism and Empire" in the book, "Axial Civilizations and World History", he declares that he is seeking to establish a cause-effect relation separated by two millenia!

"Both because the divergent modes of realizing the imperial political principle in South Asia and Europe have had reverberations across history and because they demonstrate the existence as such of alternate possibilities in transregional polity, studying them is meant as a form of "actionable" history, an attempt to produce statements about past events that can inform the conduct of present practices."

(Pollock 2005: 400)

Clearly Prof. Pollock's studies are not intended as academic exercises but aimed to represent history as he would like to influence future action. Perhaps his interest is in using academic activities to take him closer to policy-makers of the world, as otherwise his views on the subject are quite baffling to any scholar long familiar with Sanskrit studies.

"The Veda's injunction to act is meaningful precisely because it enunciates something that transcends the phenomenal, something inaccessible to observation, inference, or other form of empirical reasoning – something in fact, irrational."

(Pollock 2006: 405)

This view is for the most part a repetition of the Mīmāṃsā's own explanation of why we cannot understand Vedic injunction by any other means, since we find it only in the Veda. The last part of the sentence, "something, in fact, irrational" is Pollock's addition. Mīmāṃsā's explanations are neither irrational nor beyond one's rationale. Admittedly, people cannot grasp the Veda-s spontaneously but have to be taught by a guru in the tradition. India has long followed

an oral tradition in Sanskrit studies; a book is an aid to study, but not a replacement for a good teacher.

From the article, “Mīmāṃsā and the problem of History in Ancient India” -

“Then I will go on to examine in a little more detail what I think could be viewed as a confrontation with history on the part of Mīmāṃsā, and the resulting limiting conditions on histiography imposed on the valuation of knowledge in general that Mīmāṃsā, the dominant orthodox discourse of traditional India, articulated”.

(Pollock 1989: 604)

“The denial of history, for its part, raises an entirely new set of questions. To answer these we would want to explore the complex ideological formulation of traditional Indian society that privileges system over the creative role of man in history - and that, by denying the historical transformations of the past, deny them for the future and thus serve to naturalize the present and its asymmetrical relations of power.”

(Pollock 1989: 610)

That ideological formulations in Indian society privilege systems over creative role of man cannot be said to be the norm – in many instances of creative activity, such as architecture, literature and music, they actually help the individual attain far greater heights. Seeing the depth of systematization in an ancient and continuous tradition such as ours, he is mistaken that it does not allow for novelty or creativity. The situation is similar to wondering, upon seeing the intricate rules of Indian classical music, whether any new song can be sung!

Appayya Dīkṣita was an orthodox brahmin, a traditional Vedic scholar, a Mīmāṃsaka, an Advaitin and a rhetorician par excellence. We cannot confine his identity to a definition that might be convenient for a modern research paper or monograph. We may mention here that Dr. Pollock translates the title of Appayya’s work *Pūrvottara-Mīmāṃsāvāda-nakṣatramālā* as “The Milky Way of Discourses on Mīmāṃsā and Vedānta” and then writes further -

“We might better capture the spirit if not the letter of the title by translating it “Collected Essays in the Prior and Posterior Analytics”, or perhaps instead, with a nod to Gadamer rather than Aristotle, “... in Philosophical and Theological Hermeneutics”.

(Pollock 2004: 2)

But “*Nakṣatramālā*” does not mean “Milky Way” - it means “group of stars” or “string of constellations”. There are traditionally twenty-seven constellations along the equator of the celestial sphere and since there are twenty-seven essays or arguments in the book the author has named it so! A necklace with twenty-seven beautiful pearls is also known as a *nakṣatramālā* (Apte 1965: 333). The Sanskrit term for “Milky Way” is *Ākāśa Gaṅgā*. Although not very significant in this case, it shows the latitude Western writers display in their translations. Here, Pollock covertly undermines the astronomical advances in the Indian system by using a wrong translation that is of no worth. Further, *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsā* always refers to *Mīmāṃsā*, the interpretation of the earlier portion of *Veda* dealing with ritual and *Uttara-Mīmāṃsā* always refers to *Vedānta*, which deals with the analysis of *Upaniṣad*. They cannot be translated as “prior and posterior analytics”. Where the translations go against traditionally held meanings, they have to be discarded. Language, by definition, is something that is used according to the intentions of the speaker and unless there is familiarity with the cultural context, there is bound to be error.

## 5. Conclusion

In Indian treatises on *śāstra* the subject under discussion was always considered more important than the historical antecedents of the writer or the place where the book had been written. Historical importance was accorded to the achievements of kings in edicts, but not in the pursuit of knowledge. It is a characteristic feature of Indian writing, but does not merit value judgements or speculation on motives. There is clear evidence that the Indian tradition understood the passage of time very well — royal edicts of military and economic relevance record the year very clearly. That very few edicts remain in a crowded tropical country with a long history is a different matter. Many families were known to have carefully preserved records of family trees with details of native place and property, but they have now gone up in dust.

In the *sankalpa mantra* that is chanted every time a person undertakes a formal worship ritual, his name and family are mentioned to establish his unique identity, the place in which he (or the activity at that point in time) is located is mentioned for unique configuration in space

and the date is also mentioned for uniqueness in time. The *Navya-Nyāya* philosophy had also developed technical terminology in terms of *avacchedakatva* of *deśa* and *kāla* to distinguish between any two individual entities. Way back in the *Vākyapadīya*, Bhartṛhari speaks of *mūrti-vivarta* and *kriyā-vivarta* which define an entity uniquely in space and time, as reflected in the four-dimensional Cartesian co-ordinates that define reality (Narayanan 2012: 79). The language is different, but the concept is the same. The American astrophysicist Carl Sagan has shown in his book and television show, “Cosmos” that for some reason the Indian civilization is unique in its astronomical scales of time that correspond to the figures in modern astrophysics.

There is not one system of knowledge that does not have some point of “singularity” as it is called in modern physics, where there is no answer and hence the question is not addressed. We can ask questions such as - 1) What was the expanding universe like, at its first moment of creation, at time  $t = 0$ ? 2) What was the cause of the Big Bang? 3) What is the value of infinity divided by zero? (The answer is: “indeterminate”, in mathematics.) 4) Why does the Bible say that God created the world in six days? 5) What is defined by “day” in this context? 6) Is it a “day” on the Earth or is it on Jupiter? 7) But then what would constitute the meaning of “day” on Uranus, whose axis of rotation lies parallel to the orbital plane of the other planets? 8) Should we not understand the neighborhood of the earth, the solar system, as being encompassed within the definition of “world” as created by God? And so on and so forth. But we cannot hope for conclusive answers. Can we criticize mathematics as a science because it cannot solve simple problem such as zero divided by zero?

The *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* speaks of the teacher and student sitting down together to study:

“Let us be protected together; let us sup together; let us join in our endeavours; let our study lead to illumination; may we never succumb to hate”. If the Western endeavours in Sanskrit studies are not guided by this lofty ideal, they are not worth five paise.

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**Ślokavārttikam.** See Rai (1993).

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**Vākyapadīya.** See Iyer (1983).

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# Chapter 7

## Chronology Beyond 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis'

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### Introduction

Indology, the study of India by Western scholars (primarily), first took roots when few of the expansionist-oriented European nations set foot in India. The initial attempts later emerged as a burgeoning separate field of study which has flourished in the past two centuries. Indology falls within the broader field of 'Oriental studies'. While the basic framework under which Indology is carried out (by scholars trained in Western ideologies) has remained the same, there has, from time to time, been some divergence in the specific lens utilized to study Indian tradition – history, language, literature and the likes. Consequently, the older 'oriental' lens has now morphed into, what some call, with justification, 'American-Orientalism' (for example, Malhotra 2016: 23–25). Owing to his acumen, Prof. Sheldon Pollock has emerged as the leader of this new take on Indology.

Over the course of approximately the last three decades, Pollock has provided a new hypothesis on Sanskrit studies and consequently

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<sup>\*</sup>pp. 211–259. In: Kannan, K. S and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*. Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

on Indology – which declares Sanskrit, first, as a political tool and subsequently, eventually, a dead language - because of its being a tool of polity, overthrown by the oppressed vernaculars. His hypothesis is based on his narrative and subsequent interpretation of ancient and medieval India related matters – the texts, inscriptions etc., as well as prescribing dates to not only the ancient texts but also to some historical events in the Indian subcontinent. His narrative purports to develop an overall picture of pre-modern Indian society, overarching in space and time. The veracity of his hypothesis and the corresponding picture of India can be examined in two ways.

Sanskrit plays a critical role in any picture of historical India, Pollockian or otherwise. This paper looks at Pollock's ideas on Sanskrit. He has defined a term 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' to evoke the idea of Sanskrit as a political tool. Three of his works directly relate to this Sanskrit Cosmopolis and are referred to here. This article essentially examines Pollock's hypothesis via testing the presented events associated with the Pollockian Sanskrit Cosmopolis and the Pollockian death of Sanskrit. Thus through this study, the authenticity of the Pollockian idea of Sanskrit as a political tool in India of yesteryears is examined.

Invariably, any study of history involves dating the events in the correct order – the correct dating and the study of events across dates is chronology. The traditional approach of investigating chronology is to verify the dates of events. Specifically, in this case, it involves investigating the dating of events followed by Pollock *et al.* in his hypothesis of Sanskrit Cosmopolis and compared with other available scholarship on historical dating. Malhotra, in *The Battle for Sanskrit*, presents some examples where such a scholarship differs in the chronology subscribed to by Pollock *et al.* More recently Sastry (Sastry 2017) has provided further examples. Clearly, this avenue offers significant research opportunities<sup>1</sup>. The very fact that there could be different dates possible provides a serious challenge to Pollock's hypothesis.

However, this paper considers an alternative way. This alternative approach first examines the narrative of Pollock which governs the lens which is used to interpret the events. The *pūrva-pakṣa* then outlines the events themselves as published by Pollock (via this lens) and described by him *within the dates defined by himself* (chronology). It

is then shown why the Pollockian narrative goes beyond space-time. Therefore, if such a narrative were to be true, then events beyond the dates assigned by Pollock can be expected to be the same as that within, and hence amenable to prediction. In other words, the events within Pollock's assigned chronology is expected to be duplicated, and therefore observable *beyond* the assigned dates of Sanskrit Cosmology. To investigate Pollock's hypothesis these 'predicted' events are compared against the actual 'observed events'. The observed events are obtained from traditional documented sources, in particular Baldev Upadhyaya's book – *Kāśī kī Pāṇḍitya Paramparā*. Finally, the article also presents the traditional view/narrative of the pre-modern, and indeed the ancient, Indic society. It is seen that a picture of India of yesteryears, substantially different from Pollock's, emerges via the observed events presented.

Other than the rebuttal to Pollock, it is also hoped that the readers, generic and those in the field of Indology, will find useful traditional sources to refer to and the motivation to read them. A case in point is Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmi's *Rāmāyaṇa Paricaryā*, which Baldev Upadhyaya describes as containing the solemn meaning of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. He describes this text to be more a note than a commentary on the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

## ***Pūrva-Pakṣa: Pollock's Hypothesis***

Pollock has written a series of India related material, which is a substantial list, during the course of his long academic career. His hypothesis on "dead" Sanskrit is largely contained in his three articles – "The Sanskrit Cosmopolis" (1996), "India in the Vernacular Millennium: 300 to 1200 C.E." (1998), and "Death of Sanskrit" (2001). These articles bring the Pollockian ideas about the 'dead' Sanskrit into sharp focus. The present article focuses on two of these articles – (Pollock 1996 and Pollock 2001). Much material in *pūrva-pakṣa* is gleaned from his Sanskrit Cosmopolis paper.

His entire hypothesis, all that is contained in these articles, can be summarized in the following words: The perfection and the subsequent aesthetic appeal of Sanskrit language - grammar, *kāvya*, etc. was deliberately developed by scholars (brahmins/pandits) for the purpose of colonizing other regions in collusion with the kings (Hindu). The successful colonization attempts were carried out solely

by using the power of the language – Sanskrit – as a political tool and not by the march of an army or a religious crusade. These regions, oppressed by Sanskrit, then rose against it, and reasserted themselves, thereby killing Sanskrit in the process.

The word ‘colonizing’ above is important to discuss. Pollock cites R.C. Majumdar’s work which uses the word India’s colonizing past and adds to it: “...in the Indian case, the consolation of its own great ‘colonial’ past in the face of a humiliating colonized present” (Pollock 1996: 233).

At the very core of Pollock’s hypothesis is his narrative that India’s natural state is that of balkanization (being broken into pieces). A glimpse of this idea is seen in the following:

“The point of...tracking the historical trajectory along which Sanskrit...- travelled in the thousand-year period...is to make social-theoretical sense of it. ...Can we determine the conditions that enabled this language...to spread...with such vast translocality, to become the means by which a whole world gave voice to a political vision?”

(Pollock 1996: 231)

Indeed, he seems vexed about Indologists not seeing the balkanized state of India:

“...various nationalisms equated language community and political community, and modernity created the true *ideological* representations of culture: the illusory and dangerous notions of the authentic, the autochthonous, the indigenous, the native.”

(Pollock 1996: 247)(*italics as in the original*)

In effect, he is saying that something is amiss in Indology theories related to Sanskrit – this theory, his hypothesis, which is capable of making socio-theoretical sense of the history of Sanskrit – is the aestheticization of power by Sanskrit. This power brought together separate regions together and formed the Cosmopolis – but for this power, India would have just been an assortment of different regions. Naturally, after the ‘defeat of the Sanskrit Cosmopolis’ and the ‘Death of Sanskrit’, these regional ‘pieces’ must attain their natural state of balkanized regions and go their separate ways, politically and culturally.

Movement of the Sanskrit language as a political tool requires discussion on culture. Pollock’s belief is that culture is always an ongoing process – ‘Indeed, the very concepts ‘indigenism’ and

'autochthonism' are empty ones for those (that is Pollock) who take culture to be...processes, and...consider 'the indigenous' either only as the moment on a timeline prior to the particular transformation one is studying...' (Pollock 1996: 234). To Pollock, cultures are continuously transforming processes and therefore, as one extrapolates along the Pollockian trajectory, India never had a culture of its own to speak of. After all, cultures change continuously, India being no exception. Especially so when one invokes the Aryan Invasion theory (AIT). Of course, AIT is contentious at best, which he has failed to acknowledge. "Transculturation...is the real and permanent condition of all cultural life, with the vernacular and vernacularisation themselves being, not something authentic, but just another unstable stage in a sequence of changes" (Pollock 1996: 246).

The lack of culture in any space and time supports the idea of a balkanized space, or perhaps, better put, goes hand-in-hand with it. Whether this is true or not, i.e. whether India had its own culture or not is a much bigger question to answer. Regardless, 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis' and 'dead Sanskrit', rest on the ideas of 'no culture' and 'balkanized state of India'. Additionally, these ideas help identify the specific lens in use by Pollock, and indeed others who subscribe to his ideas, in their study of India. This lens then governs interpretations of events. In other words, the overall lens mentioned above defines the interpretative lens for the events. Hence, essentially, there are two interconnected layers to his hypothesis: Layer 1 – balkanized state and its culture, and Layer 2 – Sanskrit Cosmopolis and Death of Sanskrit. Layer 1 leads to Layer 2.

Having looked at the core of Pollock's ideas about Sanskrit, let us explore in further details, what according to Pollock, is the basis for his assertions.

### **Basis for his Hypothesis:**

We briefly look at the papers mentioned above and reconstruct the ideas contained therein.

In the 1996 paper on the 'Sanskrit Cosmopolis', Pollock thinks there existed a Sanskrit Cosmopolis. He states:

"There was,..., a certain concrete reality to the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis'.... For a millennium, and across half the world, élites participated in a

peculiar supralocal ecumene... It was...a symbolic network created...by the presence of a similar kind of discourse in a similar language deploying a similar idiom and style to make similar kinds of claims about the nature and aesthetics of polity – about kingly virtue and learning; *dharma* of rule, the universality of dominion."

(Pollock 1996: 230)

Here, material with evidence is the last part describing the 'kingly virtues and learning' and the rest. This is based on an epigraphical evidence presented by Pollock himself and will be discussed in the *uttara-pakṣa*. For now, the important thing to note is that the words 'elite', 'supralocal ecumene', 'symbolic network' are carefully chosen words by Pollock to evince a sense of elitist society. Note that he has not provided any evidence of elitist society or a supralocal ecumene. This is an example of his focused interpretations based on his own narrative of India.

Here, the word 'elite' requires further discussion. 'Elite' is decidedly a word of a European origin, reflecting their societal structure. While this word can be easily extended to the current Indian society, to use it for the Indian society of yesteryears requires evidence. Pollock does not provide any. The current paper aims to address this very lacuna and thereby test Pollock's claims of a Cosmopolis and dead Sanskrit. Using documented accounts, whatever is available, the lives of people from the previous era is presented and an attempt is made to recreate a picture of the then Indian society. This is done in the latter part of the paper. An example is the account of two villages which have survived for 700 years in two different parts of India (Dharampal 2000). The common feature between these villages is that both these villages were self-sustained and prosperous. Given that even the dynasties of kings do not last that long suggests that the kings and villages in a given kingdom would have a unique relationship, a relationship likely not seen in Europe (or present day America) hitherto. The response, the *uttara-pakṣa*, among other things, attempts to identify this relationship.

#### (i) Feature of the Cosmopolis:

Pollock explains the use of his word *Cosmopolis* – the term *polis* in *Cosmopolis* borrowed from polity or a political intention – no doubt leading him to interpret Sanskrit history with a lens favoring colonial intent of the Indian (Hindu) kings. Pollock contends that since

Java and Khmer inscriptions bore large resemblance with Tamil and Karnataka inscriptions, the Indian subcontinent and regions of South East Asia were part of a Cosmopolis – the similarity in epigraphical evidences both in India and South East Asia. Since Sanskrit was used as a political tool, it was a Sanskrit Cosmopolis.

“One hypothesis I want to explore is that Sanskrit articulated politics not as a material power - ... - but politics as aesthetic power” (Pollock 1996: 198). His arguments rely on the epigraphs and inscriptions found in different parts of India and other regions of South East Asia, namely, Khmer, Java, etc. Pollock presents the epigraphical analysis for these regions essentially in two stages – one, where he sees rise of Sanskrit to become dominant and the following next stage where the so-called vernaculars rise, subsequently reassert themselves, killing Sanskrit in the process. These two stages are based on the two different structures – one with the domination of Sanskrit and later, the domination of the vernaculars – found in the inscriptions. In the earlier epigraphs, at least the ones that have been reported, bear a *prāśasti* written in Sanskrit for King whose name can be adduced to have some Sanskrit connections, followed by the mundane deeds written in the vernacular. He is able to show that this structure, which he calls hyperglossia (“...though ‘diglossia’ may be...appropriate in the case of Prakrit, I would suggest the term *hyperglossia*” (Pollock 1996: 208)) with a ‘division of linguistic labor’ (Pollock 1996: 212), was present in inscriptions around the area, within and without India.

The structure of the inscriptions from the second stage is where the *prāśasti* and mundane deeds are both written in the vernacular. The timelines may have been different for different regions, but all of the inscriptions from the first stage are around 4th–9th century C.E. By the start of the second millennia of the Common Era, the subsequent structure sets in. His interpretation is that the vernaculars, oppressed by Sanskrit, rose against it, which is then reflected in the epigraphs.

Therefore, the attributes of the Pollockian Sanskrit Cosmopolis are, a) the rise and fall of Sanskrit, and b) Sanskrit in competition with the local vernaculars. He argues that the rise of Sanskrit is via the *prāśasti* writing first appearing in Sanskrit in a line or two. The share of Sanskrit in the inscription then increases to a full-fledged *prāśasti* in Sanskrit. The King is elevated to a divine status. The vernacular on the other hand is only just for recording the mundane deeds. The

competition is this so-called relegation of the vernacular to describe mundane deeds. He goes on to describe that as hyperglossia – division of labor expressed through language. This hyperglossia in turn is his claim to oppression by Sanskrit. One sign of the oppression of the vernacular, Pollock asserts: “Prakrit will be banished from the realm of public political poetry, throughout the subcontinent and beyond” (Pollock 1996: 207).

This oppression eventually leads to the collapse of the Cosmopolis – represented by the fall in the extent to which Sanskrit is found in the inscriptions relative to the vernacular. He provides some statistics from the epigraphical records of Karnataka to support his case of ‘rise and fall of Sanskrit’- Inscriptions wholly or partially in Kannada was 30% between 543-757 C.E. but rose to 90% between 960-1200 C.E. While there seems to be more usage of Kannada in the inscriptions in the time period provided, note once again that there is no evidence provided for either hyperglossia or oppression. Discussion on this Pollockian ‘competition’ between Sanskrit and vernacular languages and Sanskrit’s oppression will be presented in the *uttara-pakṣa*.

(ii) Invoking the aesthetic power of Sanskrit:

“No ‘Sanskrit’ political formation had conquered the Deccan and peninsular India during this period; no religious revolution had occurred, no new revelation was produced in Sanskrit”

(Pollock 1996: 198).

Clearly, *prāśasti* plays an important role here in Pollock’s analysis. Other than the statistics of inscriptions, he further describes the role of Sanskrit in the *prāśasti*-s: “They make political poetry in a language that had not been used before – for the publicly inscribed celebration of a historical ruler – and that from that point on for a thousand years will be only made in that language” (Pollock 1996: 207). This is the aesthetic power of Sanskrit that Pollock alludes to. He shows epigraphical evidences from Pallava dynasty with inscriptions containing similar structure as mentioned before between Sanskrit and Tamil.

Even as he asserts his conclusions, he admits to being puzzled by various questions (and this is important for we will come back to these questions at a later time, that seemingly have no answer) the extent of *prāśasti* written which have befuddled many Indologists, for example

the French Indologists, no military movement, no centre-periphery relation, no power centre, which he calls 'fluid centre' (presence of a power centre and this centre's control over a territory, called the centre-periphery relation, are critical to any colonial ambitions), and last but not the least no religious movement. In other words, what has baffled him, and the others, is the spread of Sanskrit without, what he describes as "No organized political power such as the Roman Imperium or a crusade like religious movement...or coherent, scripture-based religious idea-system...was at work here". Pollock's stroke of genius is to explain the spread of Sanskrit as an act of colonization, not through military or religious indoctrination, but through aestheticization of power. This aestheticization of power was coming from the Sanskrit language. He points out that the previous scholars have missed such an analysis and makes a plea to his fellow scholars to see it as he does, "And when will we begin to see that among the facts that are important in these texts (*in epigraphic inscriptions*) is their textuality itself ...".

He considers Sanskrit as having the unique ability for the task of aestheticization:

"Constituted... in large part by a communicative system and its political aesthetic, the Sanskrit ecumene [vast zone of cultural interaction] is characterized by a transregionally shared set of assumptions about the basics of power...or...about the ways in which power is reproduced at the level of representation in language..."

(Pollock 1996: 199)

At this juncture it is noteworthy to point out that A. G. Menon, in the same volume as where Pollock's article appears, states that the coastal region fishermen of South India had business dealings with the Dutch, and inscriptions have been found which show *praśasti* written in Sanskrit for the Dutch power bearers. Not Indian kings since the power has changed hands, followed by mundane deeds in the local language. This happening in the middle of the second millennium, much after, a reminder, as Pollock has described, the Sanskrit Cosmopolis has been demolished. Menon has interpreted the writing of the mundane deeds in local language as that which facilitates ease of understanding, while the Sanskrit *praśasti* following the tradition of the past – narrating the higher truths for the few who understand the language, and the insight to this truth that the language evinces.

The second paper talks about the details of how vernacularisation happens – through literization and then literarization, draws parallels between European and Indian vernacularisation, and an attempt to explain the phenomenon for the Indian vernacularisation. Here again, there are questions unanswered – while Europe balkanized into nation states, India did not, granting that language based regions did exist in India. There is, within the Indian context, once again, no religious movement or a march of a kingly imperium. Pollock is convinced that the current theories, of vernacularisation that is, are simply not good enough to explain the changes taking place in Europe, let alone India. Thus, in an attempt to answer these vexing questions on India, he reasserts the Sanskrit Cosmopolis hypothesis. The significance of this paper, though, lies in his conviction that 'literary culture' is the way (only?) to study cultures. What is culture? Is literary history of a culture the only way to study a culture in space and time? etc. – are formidable questions, as already stated, and beyond the scope of this paper. However, the Indic traditional point of view of Indic culture will be briefly presented at the end, the purpose being to simply present other opinions that exist.

Then comes the 'Death of Sanskrit' paper which has been discussed by others. Here he has looked at four cases to try and demonstrate that Sanskrit died by a certain period of time in India – different times at different places – but dead nevertheless. This paper has been critiqued and two of these critiques will be looked at more carefully (Section 'Prior challenges to Pollock'). Interestingly these have happened after (beyond) the Sanskrit Cosmopolis.

## Pollock's Narrative

The basic assumption of Pollock here, which I believe leads him to specific interpretation, is that Indian kings were power hungry, ironically, still steadfastly holding on to the fact that he is unable to find a power center or indeed a rigid center. These power seeking minds, the kings that is, sought the help of the brahmins, who colluded with them, and so we had the Sanskrit Cosmopolis. Subsequently, the local regions wanted a 'self-conscious' voice and rose against this 'translocal polity'. What is the basis for such an assumption? And more importantly, with no power centre, who or where is the actual colonizer? Without providing a justification for his assumptions,

the series of papers then attempts to validate these assumptions via a series of specific interpretations of historical happenstances. There are other assumptions and assertions in his interpretations, some explicitly stated and some not – brahmins wrote *prāstasīs* for the kings to legitimize their power, Vedic Sanskrit writings are only about liturgical and sacerdotal purposes – “where it is most at home” (Pollock 1996: 197), the entire history of India has had nothing worthwhile to contribute – “melancholy history” (Pollock 2001: 392) (a rephrasing, if you will, that India did not have a culture of its own) – other than the Sanskrit texts, etc.

Furthermore, Sanskrit with its aesthetics was used as a political tool to colonize but its aesthetics was perceived to be noble that needs to be upheld. This narrative shapes the lens on how to view/interpret events; and also subsequently helps put them in a certain sequence. Herein lies the chronology. Figure 1 summarizes the narratives and the sequence of events that come out of Pollockian analogy (also Malhotra 2016: 222-229).

In Figure 1, the cause is the narrative that the Hindu kings and the brahmins were power hungry. The entire history is then looked through this lens. The events in Figure 1 then follows – vertical strata in the society with oppression of women and dalits, this social structure challenged by Buddhism and rises against Hindu kings and brahmins, the rise of the Sanskrit Cosmopolis to counter the rise of Buddhism, the subversion of the vernaculars to assert Sanskrit in the regional languages, consequent vernacular uprising resulting in the defeat of Sanskrit and the eventual death of Sanskrit Cosmopolis and the death of Sanskrit. The chronology then assumes critical importance. For instance, the dates assigned to writing *Rāmāyaṇa* is 200 B.C. This date ensures that *Rāmāyaṇa* was written after Buddhism had arisen and supports the cited event that Hindu brahmins created *Rāmāyaṇa* to counter the rise of Buddhism. The role of chronology, that is assigning dates to events, should be amply clear.

Figure 1 clearly shows that chronology plays an important role in this narrative-event correlation. Furthermore, the Western study of humanities and social sciences promises ‘science’. Just as in physical sciences there is a cause-effect correlation, likewise, a cause is assigned (or assumed), and the event is then explained on the basis of that cause. This is akin to the ‘apple falling due to gravity’ explanation.

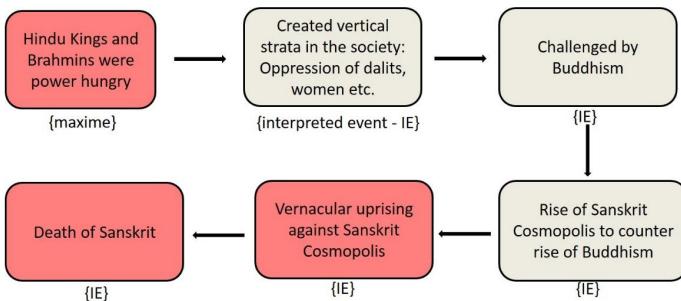


Figure 1: The schematic shows the narrative and the correlated event hypothesized by Pollock. The imposed narrative is that the Hindu kings and the brahmins have always been power hungry, they colluded to maintain the power structure. The red colored boxes (the essential narrative and the interpreted event IE) are challenged in this paper.

Gravity (which is the cause) must exist for the apple to fall (the event). Thus a science-like study is offered. Moreover, the chronology is obvious – gravity must exist/come before the fall of the apple (event).

### Approach for This Paper:

The standard chronology study is performed by checking the veracity of dates for the events. For example, were the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* written ‘after’ Buddhism to counter it? A variation of this study can be – Were these dates researched by Pollock himself, or did he borrow these dates from elsewhere? Is there universal acceptance of these dates? In other words, how established are these dates? These and similar questions offer a rich avenue of research and it has been carried out. For instance, Sastry and Kalyanasundaram’s joint paper (in this volume) investigates this line of questions.

The current paper however takes a different approach. A critical part of assigning the chronology are the actual events themselves. An alternative approach to studying the chronology therefore is to assess this entire sequence of events, a study to verify the accuracy of these events. For instance: Was there even a Sanskrit Cosmopolis? Did

vernaculars really rise against Sanskrit? etc. – these are some of the questions that can be asked. Taking this approach, this paper looks at the main narrative (power-hunger of kings and brahmins) and the two downstream events imposed by Pollock viz. "vernacular uprising" and "the death of Sanskrit". The ideas challenged in this paper are marked in red color in Figure 1.

### **Pollockian Narrative Extends Beyond Time and Space:**

The basic narrative of Pollock goes beyond time that he has specified in his Sanskrit Cosmopolis (as 300 C.E. to 1300 C.E.). This is so because the narrative assigned is the inherent flaw, almost as if by design, in the thinking of the Hindu kings and the brahmins – hunger for power. Since it is inherent, it is not limited by time or indeed by space. Accepting this idea for the time being that the Hindu kings and brahmins' minds have been afflicted with greed, would not change with time and space. As such, their acts (events) should reflect this behavior at any point in time and space. Indeed, Pollock is pointing out to this afflicted mind of King Harṣa in Kashmir in the 14th century which he then claims was the cause of downfall and death of Sanskrit in the Kashmir. "It was a century that began with the atrocities of King Harsha" (Pollock 2001: 399). Note that the case of Kashmir is after – beyond – the Sanskrit Cosmopolis. In other words, Pollock himself inherently asserts that his narrative holds across and beyond his Sanskrit Cosmopolis.

The approach of the current paper is that lives of brahmins and kings from a specific time period and space are presented. The time period selected is after the 'demise of the Sanskrit Cosmopolis' and extends up to close to the 20th century. The space selected is the center of learning with a long history of the presence of brahmins – viz. Kashi. Hence the title 'Beyond the Sanskrit Cosmopolis'.

It is shown that Pollock's narratives and his interpreted events do not match the historically documented accounts of the lives of the brahmins and the Hindu kings, at least in and around Kashi and in the time period studied. Of course, it is recognized that this is a small sample and more research along similar lines is required to form a more comprehensive response to Pollock's hypothesis.

## Prior Challenges to Pollock

The current paper is obviously not the first work to challenge Pollock's hypothesis on the death of Sanskrit. Here the critiques by Indologist Hanneder and Sastry are briefly presented.

### Hanneder:

Hanneder has critiqued Pollock's paper "Death of Sanskrit" from several different positions – definition of death, wide usage of Sanskrit in the 'Cosmopolis', Pollock's judgement on quality of Sanskrit works and their quantity, interpretation employed by Pollock and on Pollock's description of Kashmir and Vijayanagar on the basis of which he, i.e. Pollock, comes to a certain conclusion about Sanskrit in India. Some of these are worth restating.

Hanneder points out how Pollock has arbitrarily prescribed a ground for 'living Sanskrit' (opposite of death) viz. "if and only if there is a large quantity of Sanskrit of high quality with a significant influence over a wide space" (Hanneder 2002: 299). Pollock then checks against these criteria - based on epigraphs, some texts from Sanskrit poets of the past, and his definitions of quality and influence - and pronounces Sanskrit as dead because one or more of his choice of criteria has not been satisfied. Hence the entire hypothesis is based on self-defined definitions and specific interpretations.

#### 1. Death

While Hanneder agrees that Sanskrit literary production has fallen, he also admits that these might have happened numerous times in the long history of India, the important point being that Sanskrit 're-invents' (Hanneder 2002: 294) itself. He critiques Pollock's attempts to artificially magnify these discontinuities in Sanskrit literary productions and label them as 'death'. He also calls out Pollock's dilemma - 'Sanskrit is dead in some crucial way' (Pollock 2001: 393) - pointing out that Pollock himself sees a problem with the word 'death'. In addition, Hanneder questions this term when, he points out, several writings sprang within a century (within the context of Kashmir) after Sanskrit 'reinvented' itself.

## 2. Quality

Hanneder has criticized Pollock on his (Pollock's) idea of quality of Sanskrit texts in a number of ways (Hanneder 2002: 295). A brace of important ones merit repetition. Firstly, Hanneder quotes Johannes Nobels who openly states that the traditional view of *kāvya* must be considered, for these are written with a certain force of creativity\*. This quote from Nobels, which Hanneder (2002: 301) has presented in full, is reproduced here in translated words.

The writer [the author that Nobel is critiquing]...was also not able to manage to illustrate the history of Indian poetry in its development properly....he did not use the correct method, ... he does not see the importance and most of all because he does not show the familiarity with Sanskrit, which is required for a good understanding from the inside (i.e. the traditional view). Nobel later states, "We have to basically immerse ourselves into the middle of the Indian world of ideas...to see how each poet draws up the lines...with his genius...and elicits every time, a different shade of color".

Moreover, Hanneder rightly points out that the judgement of quality cannot be an objective criterion to assess. For instance, Upadhyaya, a traditional scholar of great repute, whose intellectual achievements and works are drawn upon from and presented in the latter half, is in wholesome praise of the *kāvya* texts - and indeed other prose and poetry texts - which Pollock brushes aside as being 'unimaginative'. Thirdly, Hanneder points out that even if the quality was deemed to be 'lower', it could have been done purposefully to enhance the activity of Sanskrit at the grass-roots at the time of turmoil (Hanneder 2002: 298).

Hanneder seems to agree with the term 'Cosmopolis', though he does not agree with Pollock's assertion of restricted space for Sanskrit in the Cosmopolis. Thus, Hanneder seems to be in agreement with Pollock's idea of 'intention to colonize'. Hanneder has also not commented upon Pollock's assertion that kings and brahmins colluded in such an act of colonization. Thus it is not clear what Hanneder's position is about the nature of brahmin-king relationship.

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\*Originally written in German. Extract from the translation is presented in italics in the main text.

### Sastry:

Recently, Manogna Sastry has critiqued “Death of Sanskrit” paper by Pollock. Sastry provides several instances in Pollock’s article where his selective citations and interpretations are exposed, and consequently, she rightly questions the motives of Pollock. For instance, in the case of Kashmir, as she extends the efficient critique of Pollock by Hanneder on this case, Pollock is reluctant to discuss the role of Islam in reducing the Sanskrit related activities in the valley, and this seems to be a general trend in Pollock’s analysis (for example, see Malhotra 2016). Thus, while Pollock is quick to point out Hindu King Harṣa’s destruction of temples, he is conspicuously silent on Sikandar Shah Mir, who went on a rampage, demolishing idols and temples in every village of the valley. Sastry points out that the predecessors of the same King Harṣa, of the Lohara dynasty, continuously provided courtly patronage to Sanskrit and Sanskrit scholars. See Malhotra for further details on the deviant behavior of King Harṣa whose ancestors were more traditional kings, so to speak. Sastry has pointed out multiple instances in Pollock’s paper like the one noted above. In her concluding remark, Sastry makes an important point worth repeating: Pollock’s befuddlement in explaining several unanswered questions, not the least his own multiple cases in his article on the death of Sanskrit – “no straightforward manner to configure these four moments in Sanskrit” – is because there is “no naturally connecting thread” that binds these ‘factoids’ together. The corollary of these puzzlements is that Pollock has been forced to be selective in his citations.

Was the expansion of Sanskrit, for example in South East Asia, truly an act of colonization by the Indian rulers, as Pollock asserts - whoever these rulers might have been given that there was no power-center or a center-periphery relation? Were, in the grand narrative, the brahmins and kings power hungry, with a mind-set that would govern their actions? Was there any divide and uprising against Sanskrit in the regional space? Finally, could there be a different interpretation of the observed events, a view different from what Pollock presents, – e.g. in the case of the ubiquitous *praśasti*-s being a brahmin-king nexus as an exercise of power? And yet, all these questions are but a subset of an encompassing larger question: Did Sanskrit ever die? Certainly the traditional scholarship is of the opinion that Sanskrit has always been

practiced. For one, Ingalls is also of the view that Sanskrit activity was very much present.

“The traditions of Sanskrit scholarship, however, was not broken. The brahmins living in the capital or on their tax-free grants of land saw that their sons were taught Sanskrit grammar and the traditional Sanskrit sciences, in many cases teaching their sons themselves.”

(Hanneder 2002: 304)

This article aims to submit some historical events from the time period spanning 17th to the 20th century which, as we will see, further supports the view that Sanskrit was indeed very active at the grass-roots of the society. Therefore, in some sense, the article attempts to recreate an image of medieval and pre-modern India based on the documented accounts of Indian scholars and intellectuals, i.e. the pandits. Baldev Upadhyaya’s book *Kāśī ke Pāṇḍiton kī Pāṇḍitya Paramparā* has already been referred to. The entire book and indeed the very existence of such a book, its title *Pāṇḍitya Paramparā*, forms a formidable response to Pollock’s assertions. However, for the purposes of a scholarly response, some ‘hard’ facts must be presented. As such, out of more than 100 Kashi pandits’ lives accounted for in the book, a few have been chosen for this article.

### **Pollock’s Befuddlement:**

There are certain events that befuddles Pollock. His befuddlements are: 1) no centre-periphery relationship, a fluid center, 2) no march of military, and 3) no religious crusade, and 4) the large number of *prāśasti*-s written. Sanskrit Cosmopolis and aesthetic power of Sanskrit offers answers to these befuddling questions. For instance, it explains how Sanskrit (might have) travelled. However, these hypotheses must be examined. Initial critiques by Hanneder, Sastry and Malhotra already cast doubts on Pollock’s hypothesis. In the following, it will be further shown that based on Upadhyaya’s documented evidence of the lives of brahmins and kings, Pollock’s hypothesis seems even more tenuous.

### **Further Challenges: *Uttara-pakṣa***

As stated, a lot is drawn here from Baldev Upadhyaya’s book *Pāṇḍitya Paramparā*. It simply documents daily accounts of pandits – from C.E.

1200-1950, and Kashi kings. This is from around the time Sanskrit Cosmopolis has been defeated, according to Pollock, and Sanskrit and the regional vernaculars have fought against each other, with the vernaculars emerging victorious signaling the end of Sanskrit Cosmopolis. Sanskrit dies soon after – at different times in different places, 13th century in Kashmir, and mid-19th century in Bengal – ‘on the eve of colonization’ (Pollock 2001: 395). The article explores what the documented accounts of pandits and kings tell us.

## Who is Baldev Upadhyaya and What is His Source of Information?

Before we look at the documented accounts, a note on Baldev Upadhyaya merits attention. He was a Kashi Pandit himself, born in 1899 and passed away in 1999. He edited 9 Sanskrit texts, was the chief editor of 11 more Sanskrit texts. He has written over 30 books in Hindi which are tabulated in the Annexure. He won a number of awards, including a Padma Bhushan award in 1984, a top honor bestowed by the Government of India. Given his literary and intellectual achievements it would be remiss to not state that he was one of the topmost traditional scholars who had profound knowledge about the Indian *śamāj* and *sabhyatā*, i.e. Indian civilization and society.

What was the source of his information of the daily accounts of these pandits? A number of his accounts are based on first-hand information because he lived with and studied with or was taught by some of these pandits. In other cases, he has referred to some texts that give the description of these pandits, for instance, Mark Twain’s description of Bhāskarānanda Sarasvatī (in *More Tramps Abroad*) or Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj’s *Kāśī kī Sarasvatī Sādhanā*. He also provides a list of texts etc. he has referred to. In still other cases, he has learnt about these pandits from the older scholars who, in their own young days, personally knew some of these pandits.

In the following, are given multiple seemingly simple accounts, which are nevertheless of grave importance, as they tell us of the life of the pandits at the grass-roots – level which is indeed the true indication of a society<sup>2</sup>. In the sequence of this documentation, the first is the salient features of pandits, followed by descriptions of some Kashi pandits, and the pandits from Bengal. This is followed by a short description of the kings of Kashi and their role. *Praśasti* writing seems

to be an integral part of Indian literature. Some examples of *praśasti*-s are presented from and for different spheres of the society.

### Salient Features of Pandits:

Upadhyaya writes a few pages on the general characteristics of the pandits, of at least Kashi, and it would be surprising if these characteristics of Kashi pandits did not match those from other parts of India. These pandits were devoted to attaining knowledge, in what can be called *gyān kī sādhanā*, while leading disciplined lives of austerity, sometimes extreme. Upadhyaya has great respect for these brahmin Kashi pandits because of their humility and modesty; and this, in spite of attaining a most profound knowledge as well as receiving kingly or emperor patronage. Upadhyaya is not alone in his admiration. Franz Kielhorn, pleading (to the West?) for saving Sanskrit and the intellectuals (pandits) who carry the knowledge, was much impressed by their humility and modesty.

“It is sad to see the number of great Śāstris, distinguished no less for their humility and modesty than for their learning and intelligence, diminish year after year, and to feel that with them there is dying away more and more of that traditional learning which we can so ill dispense with...”

Franz Kielhorn as cited in Aklujkar (2001: 41)

The pursuit of knowledge was their main occupation and they would arrive from all over India travelling great distances in order to come to Kashi.

Their daily practice included teaching students for free, sponsored by the kings and the rich businessmen alike. Some renowned pandits would have a long queue of students waiting their turn to learn from their guru till late night. Given such prevalence of learning in the society it is obvious that not all pandits would find favor with the king and only the renowned or the most talented of the lot made it to the king’s court. Also of note is that the rich in the society, other than the king, also provided food and shelter to the students and pandits. Hence Pollock’s claims of an exclusive king-brahmin nexus is questionable.

## A Challenge to the Charge of “Power-hungry Brahmins” and “Vernacular Uprising”

Life-accounts of four *śamnyāsin*-s/pandits are provided – Bhāskarānanda Sarasvatī, Kavīndrācārya Sarasvatī, Datiyā Svāmī and Kāṣṭhajivhā Svāmī, which challenge Pollock’s assertions.

### 1. “The Army Chief and the Svāmī” – Bhāskarānanda Sarasvatī<sup>3</sup>

Birth: Bhāskarānanda Sarasvatī was born in 1832 near Kanpur. He was a Kānyakubja brahmin.

Studies: From the age of 8 to 20 years he studied Veda-s, several Śāstra-s, *darśana*-s, Pāṇinian grammar (*Vyākaraṇa*), etc. Left home several times after the death of his first baby. Later in his life, during his travels, he was also initiated into the study of Advaita Vedānta and Prasthānatraya.

Śamnyāsa: After living in Ujjain for several years he came to a small town called Asni in North India, where he was initiated as a *śamnyāsin* at the young age of 27.

Travels: Following his initiation, he went for an all-India pilgrimage. He continued his renunciate ways and gave up all his belongings including his meagre clothing that he had. He slept under trees, lived along the banks of the river and lived a life of extreme austerity, practicing his meditation and refining his *citta*. He continued his travels and eventually came to Haridwar where he continued his austere lifestyle but at the same time found a *guru*. After finishing his studies he went to Kashi where he chose a garden to live and perform his austerities. The king of Amethi, who was his student, offered the king’s garden for him to live in instead – Anandbagh. Svāmī accepted and lived in that garden for the rest of his life.

Service to the masses: His compassion for the common masses is seen in this single example where he treated a homoeopathic doctor’s wife (suffering from cholera) and son, following which the doctor became a devoted disciple of Svāmīji.

Life accomplishment: His sense of austerity, *aparigraha* (essentially non-attachment), was of the highest order and these austere practices, people believed, gave him special powers. His

fame grew far and wide, and he was visited and/or contacted by heads of States/kings, high powered administrative officers, from India and beyond. Yet, he continued his austerities. He was visited by Mark Twain, and the German emperor (Wilhelm I) and his grandson sent a note to him (after he had declined the Emperor's offer to come to Germany) along with his photograph<sup>4</sup>. He treated the rich and the poor, emperors and kings included, the same.

Upadhyaya cites several interesting examples including that of the Commander-in-Chief of the British army, namely William Lockhart. This army chief, after defeating the Afridis of Afghanistan, came to see the Svāmī accompanied with his wife and a select few junior commanding officers. As they sat down with the Svāmī, Lockhart boasted of his recent exploits. The Svāmī smiled and asked him to lift a pencil which, much to the surprise of the General and others present, the General could not however hard he tried. He bowed to the Svāmī who then proceeded to explain the General the qualities of humility and modesty.

*Prāstasti-s*: It is clear that Svāmīji had become very popular and several known personalities visited him for his *darśana*. After he passed away (he took *samādhi* in 1899) several of his followers came together and wrote several for the Svāmī in Sanskrit and Hindi. The *prāstasti-s* seems to be compiled in a single volume.

Writings: Despite his busy schedule with followers wanting his time, and his daily spiritual practices, he did devote some time to writing a few texts. He wrote a commentary on Vedānta called *Svā rājya Siddhi*, commentary on 10 Upaniṣad-s called 'Prakāśa', and a brief exposition on the *Nalodaya Kāvya* which appeared in a publication called *Subodhini*. He also wrote a Sanskrit text *Anubhūti Vivaraṇādarśa*.

Gleanings: Several points emerge from Bhāskarānanda Sarasvatī's life that contradict Pollock's assertions of 'greedy power hungry brahmins' and 'vernacular uprising' – 1) free movement across India, severe austerity with extreme renunciation, including clothes, 2) simultaneously reasserts Upadhyaya's points - dedication towards knowledge and *tapasyā* and devotion towards guru, and 3) *prāstasti* written for a fellow Pandit as

opposed to Pollock's claim that *praśasti* was written for kings to give them divine status and consequently political power.

2. "The 600 km Foot-march" – **Kavīndrācārya Sarasvatī**<sup>5</sup>

Birth: Kavīndrācārya was contemporary with the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and even saw the rise of Aurangzeb to power. Thus we can place him in the 17th century. He originally came from the Godāvāri region.

Studies: He studied the *Veda*-s, *Vedāṅga*-s and other *śāstra*-s. After his studies he too became a *saṁnyāsin* (renunciate).

Life: Kavīndrācārya was good friends with the French traveller and writer, Bernier, who describes Kavīndrācārya's life in some detail. For instance, Upadhyaya cites Bernier about Kavindracharya's simple outfit – a white loin cloth (*dhoti*) and a red shawl (*chādar*) on his shoulders being the prominent component. Importantly, he adorned the same outfit whether he was in front of the emperor or on the streets of Agra. Kavīndrācārya used to receive Rs. 2000 as monthly pension from Shah Jahan for his intellectual capacity which, clearly, the emperor was quite taken by. The *Svāmī*, in turn, would donate all of this money to other brahmins along the banks of the river.

It is instructive to note here that Pollock, who has discussed Kavīndrācārya's works in "Death of Sanskrit" (Pollock 2001) (and dismissed them as being unoriginal), points to the collection of texts in Kavīndrācārya's library and attributes it to the pension from Shah Jahan - 'no doubt thanks to a pension from the Mughal emperor' (Pollock 2001: 408). This is a good example of how erroneous claims can be made by Indologists in general and by Pollock in particular.

Service to the masses: His compassion for common people is demonstrated by the following incident – a major incident, which even the Western Indologists acknowledge it (see O'Hanlon (2010), for example). The incident involves the Hindu tradition of going on a pilgrimage by the common people and ascetics alike, from all parts of India, across all of India. Shah Jahan, the emperor in Agra, imposes a selective tax on Hindus for their pilgrimage. Upadhyaya describes the situation as follows: the pilgrimage, the *yātrā*, was itself an arduous task – a challenge – and to be imposed with a tax on top, created

great difficulty for Hindus everywhere. Kashi being the center of learning, came under the attention of people, who looked up to the Kashi pandits to find a solution. Kavīndrācārya, being the most renowned in Kashi at the time, was approached to speak to the Mughal emperor. He readily agreed and along with a few pandit friends to accompany him, started on foot. The distance between Kashi and Agra is 600 km – a pilgrimage in itself.

Question to ponder: Why would a Pollockian elitist travel 600km on foot, braving hardships? Note that Kavīndrācārya was yet to meet with the emperor and the patronage of Rs. 2000 per month had not commenced at that time.

His journey is likened to that of the Sikh guru, Guru Teg Bahadur (executed by Aurangzeb), both with a noble cause but one on a horse, with soldiers to accompany and the other with some *svāmī-s* as travelling partners. Once in Agra, at the emperor’s court, he made a forceful case for the abolition of taxes. Upadhyaya reproduces the note from historian H. P. Shastri on this incident.

“He journeyed to Agra with a large following and proceeded to Diwānām and there he pleaded the cause of the Hindu pilgrims, with so much force of eloquence that all the noblemen of the court from Irāk, Irān, Badakshan, Balkh ...., were struck with wonder. Shah Jehan and Dara Shikoh relented and abolished the tax [i.e. the pilgrim tax]. That was a day of great rejoicing throughout Hindu India. It was on this occasion that the title of *Sarvavidyānidhāna* was conferred upon him.”

Shastri (1912: 11) (*spellings as in the original*)

*Praśasti-s*: Even when only Kashi and Prayag pilgrims were absolved of the taxes, there was a group of scholars, 69 of them, who wrote *praśasti* text in honor of him, for Shah Jahan and also Dara Shikoh. Therefore, the *praśasti-s* include the respect for Kavīndrācārya as well as for Shah Jahan and Dara Shikoh.

Writings: Upadhyaya contends that Kavīndrācārya could not spend much time writing because most of his time was spent helping the people. However, Kavīndrācārya generated literature, both in Sanskrit and Hindi. There is only one work published, although it is said he wrote a number of works, all unpublished. One of this is the *kāvya* text *Kavīndra-kalpadruma* which remains unpublished. The other unpublished

Sanskrit texts include *Yoga-bhāskara*, *Śatapathabrahmaṇa Bhāṣya* and *Haṁsadūta Kāvya* (the last one is contested as to whether it was Kavīndrācārya who wrote it). His Hindi texts include *Vaśiṣṭha-sāra* and *Samaya-sāra*.

**Gleanings:** If Pollock's writing about Kavīndrācārya's pension usage is incorrect, then, how accurate is Pollock's statement – “...a wide variety of *competing* religious orders, Saiva, Buddhist, Vaiṣṇava, and others”? (Pollock 1996: 198)(italics ours). The question raised is for the underlined word ‘competing’. The bigger question to ask is, can the writings of such Indologists be trusted? Additionally, it shows the importance of meticulously performing comparative study of texts written by traditional scholars and Indologists. Furthermore, the act of Pilgrimage Tax imposed on Hindus has an important lesson for this article – the Hindus from across the country travelled from one region of the country to another. This is a significant point worth noting vis-à-vis the Pollockian presumed conflict between different regions of India and the Sanskrit Cosmopolis. The pilgrimage across India directly contradicts Pollock's claim of 'vernacular uprising' i.e., fight between one part of the country with another or Sanskrit trying to dominate. As far as *praśasti* is concerned, once again we find *praśasti* written for a pandit and non-Hindu king and his son – once again contradicting Pollockian assertion that *praśasti* was used as an instrument of political power. Finally, Kavīndrācārya came from Godāvari region from Southern India and lived in Kashi, and travelled 600km – this again contradicts 'vernacular uprising' narrative of Pollock.

### 3. “The Energetic Pilgrim” – **Datiyā Svāmī**<sup>6</sup>

**Birth:** The childhood name of Datiyā Svāmī was Mahāvir Prasad, born not far from Kashi, in 1898. He was a Saryuparin brahmin.

**Studies:** In 1913, he left his home at the young age of 15 and came to Kashi to study Sanskrit. He studied Vyākaraṇa under a *guru*, and soon came in contact with another Svāmī living in a small hut nearby. The contact with the Svāmī flowered a deep sense of taking up *saṁnyāsa*, which he eventually did, and was initiated into renunciation by the same Svāmī. On the other hand, he continued his study of Veda-s, Vedānta and several *śāstra*-s.

Life: His father died at a very young age. His mother would carry him on her shoulders to the nearby goddess Kālī temple which nucleated a strong desire in the boy towards a *sādhana* for Śakti. As he grew older, he would visit a Hanumān temple every day and, evidently inspired by the deity, even took up wrestling. He went to a school for his initial education. He studied, among other subjects, Urdu and quite liked it. Later on his life, during his pilgrim travels no doubt, he became quite a polyglot with fluency in Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi and other local languages. That was to come much later though. He was also a fan of music and enjoyed listening to different genres of music including Sufi mysticism. He even wrote ghazals in Urdu. Notably, one of his disciples wrote a ghazal in Urdu and was blessed by him.

Travel: In 1926, after a study spanning 13 years, he set out on a pilgrimage to deepen his spiritual quest. He visited Kangra, Bengal, Bombay, Nepal, etc. and finally reached Punjab. He met a Gujarati *saṁnyāsa*, Ananthanandanath, who initiated him in Tantric practices. Under the advice of his guru, the Gujarati *saṁnyāsin*, he set himself along the banks of river Narmada and did *tapasyā* for one whole year. He then continued his travels to Amritsar, Tarantaran, Dhaulpur, etc. and eventually reached Datiyā in Madhya Pradesh in 1929. He stayed there for the next 50 years till his death. He continued his practice of Tantra there. Like Bhāskarānanda Sarasvatī, he attained *saṁādhi* in 1979.

Service to masses: In Datiyā, he performed several service for the common masses. He established the Bhagavatī Pītāmbarā in 1935, which became popular as an *āśrama* in all of India. Earlier he had established a temple for Paraśurāma, and was considered a great scholar of Śāktamata. The remarkable thing being that Paraśurāma is traditionally mostly revered in Maharashtra and Kerala, but to establish such a temple successfully in Madhya Pradesh speaks of the respect people had for this Svāmī. Additionally, while a temple for Reṇukā, Paraśurāmā's mother, exists in Kashi, no temple for Paraśurāma exists even in Kashi. Other temples included those of Mahākālabbhairava, Dhūmavatī and Tārā. Special mention must be made of the Śaḍāmnāya Śiva's temple – a rarity, given that it is hardly found anywhere else in India. He proceeded to consecrate six idols of Shiva

corresponding to the six-named Śiva (Ṣaḍāmnāya) in an ancient temple in Vankhandeshwar in 1980.

He was adept at Vedic and Tāntric *yajña*-s. He was not only a great proponent of British-free India but also performed a Rāṣṭra-rakṣā *yajña* (National Safety *Yajña*) when China attacked India in 1961. He also performed a Brahma-*yajña* where 9 days were allotted for each of the four *Veda*-s and the *yajña* carried on for 36 days. The first *yajña*, i.e. the National Safety *Yajña*, was performed with Tantric rituals; and the second, the Brahma-*yajña*, with Vedic rituals. While one may not subscribe to the idea of performing *yajña*-s for beneficial purposes, no one can deny the societal awareness that Datiyā Svāmī displayed, and the sense of duty towards his country and fellow human-beings. Like Bhāskarānanda Sarasvatī, he acquired inexplicable powers through his devoted Tāntric practice, which he used, for example, for treating the terminally sick.

Writings: Like Kavīndrācārya and Bhāskarānanda, he too wrote a significant number of texts. He wrote instructions for offerings for the deities he established in several temples, commentaries on several ancient Tantra texts, and those related with new findings. For instance, he wrote descriptions of ancient texts while simultaneously writing new texts shows. In particular, he advocated similar forms in the Āgama-Nigama texts, and he would see elements of Āgama in the Vedic *mantra*-s. According to Upadhyaya, such findings of Datiyā Svāmī are new and independent and which Upadhyaya contends, Datiyā Svāmī's view that there is unity in diversity

Gleanings: Such multilinguality is found amongst great many pandits, a number of whom wrote in Sanskrit, Hindi and other languages. Note the inter-regional co-operation amongst the *śāṇyāśin*-s. Notice once again the popularity across regions throughout India. This popularity of an *āśrama* would not have happened through state-sponsored advertisement, that too in pre-Independence India, but only through visitations by the common masses. In other words, the visitations by common masses from across different regions would have been the source of such popularity.

#### 4. ‘The Wooden Sleeve’ – **Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmī**<sup>7</sup>

Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmī was the *guru* of Kashi King Ishwari Prasad Narayan Singh – a king of exceptional intelligence with a sincere devotion towards the pursuit of knowledge. Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmī was a very modest person. It is said that once he uttered some words in anger, *apaśabda*, against a senior monk. He was filled with much remorse, and to prevent himself from poor utterances again, especially those directed against his peers and seniors, he put a wooden sleeve on his tongue – hence his name Kāṣṭhajihvā (“wooden tongue”). This act is unusual, extraordinary and likely is unparalleled.

Writings: Upadhyaya sees Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmī in two roles: one as a *sādhaka* (spiritual seeker) and the other, a poet. Though his role as a poet is relatively well known, his role as a *sādhaka* is not so well known. His favorite acolyte was none other than the Kashi King Ishwari Prasad Narayan Singh, who himself was a great devotee of his *guru* and a serious scholar. Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmī wrote both Sanskrit and Hindi texts. His enumeration of Sanskrit texts is counted at 21, although, Upadhyaya states, one British author has only mentioned 4 of these. None of his publications, Sanskrit ones, have been published, and only the handwritten manuscripts remain. His Hindi texts are many, some published and some unpublished. *Rāmāyaṇa Paricaryā* is one of his most significant works. Although he was a *sādhu*, he was also a poet.

*Rāmāyaṇa Paricaryā* is more a note than a commentary on the essence of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Upadhyaya notes the necessity of reading the entire text, but quotes Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmī on some details such as – why Sundara Kāṇḍa was named so etc. It makes for a difficult reading which prompted King Ishwari Prasad Narayan Singh to write a commentary on the *Paricaryā* to make the *Paricaryā* comprehensible. It was called the *Pariśiṣṭa*. This is a pointer to the high calibre of intellect of Ishwari Prasad Narayan Singh. This commentary too was not simple enough for the common masses. Thereby a third person, cousin of the Maharaja – Śrī Harihar Prasad - wrote a simpler version of the *Pariśiṣṭa*. It was called *Prakāśa*. The three of them together was published in 1896 under the name *Rāmāyaṇa-Paricaryā-Prakāśa*.

*Parīṣṭa*. Similarly, Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmī wrote *Kāśīrāja-Sāgara*, a Sanskrit text, which too, Upadhyaya contends, is quite difficult to comprehend for the modern pandits.

**Gleanings:** The short description of Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmī and his student King Ishwari Prasad suggests the humility of the pandit on the one hand, and a strong penchant for knowledge and a desire to help the common masses in the king on the other. Else, this Hindu king would not have attempted a commentary for easier comprehension of the *Paricaryā*. This negates Pollock's hypothesis of power hunger in kings and brahmins.

The few exemplary descriptions clearly show that these pandits, across space and time, demonstrate a single minded devotion to the pursuit of knowledge – all in Sanskrit – attained through hard work and discipline. These pandits are from different centuries, thereby pointing to a continuity of tradition. Notice that these pandits are within the time-line of the presumed Pollockian 'Dead Sanskrit' – Kavīndrācārya appearing in the tumultuous time of Aurangzeb and the colonizing British are yet to arrive. Regardless of the centuries that have passed between these pandits, and although only four examples are discussed, reading Upadhyaya shows that the picture that emerges of brahmin pandits is one of intense yearning for knowledge and subsequent dissemination of the same. For instance, Pandit Gopi Nath, his son Gokul Nath and his student Manidev wrote *Mahābhārata Darpaṇa*. It is approximately 2000 pages and took about 50 years to complete. Such was the pursuit of knowledge of the pandits.

Furthermore, this is a good indication of the activity of Sanskrit at the grass-roots – the so-called ground-reality. Even when Islamic rulers, a number of them, had imposed themselves on the Hindus, and the trend continued with the British – for example, Warren Hastings, who attacked Kashi with his forces, but was forced to retreat in the cover of the night – Sanskrit was still being taught, learnt and expressed in texts.

## **Kashi Kings: Challenge to the Narrative of “Power- hungry Kings” and “King-Brahmin Collusion to Impose”**

Table II collects the description of Kashi kings. Although Upadhyaya describes the full lineage, for the sake of brevity, this lineage is shortened for this article. Column III in the table shows the king’s main accomplishment and the corresponding counter narrative to Pollock is provided in column IV. A quick glance at the table suggests valiant, intelligent Hindu kings who fought against aggressors, restored order in the society (often caused by alien rulers – Muslim or British) and provided patronage to brahmin/non- brahmin scholars alike. These attributes of the Hindu kings is almost impossible to reconcile with the Pollockian narrative of the Hindu kings.

## **Cross-regional Culture: Challenge the “Vernacular uprising” and “Death of Sanskrit” Hypothesis of Pollock**

Here, the interconnectedness between Bengal-Kashi is briefly explored. Kashi pandits were asked to move to Calcutta and teach in the Sanskrit college of Calcutta. This demonstrates a strong cross-regional culture. While Kashi Sanskrit college was established in 1791, the Sanskrit college in Calcutta was established in 1824. There are two obvious facts but worth stating – the opening of Sanskrit colleges. Some may argue that this was done by the British to help revive Sanskrit. However, running the Sanskrit college actually depended upon Sanskrit pandits. It was these pandits, home grown through a lineage called *Pāṇḍitya Paramparā*, who were hired to teach Sanskrit in these colleges. What allowed the existence of such *paramparā*, yielding such pandits to run the Sanskrit colleges if Sanskrit was dead by 1300 – “Sanskrit lost these contests (with vernaculars) and lost them everywhere” (Pollock 1996: 198) – as Pollock describes it? What actually emerges is that Sanskrit pandits were still learning their *śāstra*-s within the *guru-sisya paramparā* and appointments in Sanskrit colleges were simply a matter of a regular source of income, which in the earlier times were provided by the kings and the rich business men. An alternative way to ask the question is - would these Sanskrit colleges, albeit helped in their inception by the British, have any meaningful existence if there were not Indian Sanskrit pandits already available to run them? Here is an

example from British administrators seeking and utilizing Indian pundits for running the Sanskrit colleges. The following example is a letter of recommendation for a job for Pañdit Nāthuram Śāstry<sup>8</sup>:

“The secretary beg to propose Nāthu Rāma, a Pañdit of considerable abilities for the office as a fit person to succeed to the appointment. The individual in question was in the college of Banaras, where he bore a high character. He lost his appointment there, in consequence of exceeding his leave of absence which it subsequently appeared owing to family distresses and not to any improper neglect (24th July, 1827).”

Hanneder has already commented upon the selective interpretation of Pollock regarding Bengal. A few more examples will illustrate the error in Pollock’s analysis, not only of a “dead Sanskrit”, but also of a society where knowledge in Sanskrit was still considered important.

**Yadaveśvara Tarkaratna:** b. 1850 in North Bengal, d. in 1924. Initially learnt Bangla in his village. He also learnt Sanskrit in Bengal itself from Haragovinda Siddhānta (grammar), Īśvara Vidyālaṅkara (*Kāvya Prakāśa*). His father died when he was only 5, but his father’s students made sure he did not feel orphaned. They arranged for him to go to Kashi for further studies. There he learnt Nyāyaśāstra from Kailāśa Candra. It was his excellence in Nyāyaśāstra that gave him the title of Tarkaratna. He then went to Svāmī Viśuddhānanda Sarasvatī and learnt Vedānta and Yoga Darśana. Griffith called him and taught him Western philosophy. He then went back to Rangpur where he joined as a teacher in a school where he taught Sanskrit. It must be noted here that a school in Bengal in a small village was teaching Sanskrit. This school closed down (for some reason), and he with the help of Śrī Aurobindo’s father, started a Sanskrit school. In this new school he taught *kāvya*, grammar and *śāstra*. It is thus difficult to accept Sanskrit as a dead language, at least during this period.

He was felicitated both for his Sanskrit works and his service to Bangla. This clearly shows that both Bangla and Sanskrit happily co-existed at the eve of colonization. His creations were, expectedly, both in Sanskrit and Bangla. Sanskrit creations include: *Śoka-taraṅgiṇī* (a *kāvya* piece), *Vāṇī-vijaya*, *Subhadrā-haraṇa* and ten more. Bangla creations include: *Draupadikāvya*, *Asoka* (a novel) and a few more. His only son was a scholar too who wrote about Jain images (a Hindu writing about Jain deities must be noted) – written in English, and *Sārnāth kā Itihās* in Bangla. It seems language was not an issue at all. These scholars

wrote in whichever language they felt at home with and obviously were usually well read.

**Vidhuśekhara Śāstrī:** He was a Buddhist scholar. He learnt Hindu śāstra-s as well as Buddhism texts – all in Kashi. He too was born in Bengal (Maldah) in 1878 and was born in a brahmin family. He first learnt English in a local school, and later, on his father’s insistence, went and learnt Sanskrit as well (*kāvya*) in Bengal itself. He wrote two small texts on *kāvya*. He then went to Kashi and learnt śāstra-s. He learnt Nyāya from Kailāśa Candra Śiromāṇi and Vedānta from Subrahmaṇya Śāstrī. Vidhuśekhara was influenced by European scholars and was inspired to learn about Buddhism. He learnt Tibetan, and wrote a grammar book on Tibetan. He and his students translated Buddhist texts in Tibetan into Sanskrit. This one example ought to be enough to see that Sanskrit at grass-roots in Bengal was very much alive. His writings – too many to list here – were in Bangla, Sanskrit and English, noteworthy being books on Tibetan grammar, translation of Gauḍapādācārya’s Advaita Vedānta etc. Once again, notice the multilinguality and free movement across different regions of the country. Similar examples may be seen in the life accounts of **Kshiti Mohan Sen, Vaidyanath Mishra** etc. who studied Sanskrit, and wrote in a host of different languages – Hindi, Bangla, and English.

It is a sign of remarkable harmony within the society that a brahmin Pandit became a Buddhist scholar. This evokes a sense of camaraderie between brahmins and Buddhists, and a permeable interface between brahmins and Buddhists, or between scholars with inclinations towards different texts of authority. Take for example the case of a Jain scholar helping Upadhyaya with his book *Ārya Sanskrī ke Mūlādhār* (Upadhyaya 1947). Also of note is the incident presented by Upadhyaya where a group of brahmin scholars came together to help with the Theosophical Society in 1880 (Upadhyaya 1982: 140). Also, Tarkaratna’s son, being a brahmin, wrote freely on Jain images.

**Table 1. Lineage of Kashi kings and their main accomplishments. Counter narrative to Pollock's ideas is also provided.**

Kashi King	King's learnings	King's main accomplishments	Counter narrative to Pollock
Rama Sharma - was a brahmin	Learnt San-skrit and weaponry.	Defeats the rogue elements in the surrounding areas of Kashi.	A brahmin performing <i>ksātriyic</i> activity points to a horizontal/fluid <i>varṇa</i> system.
Mansārām		With the help of his younger brothers defeats the then Muslim rule in the Kashi region - the society was riddled with robbery, theft and insecure life.	A valiant and intelligent Hindu King brings social order during the time of unrest in the society.
Balwant Singh		Extends the kingdom, moves the capital to Ramnagar, builds a fort, Śiva temple; in association with Rāṇī Ahilyā reconstructs the Kashi Viśvanātha temple.	He brought the temples, especially smaller ones, to a more functional status e.g. ringing bells. Gave patronage to both Hindu and Muslim scholars (Sheikh Ali-Haji who fled from Nadir Shah's atrocity).

Cet Singh	Sāhitya	He fought Warren Hastings – the population of Kashi, in support of Cet Singh, rose in revolt against Hastings who had to beat a retreat.	Service to the masses who preferred a Hindu king's rule over Warren Hastings.
Mahip Narayan Singh		Donated land for Government Sanskrit school. Largely quelled the turmoil and unrest (possible British influence) during his time.	Service to the masses.
Udit Narayan Singh	Wrote three commentaries on the <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i> .	He started the Rāmlilā tradition which is still followed today. He also ordered pictorial representation of the <i>Rāmāyaṇa</i> which is unique.	His younger brother built gardens around the city for general population. These are direct evidences of service to the masses.
Ishwari Prasad Narayan		Saved cows from a butcher by buying them over-priced. Wrote a commentary on the difficult-to-understand <i>Rāmāyaṇa Pari-caryā</i> .	Confiscating cows would have been an act of demonstrating power. Buying the cows, on the other hand, was a demonstration of fairness.

## Clash of Narratives

### Pollock's View of Indic Civilization Revisited:

Pollock's statement of melancholic Indian history notwithstanding for the time-being, his image of pre-modern India indicates the period between 800-1300 CE of great turmoil when regional forces grew against Sanskrit Cosmopolis and defeated Sanskrit everywhere – “...with reference to Sanskrit's complicated contests with regional languages... Sanskrit lost these contests and lost them everywhere” (Pollock 1996: 198). Following these ‘contests’ Sanskrit Cosmopolis was ‘destroyed’ and subsequently, the death of Sanskrit ensued. However, the few scattered historical accounts presented in this paper already begin to dismantle this hypothesis. We already see a substantial and continuous Sanskrit activity as late as 20th century contradicting Pollock's assertion of a “dead Sanskrit” – *Datiyā Svāmī*, whose works were deemed to be new by Upadhyaya. Moreover, we also see translations of original Sanskrit texts in Hindi, that is Upadhyaya's texts, and their subsequent translations not only in Indian vernaculars, Kannada and Telugu etc., but also in ex-Indic languages Burmese and Sinhalese. The relevance of these two neighboring regions translating Upadhyaya's texts is not lost, as Pollock has cited two holes in the Sanskrit Cosmopolis – Burma and Sri Lanka! Clearly, Pollock is inaccurate with regards to Burma and Sri Lanka within his own Cosmopolis. More remarkable is the thriving Sanskrit activity at the grass-roots with home-schooling of pandits in Sanskrit followed by tutelage with a *guru*. As the State patronage installed by the Kings declined, the brahmins have been forced to abandon their traditional life-styles – that of single-minded pursuit to knowledge and freely disseminating it for the future generations.

One relies on such books as Upadhyaya's to get a more accurate sense of what the society must have looked like with the brahmin community's devotion to their pursuit, not of power, but of knowledge, through and sometimes beyond, what may be termed a drastic change in the nature of relationship between the ruler and his subjects - first with the coming of Islam, and then of the British colonialism. Were there a few brahmins who fell into greed, and did not follow the traditional path? Surely, there would have been some. But ‘some’ does not constitute the ‘whole’. The picture recreated by

Indologists should be on the ‘statistically significant’, so to speak, as opposed to the ‘statistically negligible’. My preliminary conclusion is that more the details compiled from such books as Upadhyaya’s, the shakier Pollock’s hypothesis would turn out to be.

### **Traditional View of Indic Civilization:**

Several questions have baffled Pollock, which he concedes to too, and then answers them through “aesthetic power of Sanskrit and Sanskrit Cosmopolis”. However, several of his interpretations and conclusions have been critiqued substantially. What could be a unifying theory that explains all the observed events? Could a traditional view of the Indic society offer some help to these seemingly unanswerable questions?

Following is the traditional view-point of the Indic society. Upadhyaya states that the Indic society has been a product of an interplay between Jain, Buddhist and Vedic philosophical thoughts (see Upadhyaya’s *Ārya Sanskr̥ti ke Mūlādhār'* (Upadhyaya 1947)). The philosophy on which the society was created, the bedrock, still visible, is the devotion to the idea of *tyāga* (austerity) and performing intense *tapasyā* (penance). For fulfilling these noble pursuits, the society, the boundaries of the land, require to be a *tapovana* (sacred grove for performing austerities) that allows such pursuits unhindered (Upadhyaya 1947: 415-418). Secondly, it directly contradicts the Pollockian idea that a culture is solely a series of events of transformations. An idea – a philosophy – is often the driving force of any civilization. For the Indic civilization, this philosophy has been austerity and penance with a primary aim of the pursuit of knowledge. Can the spread of Sanskrit and Pollock’s befuddlements be explained by the traditional view of Indic civilization? In other words, is there a “connecting thread” mentioned by Sastry?

“There was a goodly king who protects the earth according to *dharma* and ruled over his subjects affectionately like a father over his son...He died...But there had arisen from him...Sañjaya. Respected by the learned, understanding the finest points of *śāstra*; ...he defeated numerous neighboring kings [metrically corrupt]; he rules now according to *nyāya*...so long as he rules people can sleep...without fear of robbers...”

(Pollock 1996: 227)

While Pollock uses this inscription to show *praśasti*, rise of Sanskrit Cosmopolis and domination of Sanskrit over vernacular, the Indic tradition would call it 'duty of a righteous king' whose responsibility was to ensure the *tapovan*-like quality of the land.

Rājā Bhoja and Rāṇī Ahilyā, in restoring the temples across hundreds of kilometers in a different region, were restoring this *tapovan*. Keeping this in mind, firstly, the observations of movement of scholars through the country and beyond, unhindered, lack of military movement to conquer foreign lands or religious crusades in the history of India, seamless transition within the society – brahmin becoming a king (*kṣatriya*) for example, humility of the most deeply learned scholars – conveyor of the deepest of knowledge, and most importantly, the twin observations of undivided India with vernacular regions coexisting (as opposed to the balkanization of Europe) and continuity of Sanskrit, can all be made with ease with this notion of a philosophical foundation - all without bafflement, the puzzlements that Pollock *et al* face.

This difference in the points of view – between a traditional scholar, who has lived in the culture and whose forefathers have assiduously maintained the tradition for centuries before him, and an Indologist far removed from the grass-roots of society, the grass-roots which reflect the driving force of the society, which in turn provides a glimpse of the foundation of a society – is what Dharampal alludes to in his interaction with village simpletons returning from their pilgrimage.

It is worth repeating, lest we falter.

"They said 'No, no! We are not from one jati — we are from several jatis.' I said, but how could that be? They said that there was no jati on a yatra not on a pilgrimage. I didn't know that. ... and like many others in this country who know little about the ways of the ordinary Indian — the peasants, artisans and other village folks.

Dharampal (2000: 5)(no diacritics in the original)

What was the *tapovan*, which Upadhyaya has described India as, as in the pre-colonial era? Is it possible that the role of the kings seen in India has been that of one who protects and looks after his subjects (irrespective of his nationality or religion – Mughal emperor Shah Jahan was praised when he abolished the taxes on Hindu pilgrims in Prayag and Kashi, while the Duke of Edinburgh and Queen Victoria

were praised for opening Sanskrit colleges, which were possibly deemed a better option by the pandits for safe-guarding Sanskrit at that time), as opposed to the non-Indic definition of kings who ‘ruled’ over their subjects? What underlying philosophy would create such a *rāja-prajā* relationship? These are crucial questions whose answers will provide a more accurate picture of the pre-colonial India. Perhaps the connecting thread has been the bedrock of philosophy. Preliminary research on Pollock *et al*’s hypothesis has already revealed that one must increasingly look to traditional scholarship in order to find answers to such questions.

### **Summarizing the *Uttara-pakṣa*:**

The article presented several documented accounts. The timeline of these events are immediately after the Pollockian Sanskrit Cosmopolis. These are summarized below:

- The life of swamis and pandits elicit their main traits, which are penance and austerity. These brahmins were intellectuals who were devoted to knowledge, disseminating them after completion of their studies, both via teaching and writings, and helping the masses. While Bhāskarānanda Sarasvatī and Datiyā Svāmī were true ascetics, living their lives in small huts or gardens, Pandit Kāṣṭhajihvā Svāmī was under the patronage of a king. Hence there seems to be a flexibility within the system. In all cases, these brahmins demonstrated virtues of modesty and humility. brahmins became Buddhist intellectuals suggesting seamless transition in the pursuit of knowledge.
- There was free movement of intellectuals from one region to another, from one vernacular region to another, in Pollock’s words. Wherever they went, the people, the common masses, welcomed them and respected them for their services, knowledge they possessed and their virtues, namely penance and austerity. Furthermore, there was significant multilingualism seen, especially in Bengal pandits.
- The lineage of the kings of Kashi was briefly described. In their case at least, initial periods were spent in bringing order to the society, either against Islam or the British, or perhaps

both. Given that the lineage of Kashi kings started from a brahmin family discredits Pollockian hypothesis of rigid social structure. Kings were themselves great protector of Sanskrit and its symbols - intellectuals, brahmin or non-brahmin-s, temples, cows etc. Some of them were great intellectuals themselves, writing Sanskrit texts, or helping the storage of texts, or even publishing them. There also seems to be a coordinated effort amongst the Hindu kings/queens across regions to protect Sanskrit - the examples of Peshwas from Maharashtra supporting Sanskrit schools in Kashi, Rāṇī Ahilyā helping Kashi king Balwant Singh to reconstruct the Kashi Viśvanātha temple and Rājā Bhoja of Ujjain helping reconstruct the temple in Gujarat in the 11th century – these readily come to mind (Banwari 2015). Banwari states that these temples were the center of faith for the common masses, and the center of Indian culture. The Hindu kings were cognizant of their responsibilities towards Indic culture, and thus they made efforts to restore the damaged ones. Clearly, this happened across regions. Thus, the vernacular regions contesting against Sanskrit is difficult to accept. Additionally, Shah Jahan's court had intellectuals from Iran, Iraq and similar far-away places. In other words, a king surrounding himself with scholars is not unusual.

#### a. *Praśasti*-s: sinister intent or gratitude?

As noted previously, Pollock's analysis uses *praśasti*-s and multilinguality in inscriptions as major points of his arguments. Although *Praśasti* is looked down upon by Pollock: "...sheer inanity of *Praśasti* texts" (Pollock 1996: 242) his significant focus is on the *praśasti*-s. But only those written for the kings and is one of the foundations on the basis of which he has listed some of his conclusions. His interpretation being that *praśasti*-s and the eulogizing of the kings in the *praśasti*-s, were written with the intent to provide divinely status to the kings, thereby providing them power.

However, we have also seen *praśasti*-s written for fellow scholars i.e. brahmins. Upadhyaya's book gives several examples of *praśasti*-s for brahmins. Moreover, here is an example of *praśasti* for the Duke of Edinburgh when he arrived in Kashi (1982: 148). 17 pandits came together to write a *praśasti* in Sanskrit. It was compiled in a *kāvya* text

called ‘*Sumanoañjali*’, presented to the Duke on the 20th of Jan., 1870 by Bhāratendu Hariścandra. In other words, Hindu kings were not the only recipients of *praśasti*.

Neither was *praśasti* restricted to Sanskrit and *śāstra* reading brahmins or kings. Mahāvīra, a mathematician of considerable repute in the 9th century, from a prestigious lineage of Indian mathematician, wrote thus of his predecessors:

“With the help of the accomplished holy sages, who are worthy to be worshipped by the Lords of the world...I glean from the great ocean of the knowledge.”

Rāṅgācārya (1912: 3)

Similarly, Bhāskara II, a renowned mathematician of the 12th century had this to say of his predecessor Bhāskarācārya:

“Triumphant is the illustrious Bhaskaracharya whose feats are revered by the wise and the learned. A poet endowed with fame and religious merit, he is like the crest on a peacock.”

Joseph (2011: 379) (no diacritics in the original)

Such eulogizing in the *praśasti* is comparable to that analyzed and interpreted by Pollock. These examples seem to inform us that the *praśasti*-s have been an integral part of Indic literature. These were written for the king – Hindu, Mughal, or even British, for scholars - brahmins studying ancient literature or writing texts, or even amongst mathematicians. Thus it seems the *praśasti*-s were an act of gratitude and respect for a noble life, that of a king or a scholar. Additionally, kings from alien culture also received *praśasti*-s.

#### b. File-drawer Problem:

It seems the problem in the modern knowledge creation procedure, is one that is quite prevalent, prevalent enough to be coined with a name – such as the ‘file-drawer’ problem. The act of hiding certain ‘difficult to explain’ facts is called the ‘file-drawer’ problem.

“It is unlikely that a literature review will uncover every study of a hypothesis that has been conducted. Rosenthal (1979) has called this the “file drawer problem” because of the tendency for studies supporting the null hypothesis of no significant results to be more likely to be buried away in file drawers.”

(Wolf 1986: 37)

Pollock's works have been shown to have this problem. Multiple independent critiques of his works by various authors have shown that Pollock tends to hide historical facts, those facts that seem to contradict his hypothesis against Sanskrit. Some examples are provided again: the text raised questions on Pollock's misquoting Kavīndrācārya's use of pension money. Another Pollock mis-statement is worth repeating and addressing – 'Sanskrit was thus exclusively the cosmopolitan language of elite self-presentation' – the italics occurring in Pollock's own work. A cursory glance at the history of Indian mathematics – Jain, Buddhist and Hindu – will readily inform us that the lineage of Indian mathematics dating back to several centuries before the Common Era and continuing to the 16th century in the Common Era, and a dazzling lineage at that, used Sanskrit. Surely, writing mathematical treatises cannot be an elitist self-presentation. He is either uninformed on the mathematics of India written in Sanskrit, or he has deliberately chosen to discard the realm of Sanskrit writings in mathematics. Such Pollockian statements make his scholarship suspect. A specific instance of file-drawer problem found in Pollock's work is presented next.

One sign of oppression of the vernaculars (addressed next) – Pollock asserts – "Prakrit will be forever banished..." (Pollock1996: 207). The source of the word 'banish' seemingly comes from the following: "...given the nature of literary production of the members of this family ... there is every reason to suppose that their earlier records were in Prakrit" (Pollock1996: 207). More supposition has followed from Pollock.

After stating the banishment of Prakrit within a given time period, he states: "The last sign of Prakrit used in inscriptions in the North, apart from Kharosthi documents from Central Asia...and the mere engraving of Prakrit poetry... is in the hybrid Kuśāna records" (Pollock1996: 207). He is thus providing lip-service to Prakrit records actually found. This is a typical file-drawer problem in modern research. He is forced to do so since the presence of Prakrit writings contradicts his hypothesis and therefore, he is forced to downplay them. Incidentally, several pages later in the article he brings up yet another instance where Prakrit is being used.

### c. Oppression in the Sanskrit Cosmopolis:

A significant idea that Pollock puts forth (based on his interpretation of inscriptions bearing the *praśasti*-s and his assertion of hyperglossia)

is that there was competition between Sanskrit and the vernacular: “...Sanskrit’s competitor languages are so long disallowed any but a documentary function in the public domain of royal *praśasti* discourse” (Pollock 1996: 216).. He assumes that Sanskrit had started ‘invading’ other languages. He goes on to state that Sanskrit has started to appear in Khmer, that is, Sanskrit is slowly starting to dominate Khmer – a local vernacular. “...Khmer...like Kannada – is massively invaded by Sanskrit at least at the lexical level...and from the earliest period” (Pollock 1996: 222). Pollock’s own words describe Sanskrit as dominating the local language. Then the question is why could not Sanskrit gobble up its competition, especially when it had started to dominate it within a few decades? “...Sanskrit is, linguistically, utterly uninfluenced by Khmer – except for personal names, Khmer words never appear in Sanskrit” (Pollock 1996: 222). Assuming Pollock’s hypothesis to be true, why is Sanskrit allowing its ‘competition’ to be still being used? Note that the Pollockian Sanskrit Cosmopolis lasts for several centuries, enough time for Sanskrit to kill its competitor vernaculars, especially after it had started to ‘dominate’ the vernacular in a few decades. This hypothesis of competition and invasion by Sanskrit falls flat when we see multilingualism, some comments on which have already been made earlier.

#### Multilingualism

Upadhyaya notes that pandits would speak their mother tongue at home, but still learn and teach Sanskrit. They would also use Hindi (Upadhyaya 1982: 145). Multilingualism is also seen in the *kāvya* compilation called ‘*Mānasopāyana*’ where 66 pandits came together to write poems in different languages – Hindi, Punjabi, Marathi, Urdu, Bangla, English, Telugu etc. They have written *stuti* for the English rule, including Queen Victoria. Clearly, the pandits were happy to let other languages flourish, indeed, they were using it themselves.

## Conclusions

In summary, the current preliminary research focused on Pollock’s Sanskrit Cosmopolis from its chronology perspective. The traditional approach of studying the chronology was replaced with an alternative approach. Here the underlying narrative of Pollock was examined across time – hence a different approach to chronology was introduced. The flaws in Pollock’s narrative and consequent analysis

is borne out by such an analysis. This in turn directly raises questions about the Pollockian narratives. Hence it is suggested that this approach is effective.

While keeping with Upadhyaya's narratives, it is instructive to note Aklujkar's private communication with his guru who in turn is describing the last days of his teachers, Shankarshastri Marulkar – a great pandit of his time (Aklujkar 2001: 30-31). Aklujkar mentions how his *guru* choked in grief narrating about Marulkar. Marulkar belonged to the lineage of the great Nageśabhaṭṭa and was entrusted with the responsibility of editing several texts for the Anandashrama Sanskrit series. Yet, his last few years he had nothing left but two small pots in which he cooked dal and rice. These pots too were stolen, and Marulkar had nothing left to even cook his food. This was the state of pandits which must be seen in comparison to the pandits of yore who had royal patronage, especially the renowned and the talented ones. Pollock chooses to call such patronage 'king-brahmin' nexus to build a Cosmopolis. For him to not mention any such ground realities in his research shows how distanced he is from the actual occurrences in the society, or he is exhibiting a file-drawer problem.

Pollock tends to use difficult language and has attempted to create a picture of India. But the evidences are not forthcoming. Thus even a preliminary research such as this one is able to show the weakness in his hypothesis. His picture of India has European/Western societal lens of top-down structure of the society. The Indic traditional knowledge informs us otherwise. It presents a bottom-up view of the Indian society whose bedrock is the rich philosophical tradition of India. Perhaps one can use Pollock's own statement (although he uses it in a different context) to make the case that his hypothesis is tenuous: "The relationships between language, literature, and social power in South Asia are not going to be unpacked by any simple formula transferred from Europe, especially one that is itself shaky" (Pollock 1996: 244-245).

Given that the present initial research has found errors in Pollock's analysis, his hypotheses on Sanskrit as a political tool and as a dead language seem erroneous. Furthermore, given the file-drawer problem, his research gives scope for skepticism regarding his scholarship – and given the overt India-based political activism of Pollock, as evidenced in his numerous signatures on petitions, further

serve to raise doubts regarding the same. Follow up work from this preliminary research is presented next.

## Future Work

1. Pollock has relied heavily on inscriptions to provide his conclusions on 'hyperglossia' and 'vernacular uprising'. One of the points made in this paper is that of the 'promise of science'. An authentic scientific investigation has the attributes of repeatability, reproducibility, honest data publication etc. Given the 'file-drawer' problems his research exhibits, it is imperative to perform independent analysis of the inscriptions – not only of the ones that he has cited, but also, one may find additional inscriptions that he has not cited, that is, filed away in the drawer. This preliminary paper has not gone into the details of the inscriptions. Hence it is proposed that the next step, among others, be to study the temple inscriptions for their content as well as accompanying statistical analysis of the contents if the data lends itself to such an analysis.
2. Lives of Bengal pundits as remarked by Aklujkar (Aklujkar 2001: 29) and Mithila pundits must be studied and compared with the lives of the Kashi pandits. This will enable a clearer picture of the Indian society.
3. Likewise, role of kings in other parts of India, say Tamil Nadu, which features significantly in Pollock's analysis, is worth pursuing.
4. One of the facts that came up during this research is the nature of schooling. While Kavīndrācārya and Bhāskarānanda Sarasvatī went to a *guru-śiṣya paramparā*, by the turn of the 20th century, when Datiyā Svāmī appeared, his initial education was in a school, presumably akin to modern times. Tracking a chronological change in the schooling system would also be a fruitful research endeavor in understanding the influence of alien rule on the *guru-śiṣya paramparā*, the traditional Indian schooling system.

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## Annexure

Table enlisting Baldev Upadhyaya's written works. His edited works in Sanskrit are separate and is not included in the table.

**Table A1. List of Hindi books written by Upadhyaya. He has also edited texts in Sanskrit. The translations of his books on Indian philosophy and literature in various vernacular languages, including Urdu, Burmese and Sinhalese, attest against Pollockian Sanskrit Cosmopolis.**

S.N.	Book title/-language	Publisher	Year	Translated to:
1.	<i>Rasik Govind aur Unki kavita</i>	Hindi Pracharani Sabha, Balia	1928	
2.	<i>Sūktisūktāvalī</i>	Haridas, Mathura	1932	
3.	<i>ŚaṁskṛtaKaviCarcā</i>	Master Kheladilal, Kashi	1932	Nepali
4.	<i>Sanskṛt Sāhitya kā Iti-hās</i>	Sharda Mandir, Kashi	1934	Urdu, Kannada
5.	<i>Bhārtiya Darśan</i>	Sharda Mandir, Kashi	1942	Oriya, Kannada, Telugu
6.	<i>Ācārya Sāyaṇ aur Mādhab</i>	Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, Prayag	1946	
7.	<i>Bauddh darśan</i>	Sharda Mandir, Kashi	1946	
8.	<i>Dharma aur darśan</i>	Sharda Mandir, Kashi	1947	

9.	<i>Ārya Sanskr̥ti ke Mūlādhār</i>	Sharda Mandir, Kashi	1947	
10.	<i>Bhārtiya Sāhitya Śāstra</i> , Part 2	Prasad Parishad, Kashi	1948	Kannada
11.	<i>Bhārtiya Sāhitya Śāstra</i> , Part 1	Prasad Parishad, Kashi	1949	Kannada
12.	<i>Ācārya Śāṅkar</i>	Hindustani Academy, Prayag	1950	Kannada
13.	<i>Bhāgvat Sampradāya</i>	Nagri Pracharini Sabha, Kashi	1954	
14.	<i>Vaidik Sāhitya aur Sanskr̥ti</i>	Sharda Sansthan	1954	
15.	<i>Purān Vimarś</i>	Chaukhamba Vidyabha- van, Kashi	1965	
16.	<i>Sanskrt Śāstron kā iti- hās</i>	Sharda Mandir, Kashi	1969	
17.	<i>Sanskrt Vāñmaya</i>	Sharda Mandir, Kashi	1969	
18.	<i>Vaidic Kahāniyān</i>	Sharda Mandir, Kashi	1969	
19.	<i>Bhārtīya Darshan Dār</i>	Sasta Sahitya Mandal, Delhi	1970	

20.	<i>Bhārtīya Vāñmay Men Śrī Rādhā</i>	Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna	1970	
21.	<i>Sūkti Mañjari</i>	Chaukhamba Vidyabhavan, Varanasi	1970	
22.	<i>Sanskṛt Ālocanā</i>	Hindi Samiti, Lucknow	1977	
23.	<i>Sanskrt Sāhitya kā Saṅkṣipt Itihās</i>	Sharda Sansthaan	1977	
24.	<i>Bauddh Darśan Mīmāṁsā</i>	Chaukhamba Pustakalaya, Varanasi	1978	Burmese, Sinhalese
25.	<i>Bhārtiya Dharma aur Darśan</i>	Chaukhamba Orientalia, Kashi	1978	
26.	<i>Jñān ki Garimā</i>	Sasta Sahitya Mandal, Delhi	1978	
27.	<i>Bhārtiya Darśan ki Rūprekhā</i>	Chaukhamba Vishwabharti, Varanasi	1978	
28.	<i>Kāvya Anuśilan</i>	Tripolia Bazaar, Jaipur	1978	
29.	<i>Vaishnav Sam-pradāyon kā Sāhitya aur Siddhānt</i>	Chaukhamba Amar Bharti, Kashi	1980	

30	<i>Kāshi kī Pāṇḍitya Paramparā</i>	Vishwa Vidhyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi	1982	
31.	<i>Bhārtiya Sāhitya kā Anuśīlan</i>	Sharda Sansthan, Varanasi	1985	
32.	<i>Bhārtiya Sharma aur Darśan kā Anuśīlan</i>	Sharda Sansthan, Varanasi	1985	
33.	<i>Vimarśa Cintāmaṇi</i> (Sanskrit)	Sharda Sansthan, Varanasi	1987	

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Pollock is aware of the contentious nature of his prescribed dates. He pre-emptively states: 'even the dates I have given for framing the limits of its (Pollock 1996: 197) origin and dissolution may be disputed' and then pushes forward without providing any discussion on, or resolution of, this dispute.

<sup>2</sup> Here are some additional notes about Baldev Upadhyaya worth mentioning. O'Hanlon (2010) has referred to Upadhyaya's work and so has Aklujkar in his articles which appear in *The Pāṇḍit*. Aklujkar considers Upadhyaya's work as the best source to know about the Kashi Pandits. He also acknowledges Sinha's work on Bengal Pandits as the best work to refer to for Pāṇḍits of Bengal. As a matter for research, it would be meaningful to compare and contrast the life-style of the Pāṇḍits from two different parts of India, contemporaneous or not.

<sup>3</sup> Upadhyaya (1982: 834–850)

<sup>4</sup> The note reads: "Dear Sir, I have a pleasure in sending you the photos of the Emperor Wilhelm I, the founder of the German Empire and of his grandson, our present Emperor. I wish you health and long life. Your most obedient servant, Gruf Konigs Mark (signed)."

<sup>5</sup> Upadhyaya (1982: 77–85)

<sup>6</sup> Upadhyaya (1982: 873–881)

<sup>7</sup> Upadhyaya (1982: 791–806)

<sup>8</sup> Another example is that of Pāṇḍit Krishnadev Upadhyaya. He taught Vedānta Philosophy to W. H. Mill of the Bishop college.

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# Chapter 8

## “Hinduism: a Precursor to Nazism?”

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### 1. Orientalism, National Socialism and the Aryan Race:

By the late nineteenth century, Orientalist scholarship on India began to act as the handmaiden of European colonialism and imperialism by pretending that it had discovered and understood the roots of colonized cultures like Indian culture. It sought to demarcate the strata of texts of the Indian civilization to search for ‘external influences and later accretions’ and map them to the ‘different races that populated India.’ The ‘natives’ of India were classified as various degrees of mongrel peoples due to the admixture of the superior, virile, civilized invading ‘Aryans’ from the northwest (closer to Europe) and the effeminate, inferior, dark skinned and less civilized indigenous Indians. But this is not how Oriental scholarship started, or evolved in other parts of the world.

In the early eighteenth century in Germany, Friedrich von Schlegel had proposed that a master Aryan race had originated from the Himalayas and migrated to various parts of Europe with their

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\*pp. 261–285. In: Kannan, K. S and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*. Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

knowledge in antiquity. Their language, closely related to Sanskrit, was called ‘Indo-Germanic family of languages’ and later as ‘Indo-European’. Georg Hegel and Christian Lassen propagated this myth, but Schlegel’s brother Wilhelm later relocated the Aryan homeland to Caucasus, from where they had invaded India (Kennedy 2000:81-82). Developments in historical linguistics led to a mapping of languages to ‘races’, with the Indo-European languages being linked to the ‘Aryans’ by other European scholars like Max Mueller and Joseph Renan. This ‘Aryan Myth’ distinguished sharply between the ‘Aryan Race’ and the ‘Semitic Race’ (Jews), thereby ‘othering’ the already ‘outsider’ Jews in Europeans. Many European scholars however found the natural conclusion that Christianity was ‘Semitic’ despite their own ‘Aryan’ racial affiliation as unpalatable. In particular, the British could not digest the fact that they shared racial affinity with Indians colonized by them, except with perhaps the elite Brāhmaṇas among the Hindus. The French aristocrat Joseph Gobineau, and the Englishman Houston Chamberlain further transformed the Aryan Myth into a thesis of Nordic-Teutonic racial supremacy in the period after 1850 CE. These Nordics were considered as ‘pure Aryans’, blonde and blue eyed. The rise of German Nationalism after the Franco-Prussian war contributed to the popularity of the Nordic Aryan thesis amongst Germans, who believed themselves as the purest descendants and true representatives of this master race (Kennedy 2000:82-83).

In the early 20th century, fringe lunatics like G. Lanz-Liebfels took this Nordic Aryan thesis further and launched a journal *Istara*, of which Hitler is said to have been a regular reader (Halbfass 1988:139-140). It was Lanz who termed the Swastika as an Aryan symbol,<sup>1</sup> and also highlighted the contrast between the dark *candāla* and the blonde Aryan. Developing these ideas further, Alfred Rosenberg wrote his ‘*Der Mythus der 20 Jahrhunderts*’ which became the official ideology of National Socialism, more popularly known as Nazism. It envisaged the Germans as the least mongrel, and therefore the pre-esteemed and creative members of the superior Nordic Aryan race. Alfred Rosenberg, the high priest of the Nazi racial theory wrote,

“The meaning of world history has radiated out from the north over the whole world, borne by a blue-eyed blond race which in several great ways determined the spiritual face of the world....These wander-periods were the legendary migration of the Atlantides across north Africa, the migration of the Aryans into India and Persia; the migrations of the

Dorians, Macedonians, Latins; the migration of the Germanic tribes; the colonization of the world of the Germanic occident."<sup>2</sup>

Cited in Murphy *et al* (1952: 71)

Rosenberg then elaborated on each individual migration as to how the genetic mixture of the superior Aryans with the non-Aryan 'inferior races' in their colonies had resulted in a degradation of civilization, because the 'creative impulse of the Aryans' got diluted genetically. Below the Aryans were the Mongoloids, who were termed as 'culture bearing', below them the 'Blacks and Slavs' who were of 'lesser value', and finally at the bottom were the Jews, who were the sheer embodiment of evil (Burleigh and Wippermann 1997: 83). Archaeologists like Kossina manipulated and even fabricated archaeological 'evidence' to 'prove' the arrival of the master Aryan race into northern Germany from Scandinavia (see Diaz-Andreu 1996).

Nazism had a checkered relationship with Christianity.<sup>3</sup> Christianity was a Semitic faith from the hated non-Aryan Jews, and was meant to be replaced by a true Aryan religion (Murphy *et al.* 1952: 71).<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, anti-Semitism in German had another very important religious source – the writings of the founder of Protestant Christianity, Martin Luther (a German), who in his *The Jews and their Lies* wrote that the Jews were the killers of Christ, they desired world domination, they were 'pestilence', 'criminals', whose institutions and books ought to be burned, and who must be driven out like 'mad dogs' (Spielvogel 1996: 268) While Luther's views were extreme, anti-Semitism was firmly ingrained in the medieval Christian European mind that considered the Jews as 'Christ killers'.<sup>5</sup> Hitler considered fighting against the Jews as 'the will of the Lord' (Spielvogel 1996: 266). If Protestantism has been implicated as a source of Nazism, Catholicism has been excoriated as a colluder. There are allegations of Pope Pius XII negotiating with the Nazis to protect his Church, support the Nazi rise to power, and ignore the mass extermination of Jews, Gypsies and other non-Catholic Europeans.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. German Indology, Nazism and Pollock's Civilizing Mission

There were not just scholars of humanities that provided the ideological props for (or looked the other way *vis-à-vis*) Nazism,

but also scientists (see Cornwell 2003) like the famous physicist Phillip Lenard (FitzGerald 2013), physicians (see Kater 1989) and scholars of numerous other disciplines. Some medical professionals in particular took Nazism race theories to implement eugenics, and the elimination of ‘genetically defective’ (and therefore ‘inferior’) humans like the disabled (Hamburger 1952: 108-110). Some Indologists such as Johannes Hertel (see Frank Neubert 2004) were supporters of the Nazi National Socialist party; other Indologists such as Walther Wust<sup>7</sup> (author of a celebrated book on *Rgvedic chronology* besides numerous other works on Indo-Iranian linguistics) actually actively engaged in enriching Nazi ‘Aryan mysticism’. Then, we have Erich Frauwallner who showed commitment to Nazism even after the World War II was over (see Adluri 2011). But whereas, the German scientists and physicians have apologized for their predecessors’ collusion with Nazism, the Indologists have not yet. Scholars of Indology or Hinduism Studies continue to cite Nazi Indologists as authorities with approval.<sup>8</sup> In any respectable field, works of these scholars would be anathema. But not so in Indology, where they are still cited with approval. For instance, Witzel quotes Wust as a former scholar approvingly in one his own publications.<sup>9</sup> Other European scholars have published Kliene Schriften volumes of these Nazi Indologists.<sup>10</sup>

This troubles Sheldon Pollock. In his 1993 article “Deep Orientalism” written in his typical constipated prose with claims squirted in all directions like the ink of a frightened squid, Pollock laments at modern German Indology still not coming to terms with its Nazi past. But alarmingly, he takes a step forward – and argues that Orientalism on the one hand, and racism and the ‘discourse of power’ on the other, did not originate from Orientalism or its German variant (National Socialism). Rather, a ‘pre-modern racism’ and the ‘discourse of power’ have deep roots within the Hindu shāstric tradition. He argues that Hindu elites (the ‘Brāhmaṇas’) had created a discourse wherein they were superior by birth, controlled access to empowering knowledge, and had castigated the śūdra-s as the excluded other – just like the disenfranchised Jew in Nazi Germany. Pollock of course does not state explicitly that Hinduism is a form of Nazism, but any reader can connect the dots and conclude that this is what he is trying to say.

If Orientalism was a racist discourse of power to define the colonized and show him to be inferior and in need of the Imperialist civilizing mission, Pollock wonders if the ‘pre-modern racism’ in Hindu

scriptures is a form of 'Deep Orientalism' too. In his thesis of 'Deep Orientalism' in Hinduism, Pollock projects the 'Ārya-Mleccha' and 'Ārya-Śūdra' dichotomies in Hindu scriptures as an ancient variant of the Nazi 'Aryan-Semitic' binary. He also singles out the Dharmasāstra and Mīmāṃsā/Vedānta traditions for their alleged 'discourse of power' and exclusion of the Indian masses comprising of śūdra-s, women, Buddhists and Jains.

In fact, Pollock argues that the true goal of the 'post-Colonial Indology' (or Post-Orientalism Indology) must be to avoid the pitfall of 'third-worldism' as a reaction to Orientalism, and liberate the śūdra-s and women forming the bulk of Hindu masses from the 'Deep Orientalism' that forms the core of Hindu scriptural tradition. He gives the example of a European scholar who gave agency to the suppressed śūdra-s. So there we have the colonialism all over again – justifying Western colonial hegemony in the intellectual arena with the help of Indian elites (the Marxists dominating Indian academic institutions) to 'save the heathen Ghentoo from Oriental Despotism of the Brāhmaṇas'.

### **3. The Absence of Aryan as a Racial Concept in Hinduism**

Let us now examine Pollock's claim that the Ārya-Śūdra/Mleccha binary in the śāstra-s is a form of pre-modern racism, a discourse of power, and of exclusion from knowledge systems. Most scholars credit European sources for the development of the Aryan Myth. Poliakov (1974) argues that in country after country in Europe, the rise of nationalism created an emotional need in the minds of nationalists to trace the origin of their nation to a glorious ancestor or origin that distinguished them from the 'inferior other'. As a next stage, various European Nationalities, came to imagine the 'non-European other' which included all non-Caucasians, and even Caucasians like Slavs, Jews and Arabs as the inferior races. Biblical genealogies were frequently used to justify these racial hierarchies. Finally, the Germans invented the superior German Nordic Aryan race, in opposition to the evil and inferior Semitic race represented by the Jews at the other end of the spectrum. A culmination of this final stage was Nazism. It is in the second and third stage where Indian traditions were appropriated to further racial theories of European nationalists. It has been noted ironically that,

"Until the mid-19th century, no Indian had ever heard of the notion that his ancestors could be Aryan invaders from Central Asia who had destroyed the native civilization and enslaved the native population. Neither had South-Indians ever dreamt that they were the rightful owners of the whole subcontinent, dispossessed by the Aryan invaders who had chased them from North India, turning it into *Āryāvarta*, the land of the Aryans. Nor had the low-caste people heard that they were the original inhabitants of India, subdued by the Aryans and forced into the prisonhouse of caste which the conquerors imposed upon them as an early form of Apartheid. All these ideas had to be imported by European scholars and missionaries, who thought through the implications of the *Aryan Invasion Theory* (AM, the theory that the Indo-European (IE) language family had spread out from a given homeland, probably in Eastern Europe, and found a place in Western and Southern Europe and in India as cultural luggage of horse-borne invaders who subjugated the natives."

(Elst 1999: 1)

Chakrabarti (1999: 11) argues that by the late 19th century in India,

"...The third major ingredient of Indology of this period was a carefully constructed dichotomy between ancient India and the modern India and Indians. By the time the British came as rulers, the ancient Aryan civilization of India was degraded, and its rejuvenation could take place only under the British rule which in fact was a modern Aryan rule, because linguistically and racially the Anglo-Saxons were placed within the pristine Aryan fold.

In one sense this offered a kind of legitimacy to the British rule and European dominance in general, and the premise could also satisfy the Indian upper castes because through their ancient Aryan affiliation they could claim cousinship with their rulers...."

The colonized Indians, or rather the anglicized upper-caste Hindu elite of British India, internalized the Aryan Myth, and imagined themselves as less contaminated descendants of these superior Aryan invaders, and therefore partners with the Aryan British rulers in ruling over the lower caste Indians.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, traditional Indian scholars and religious leaders like Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda rejected the Aryan Myth as also suggestions of the external origins of any part of the Indian Hindu community.

The role of these blonde-blue Nordics in civilizing the entire Old World is even today propagated in 'scholarly' publications of Indo-European

Studies scholars like Day (2001). Day invokes evidence from cranio-skeletal studies, genetics, textual studies and archaeology to argue that the most ancient depictions and descriptions of Indo-European speakers typically show them as light skinned, light haired and blue-green eyed.<sup>12</sup> The obsession with the 'Aryan look' continues in recent writings, with the German Indologist Michael Witzel speculating that they looked like modern Afghans or Kashmiris (Witzel 1997: xxii). Victor Mair (also a German), a doyen of Indo-European studies, is not content with these partial European looks of migrating Aryans, and he suggests (Mair 1998: 14-15) that they even had light eyes, skin and hair, and entered India in large numbers. Even some Indian origin scholars<sup>13</sup> in modern times seem obsessed with the 'Aryan look' and pick on rare and isolated descriptions, ignoring others that describe the Vedic *r̥si*-s as dark, or mantras that pray for luxuriant black hair. But how valid is this Aryan race hypothesis for Indian history?

If Harappan Culture is taken to be pre-Vedic, then it can be argued that class/caste based distinctions were already existent in it, as is evident from the division of some sites into a higher and a lower level section, areas within and outside boundary walls and well defined areas in some cities reserved for workers' shops.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it is wrong to blame the Vedic Aryans for introducing a caste like social hierarchy into India.

Numerous scholars<sup>15</sup> have studied the occurrences of *ārya*, *anārya* and cognates in Vedic texts. Scholars have shown that it means 'noble', an adherent of Vedic orthopraxy, a member of the first three *varṇa*-s, a cultivator (as opposed to the nomadic *sūdra*), and more specifically, to the Puru-Bharatas (Talageri 2000: 154-160). Scholars (see also Nath 1996) like Asko Parpola and others have pointed out that the *R̥gvedic* *dāsa* or *dasyu* might refer to speakers of Iranian languages, i.e., Indo-Iranian language speakers. And the *R̥gveda* itself describes battles between not merely Arya-s and Dāsa-s/Dasyu-s, but also between the Arya-s themselves.

If we consider the Anārya-s to be *sūdra*-s, there is no proof that the dark skinned 'native peoples' were relegated to *sūdra* status by the invading Aryans. Even scholars hostile to Hinduism and operating within the Aryan Invasion/Migration paradigms state that the *sūdra* caste was allied (originally) with the Indo-Aryan stock, and that large sections of both Indo-Aryans and 'pre-Aryans' were reduced to *sūdra*

caste partly through internal and partly through external conflicts between different peoples (Sharma 2002: 39,45). The Marxist historian D. D. Kosambi actually states that brahmins were also derived from native priesthood.

There is no evidence that the Dāsa-s/Dasyu-s were uniformly dark and the Aryans were fair skinned, or flat nosed (as against “long nosed” Aryans), let alone them belonging to different races.<sup>16</sup> In fact, numerous Rgvedic *mantra*-s term *r̥ṣi*-s (seers) like Kaṇva-s (1.117.8, 1.116.23) and Aṅgirasa-s (‘Krṣṇa’ as in 8.47.3 etc.) as dark. Satyāśādha, the author of a *Kalpasūtra*, is referred to as ‘Hiranya-keśin’ (golden haired) and this special designation implies that blondism was rare in ancient India, as it is today, and was mentioned as a distinguishing characteristic of the author of this text. If fair skin was the criterion for superiority, why would Hindus worship dark personalities such as Krṣṇa, Vyāsa, Rāma, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Kāli?

And what exactly does the word Ārya mean in the Vedic and Dharmāśāstra texts? *Manu* 10.45 rejects language as a means to determine whether someone is an Ārya or a Dasyu. Verses 10.56-57 even reject appearance as a basis for Aryan affiliation, and state that qualities like harshness, cruelty etc., can easily betray one’s non-Aryan-ness. This is totally contrary to Nazism, which equates language to race, and race to one’s looks. In *Manu* 3.10, women with ‘yellow eyes’ are considered unfit for marriage – a far cry if light ‘Aryan’ eyes were esteemed.

In short, the words ‘Ārya’, ‘śūdra’, ‘Dasyu’ etc., have no racial connotations in Hindu scriptures. Even when used in a linguistic sense, the major criterion for inclusion in the Aryan category seems adherence to Vedic orthopraxy, a good character, noble birth and so on. We have not even dwelt here on the argument on how complex (and often with no basis in social reality) the theoretical interplay between *varna-jāti-gotra-kula* systems was in historical India. Suffice it to say that Pollock’s attempt to thrust Nazism onto Hindu texts is jejune, if not ‘scholarly’ hate-mongering.

## 4. Dharma-śāstra-s, Pūrva Mīmāṃsā and Nazism

Pollock presents Dharma-śāstra and Mīmāṃsā texts as a discourse of power meant for excluding śūdra-s from all avenues of knowledge and agency. One wonders why Pollock ignores the more redeeming features in the more influential genres of Hindu scriptures like the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇa*-s which contain sufficient indications that śūdra-s were eligible for Vedic learning and even participation in *yajña*-s. The same texts also argue that one's character, and not birth is the true basis of *varṇa*. Several passages of *Brāhmaṇa*-s and the *Kalpasūtra*-s also indicate the same, even though with the passage of time, the śūdra-s were barred from *yajña*-s altogether.<sup>17</sup> But even if the śūdra-s were debarred from studying the *Veda*-s, they could still access all other branches of learning.<sup>18</sup> Studies by Dharampal on traditional schools in British India clearly reveal enrolment of vast numbers of śūdra students, as well as śūdra teachers. Clearly, Pollock has stereotyped Hinduism through selective use of the data available.

The irony of casting Pūrva Mīmāṃsā as the ideological textbook of Indian Nazism cannot be overstated. Śabaravāmin, whose *Bhāṣya* forms the basis of all subsequent works of the Darśana, himself bears the name of a tribe 'Śabara'-s among whom he is said to have lived for a long time. Kumārila himself was a *brāhmaṇa* (like Śabara) but not of 'pure Aryan' pedigree, because he was a Drāviḍa Āndhra *brāhmaṇa* according to *Jinavijaya*, a Jaina text (Mīmāṃsaka Vol. I: 39). Right from its inception, Nazism regarded the expulsion of Jews as its first goal<sup>19</sup>; it sought to cleanse everything German of its real or perceived Jewish influences. In contrast, the Dharmaśāstra tradition does not ever call for the expulsion of śūdra-s. Instead, it asks *brāhmaṇa*-s to leave the domains ruled by Mleccha-s and śūdra-s.<sup>20</sup> Only in times when Central Asians or Greeks invaded India, did the expulsion of the Mleccha-s and Yavana-s from Āryāvarta become an explicit goal of Indian kings. And the Mīmāṃsā Sūtra-s actually admit the help from Mleccha languages in the interpretation of Vedic words due to the belief that all Mleccha languages also derive from Vedic.<sup>21</sup> This is in contrast to the Nazi view of total distinction and exclusion between the Aryan and the Semite.

The root text of this *darśana*, the Mīmāṃsā Sūtra-s of Jaimini, deal with the correct interpretation of Vedic passages connected with *yajña*-s.

In chapter 6, part 1, the text discusses extensively with the rights of *sūdra*-s to perform *yajña*-s. All traditional commentaries interpret these *sūtra*-s to conclude that the *sūdra*-s are ineligible to perform *yajña*-s, and Pollock accepts this interpretation. And yet, they do acknowledge the *prima facie* view of some Rishis that this right does belong to *sūdra*-s. In fact, we can interpret the *sūtra*-s themselves differently to show that the *sūdra*-s did have a right to perform *yajña*-s in the view of Jaimini himself, and that their debarment is a later imposition by the commentator tradition. We offer our alternate interpretation below (Every *sūtra* has PP and UP; PP = *Pūrvapakṣa*; UP = *Uttarapakṣa*):

6.1.4: “Since the fruit of the ritual act is desirable, everyone should have a right to the ritual acts prescribed in the scriptures.”

PP: Since it is the object of the sacrifice that is Principal and since the act itself and the materials required are subordinate to the object, it follows naturally that anyone who desires to perform the act has to have the right to carry it out. And since all desire the fruits of these acts as described in scriptures, and all desire to obtain the same, all should have a right to perform the ritual acts.

6.1.5: “On the other hand, the statement above applies to the doer who is capable of performing the ritual completely, because the injunctions defining the procedure are connected with *Veda*-s.”

UP: Jaimini qualifies the statement in the previous *sūtra*. He says that the object of the *yajña* is attained only if they are performed in accordance with the injunctions of the infallible scripture. Hence, if someone is not able to follow the letter of scriptural injunctions in the performance of the sacrifice in its entirety, he will not obtain the fruit thereto, and so his effort will be futile. Therefore, the statement “He who is desirous of heaven should sacrifice” really applies to only those who are capable of performing the sacrifice in its entirety perfectly. This *sūtra* does not really contradict the preceding one but merely qualifies it because the reason “Person X can perform the sacrifice since he desires the fruit thereof” is stated as a *siddhānta* in *Mīmāṃsā* *Sūtra*-s 6.1.13, 6.1.20 etc.

6.1.25: “All the four castes, there being no distinction.”

UP: Members of all the four castes can perform sacrifices, since the *Veda*-s do not distinguish between them with regard to their right

to perform the sacrifice. The scriptures just say - "A (man) desirous of heaven should sacrifice." This text does not specify that only the *dvija*-s should sacrifice.

6.1.26: "On the other hand, under a command, the three castes are entitled to the establishment of fire; the *sūdra* has no connection with the sacrifice- Thus states the *Brāhmaṇa* texts according to Ātreya."

PP: Ātreya Ṛṣi states: The *Brāhmaṇa* texts state that that the *brāhmaṇa* should perform *agnyādhāna* in spring, the *kṣatriya* in summer and a *vaiśya* in autumn. The non-mention of *sūdra* implies that he cannot perform the *agnyādhāna* - the first step in the performance of *yajña*-s. Moreover, the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* and *Śaṅkhītā* state: "Therefore a *sūdra* is unfit for sacrifices." These two reasons lead to the conclusion that the *sūdra* is debarred from Vedic rituals.

6.1.27: "For a special purpose", says Bādari; "all should, because of that have the right."

UP: Bādari opposes this view and says that the injunction is only with regard to the particular act of *agnyādhāna* and is not of a general nature. The cause of this scriptural statement is that the *sūdra* does not have the expertise to perform the *agnyādhāna*, but that does not imply that he does not have the right to perform Vedic *yajña*-s *per se*. Hence, all are entitled to perform *yajña*-s.

Traditionally, the view of Ātreya is taken as UP and of Bādari is taken as PP. This is inappropriate since Bādari is quoted by name after Ātreya has been quoted by name. Secondly, Bādari is not refuted anywhere in the *sūtra*-s of *Pūrvottara Mīmāṁsā* although Ātreya is. The solitary case where Bādari's view is taken as PP (in Chap III of *Pūrva Mīmāṁsā*) is due to wrong interpretation by Śabara/Kumārila. Moreover, Kumārila does state in his *Tantra-vārttikā* that the Vṛttikāra regards the opinion of Bādari there as UP. It should be noted that the *Pūrva* and the *Uttara Mīmāṁsā* mention the names of various teachers only on two cases: When there is a conflict of opinion on a particular manner, and secondly when the Sūtrakāra wishes to vest authority to a particular view. In the latter case, only one teacher's name is quoted (E.g. in *Pūrva Mīmāṁsā Sūtra* 1.1.5). In the former case, we see the names of several teachers (one after the other) with contrasting or slightly different views, and the view of the last teacher ought to be taken as the *siddhānta*. Traditional commentaries however deal with

such cases in an arbitrary manner in some cases as in this one, and the view of Bādari should be taken as the final view.

6.1.28: “On the other hand, by seeing other analogous texts too; the other view is in accordance with the Veda-s.”

PP: The *pūrvapakṣin* says that the view of Ātreya is appropriate since with regard to other acts too, the Vedic texts have injunctions only for brāhmaṇa-s, kṣatriya-s, vaiśya-s only, and do not enjoin anything for śūdra-s. (see traditional commentaries for appropriate scriptural texts).

6.1.29: “Indeed/But (the opposite view), by reason of injunction, (we) should be in favor.”

UP: Jaimini refutes the previous argument and says that on the other hand, there are definite scriptural texts mentioning performance of sacrifice by śūdra-s or their connection with the *yajña* fire and so the right of śūdra-s to perform Vedic rituals is well established. E.g., *Apastamba Dharmasūtra* 5.14.1. *Rgveda* 1.53.4 refers to performance of *yajña*-s by five ‘peoples’, which, according to an opinion cited by Yāska (*Nirukta* 3.18), refers to the four *varṇa*-s and *nīśāda*-s.

6.1.30: “If it be said that by reason of adverse qualities he is not entitled.”

PP: Jaimini quotes the PP. The *pūrvapakṣin* says that śūdra-s cannot perform Vedic rituals since they have bad qualities. For instance, the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* says “āsuryyā vai śūdrāḥ” (Verily darkness are śūdra-s), and ‘śūdra-s are not eligible to perform *yajña*-s.’ The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* also says: “Women, śūdra-s and a black crow are falsehood. Do not behold their face” in the *Pravargya* section.

6.1.31: “We say no, because of possessing a desire.”

UP: Jaimini replies: “We have stated earlier that the main criterion for eligibility for performing Vedic rituals is desire on the part of the *Yajamāna*, provided of course that he is able to perform the complete ceremony on his own. Hence, adverse qualities cannot debar a śūdra from the ritual since śūdra-s also desire to obtain the fruit of the sacrifices.

6.1.32: “And in *saṃskāra*-s, by reason of that being the most important.”

UP: Jaimini continues: The desire on the part of the *Yajamāna* is the prime motivator for performance of *saṃskāra*-s, not his *varṇa* etc. Even in the performance of *saṃskāra*-s, the prime motivator is 'desire'. Therefore, although the *śūdra* does not undergo the Upanayana ceremony, he does possess desire to perform *yajña*-s and is therefore eligible.

6.1.33: "On the other hand moreover, by the injunction of the *Veda*-s, of non-*śūdra*-s is included."

UP: Jaimini now refutes the core argument in *sūtra* 6.1.30 and adds that certain Vedic injunctions disqualify even certain non-*śūdra*-s from performing Vedic rituals. These non-*śūdra*-s are they who are robbers, drinkers of wine etc. and are therefore debarred from rituals. So, it is bad qualities alone that make a person unfit for Vedic ritual, and not his caste *per se*. See *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra* 1.1.5.

6.1.34: "If it is said- not by reason of his desire to acquire learning."

PP: Earlier you have said that a *śūdra* cannot be debarred from ritual just because of his *varṇa*. Now you will say that a *śūdra* can desire to obtain learning and thus become competent to perform Vedic rituals. But this is not possible since he cannot acquire learning and become competent to perform Vedic ritual, and so he is debarred from the ritual.

6.1.35: "The *saṃskāra* is with that purpose; there is a Vedic text related to education of men."

UP: *Yajurveda* 26.2 says- "As I have spoken for the benefit of all men, be they *brāhmaṇa*-s, *kṣatriya*-s, *vaiśya*-s, *śūdra*-s, natives(*ārya*) or foreigners (*āraṇya*)...." This verse enjoins acquisition of learning by all men. And the Upanayana *saṃskāra* is performed with the purpose of commencing education. So, *śūdra*-s can undergo the Upanayana ceremony, and start their education. Although the *Veda*-s contain no explicit directive on performing the Upanayana for *śūdra*-s, the injunction 'the *Veda*-s ought to be studied' (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 11.5.7.2) is generic to all humans. Furthermore, the origin of *śūdra*-s is stated clearly to be from the *Puruṣa* during a Cosmic *Yajña* even in *Rgveda* 10.90.12.

6.1.36: “If it be said – no, because of the injunction for learning.”

PP: The objector says that the scriptures enjoin the first three castes to perform the Upanayana of their members at certain times and in a certain manner. But corresponding injunctions for śūdra-s are missing. So, it is implied that the śūdra-s cannot undergo Upanayana ceremony, and therefore they cannot acquire learning and become proficient in the performance of Vedic ritual.

6.1.37: “Non-capacity for education should be the grounds for non-eligibility for performance of the Vedic Ritual.”

UP: Jaimini states that it is the incapacity to acquire knowledge that should cause ineligibility for the Vedic ritual. Hence those who are not capable of acquiring knowledge, are excluded from the Vedic ritual. Thus, a son of a *dvija* who cannot acquire learning is also debarred from Vedic ritual.

6.1.38: “And similarly, there are analogous texts.”

UP: Jaimini concludes – we have texts that debar acquisition of knowledge by crooked persons etc. “*vidyā ha vai brāhmaṇam ājagāma...*” (*Samhitopaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* 3) - i.e. “Knowledge went to Brāhmaṇa and said - Do not impart me to one who is wicked, crooked etc.” In fact several references to the performance of *yajña*-s by śūdra-s are encountered in the scriptures. The *Mahābhārata* mentions that the śūdra king Sudāsa Paijavana performed numerous *yajña*-s. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 2.3.1 mentions Kavasa Ailūṣa\*, the son of a maid, perform the Āponapriya rite<sup>22</sup>.

In fact, in the next two *adhikaraṇa*-s, the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*-s establish the right of the Rathakāra to perform *agnyādhāna*,<sup>23</sup> and also the right of the Niṣāda to participate in the *yajña*-s. Therefore, it is highly improbable that the same text would deny completely deprive the rights of śūdra-s to participate in *yajña*-s. The fact of śūdra-s performing Vedic sacrifices is in fact recorded in several śrauta sūtra-s. *Mānava Śrautasūtra* 11.1.2 states that if the giver of the sacrificial fees (*dakṣiṇā*) is a śūdra, then the priest should go to his house, touch water and then go over the sacrificial formula mentally. In the Āpastamba Śrautasūtra 5.11-18, śūdra-s are listed as one of them from whose homes, a sacrificer desirous of prosperity must procure

\*Editor's Note: This is in *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 8.1 (Śāstrī 1942: 304) (Sastrī, Anantakrisna. (1942). *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*. Trivandrum: University of Travancore)

fire. *Āpastamba Śrautasūtra* 1.19-23 cites some teachers who allowed śūdra-s to perform Vedic sacrifices, while others (*Āpastamba* 24.1) deprived him of this right. *Bhāradvāja Śrautasūtra* 5.2.9 also records that according to some teachers, śūdra-s also have the right to establish the sacrificial fires.

Pollock also considers the Apaśūdrādhikaraṇa (*Brahmasūtra* 1.3.34-38) to prove his point. According to the interpretation below, which is opposite to the traditional interpretations, the section merely discusses the question "Is the performance of 'saṁskāra' a pre-requisite for acquiring *brahmavidyā*?" The objector cites an incident from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* and states that since Jānaśruti, a śūdra obtained *brahmavidyā* from Raikva Muni without having to undergo any 'Saṁskāra', it follows that no initiation ceremony is required as a pre-requisite for *brahmavidyā* as is the case with eligibility for Vedic Rituals.

1.3.34: "The grief which he felt on hearing the disrespectful words (about himself) made him run- that alone is indicated."

UP: In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, we read that Raikva Muni addressed King Jānaśruti as "śūdra" and then proceeds to instruct him in *brahmavidyā* after Jānaśruti makes a gift to him. From this, it might be inferred that śūdra-s can also acquire *brahmavidyā* upon payment of fees to the teacher. This possible interpretation of the episode is controverted by Vyāsa. He states that Jānaśruti is addressed as a śūdra because he was very much grieved and because he hastened to the Muni as a śūdra runs to his master when the latter calls him. It is therefore wrong to conclude that Jānaśruti was a śūdra.

1.3.35: "Because his *kṣatriya*-hood is known from the inferential sign (supplied by his having mentioned) later on with Citraratha."

UP: Jānaśruti cannot be said to be a śūdra also because this is clear from the episode in question, and also because he is said to have come on a chariot called Citraratha, which can be possessed only by a *kṣatriya* who has some power.

1.3.36: "On account of suggestion for performance of *saṁskāra*-s and on account of its absence of mention of them."

UP: Scriptures enjoin that *saṁskāra*-s should be performed before *brahmavidyā* is imparted to the votary. Now, śūdra-s are those who have not undergone that ceremony, and so if Jānaśruti were a śūdra,

Raikva would have insisted that he undergo an initiation ceremony. But absence of Raikva's instruction to this effect implies that Jānaśruti was not a śūdra.

1.3.37: “And because of proceeding after the ascertainment of absence of that.”

UP: Finally, Raikva determined that although he sent back Jānaśruti several times and spoke to him disrespectfully, Jānaśruti came back again and again with great humility and with all his possessions. This proved to Raikva the absence of pride in Jānaśruti and showed that Jānaśruti was really desirous of acquiring *brahmavidyā*. Another interpretation of the Sūtra (similar to the traditional interpretation) is – the episode of Satyakāma Jābāla, who was an illegitimate child of a servant girl and an unknown father also indicates the same. In this episode, Gautama ascertained that Jābāla was a śūdra by birth and not ordained. Yet, he possessed the desire for *brahmavidyā* and was truthful like a *brāhmaṇa*. Still, he did not proceed to instruct Jābāla directly, but rather asked for his initiation ceremony to be performed before he could impart any knowledge to him. This shows that the performance of *saṃskāra* is a pre-requisite for acquiring *brahmavidyā*. Traditional commentaries imply that Gautama ascertained that Jābāla's father could only have been a *brāhmaṇa* since he spoke the truth. This is wrong because even if the father were a *brāhmaṇa*, the son would still have been of a mixed caste since his mother was a śūdra. Thus, the statement of Gautama- “A non-*brāhmaṇa* cannot speak thus. You did not forsake truth...” is rather a reflection of the high regard that Gautama had for the truthfulness of Jābāla. And this is why, judging Jābāla to be of a truthful character, he ordained Jābāla and imparted *brahmavidyā* to him. This episode in fact proves that the knowledge of Upaniṣad can be imparted to anyone who is of good character.

1.3.38: “And because of prohibition of hearing, studying and employment (expounding) and because of injunctions of *smṛti*-s.”

UP: This sūtra concludes the section. Śruti-s prohibit the non-initiated from hearing, studying and teaching the Veda-s if they are not peaceful, lacking in faith and humility (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.22, *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.10-11). The *smṛti*-s also say- “The Brahmin should rather die than impart knowledge to a person who will misuse it.” And, “a teacher should not teach one who does not seek

knowledge, who is incapable of comprehending it...." (*Manusmṛti* Chap II). Śaṅkara's commentary gives several examples of śūdra-s who became proficient in *brahmaavidyā* even without studying the Veda-s and he credits their past live *samskāra*-s for that.

## 5. Pollock's Journey from Hitler to Hinduphobia

It is still somewhat unacceptable to use 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism' in pejorative senses. Instead, the slurs 'Hindu Nationalist' and 'Hindutva' are used in a demeaning sense (see Tilak 2001) when in fact the target is Hindu or Hinduism. Many of the demonized Hindus have no political aspirations or connections, and are labelled so simply because they speak positively about Hinduism, and condemn the negationism in Indian history about the dark record of Islamic invasions. The perpetrators of this name-calling are typically Indian 'Secularists' (often Marxist Historians) and Western Indologists. Their behavior is reminiscent of medieval European witch-hunts, or the Nazi hunt for 'Jews, sons of Jews and grandchildren of Jews'. Ironically, the label 'Hindutva' is even hurled at Western admirers of or converts to Hinduism. The target of these Hinduphobes is not Hindutva, but Hindus and Hinduism itself. One of the strategies in this 'scholarly' hatemongering is to first label the Hindu as 'Hindu Nationalist' and then draw comparisons with Nazis (see Elst 2001). Pollock takes a step further. He draws comparisons between Nazism, and the ancient Hindu tradition itself, thereby eliminating the intervening 'Hindutva', and therefore implicating the most ancient faith in the world that is followed by more than a billion people.

Pollock has long colluded with the extremely Hinduphobic Marxist academicians within India. In fact, Indian Marxists have long had a symbiotic relationship with extremely racist, India-bashing and Hindu-hating Western Indologists. Which reminds one of the fact that one of the most prominent ideologues of Nazi Occult Religion was a Jew named Otto Weininger, whom Hitler referred to as 'the only Jew fit to live.' (Fitzgerald 2013:22). Pollock's battle is being continued by his boisterous, abusive and well placed students like Audrey Truschke, who denies or obfuscates the violent aspects of the Moghul rule; and Ananya Vajpeyi, who is laboring hard to depict India and Hinduism as

oppressive and violent. For some western scholars, the only Indians who are worthy of engagement are those who act as faithful sepoy.

And just as the European colonialists colluded with willing elite Indians to lord over millions of other Indians, the Pollocks of today have co-opted the modern day sepoy and Babus viz. the Marxist scholars of India, to once again launch a new ‘civilizing mission’ on the Hindu society. The difference being that this latest assault on Indians and on their civilization is even more dangerous, and bears sinister parallels to the progressive demonization of the Jews in Europe leading to their holocaust. A recent work argues very cogently that German Indology is ‘institutionally and methodologically anti-Semitic’ except that the German Indologists have substituted the Brāhmaṇa for Jews in their works. This reflects in their extreme suspicion bordering on animosity towards sacred Hindu texts authored by the *brāhmaṇa*-s (Adluri and Bagchee 2015). Consistent with the stance of Indian Marxists like Romila Thapar, who reduce Hinduism to oppressive Brahmanism, and cannot refer to *brāhmaṇa*-s or Sanskrit except in pejorative manners even in school textbooks (see Agarwal 2005), Pollock reduces the entire Hindu tradition into a stereotyped construct of an oppressive and exclusivist Brahmanical ideology, a form of ‘pre-modern racism’. The scholarly hatemongering by Pollock *et al* has trickled down to the level of school textbooks in the United States. In Figure 1, we give the scan from a page of a 9th class textbook used in North Carolina that draws comparison between ancient India and Nazi symbols.

Pollock claims that unlike the Orientalists, who subjugated the colonized peoples by controlling the discourse on how the culture and faith of the colonies was defined, dismembered into chronological strata and hierarchical racial subcategories, he is a post-Orientalist Indologist. He claims that the goal of his ‘new’ type of scholarship should be to demonstrate and expose the inbuilt oppression and exclusivism in Hinduism, and thereby ‘liberate’ the oppressed Indian minorities, *sūdra*-s, Dalits and women from the powerful *savarna* clutches. But, how different is this claim from that of the racist British imperialists who pretended to bear ‘The White Man’s Burden’, who were on a ‘Civilizing Mission’ and who merely wanted to keep the mutually warring and hating Indian communities apart from each other in a benevolent ‘Pax Britannica’? At least, the imperialists and colonizers appreciated the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of

Hindu traditions, whereas Pollock has no such pretensions, and sees all these traditions as merely a 'discourse of power' (Malhotra 2016). Surely, Pollock cannot be unaware that insinuating that an ideology is like National Socialism ('Nazism') is the most demeaning slur that can be hurled at Hindus.

Therefore, I would like to submit that when we connect the dots of Pollock's 'research results' on Hinduism, the picture that emerges is not a Nazi Swastika, but of Pollock preaching Hinduphobia, similar to the Nazi 'scholars' who had preached anti-Semitism. Therefore, what we can discern here is not Hitler's journey from 'from the Veda-s to Nazism', but instead, Pollock's journey from 'Hitler to Hinduphobia'.

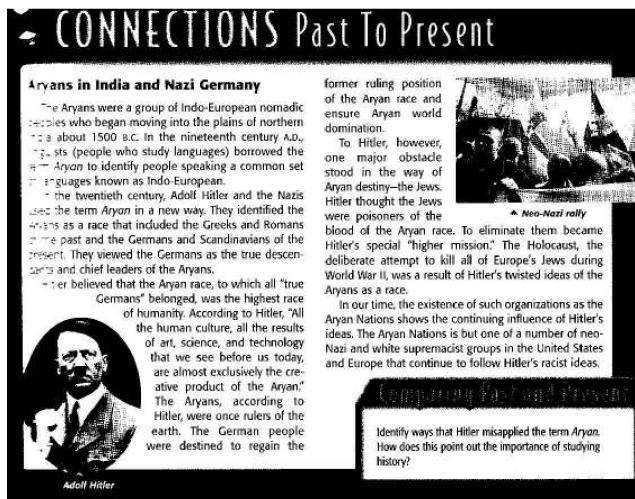


Figure 1: A North Carolina school textbook (9th Grade) page from a chapter on Ancient India

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The official emblem of Nazis, the 'Swastika' was adopted by Hitler himself, who declared in his *Mein Kampf*, that represented, "...the fight for the victory of the Aryan man and at the same time for the victory of the idea of creative work, which in itself always was and always will be anti-Semitic." (Cited in Murphy *et al*, p. 87). There is really nothing particularly Aryan about Swastika, as it is attested even in Harappan contexts (deemed as 'pre-Vedic' by Indologists) as well as in African and many other cultures.

<sup>2</sup> Rosenberg himself preferred the word "Nordic" to "Aryan", unlike other Nazi ideologues. In fact, "Aryan" and its cognates are scarcely attested in non-Indo-Iranian languages.

<sup>3</sup> Within the Indian context however, Christianity aligned itself with Orientalist scholarship to project British colonialism as a 'civilizing mission' of the barbarian Hindu who practiced 'evil idolatry' and 'oppressed the lower castes'.

<sup>4</sup> However, Rosenberg reserved his worst animus for Catholicism, and appreciated Lutheran Protestantism for condemning the former (Fitzgerald 2013: 22 sqq.) but nevertheless objected to Christianity not recognizing racial superiority of the Aryan race.

<sup>5</sup> Venkat (2007) points out that the *New Testament* itself has over 450 anti-Semitic references.

<sup>6</sup> See Cornwell (2000). Apologists like Bergman (2012) however absolve Christianity by arguing that the Nazi Aryan Myth derived from Darwinism, that the Nazis bore an antipathy to Catholicism in general, and that even the anti-Semitism of Martin Luther resulted from this illness in his last years (*ibid*, pp. 306-312).

<sup>7</sup> A simple google search will reveal Wust's deep Nazi connections but Pollock (1993) is sufficient. There are not many publications on this important subject, and when Pollock was writing the above article, only some German Indologists were willing to help him. See [https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/INDOLOGY/conversations/topic\\_s/919](https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/INDOLOGY/conversations/topic_s/919) for this revelation.

<sup>8</sup> Conversely, their attitude towards anyone challenging their own views is to lump 'the Hindu other' as a 'Hindu Nationalist' (and by implication, a 'Muslim killer', and 'Hindu Nazi').

<sup>9</sup> For instance, see Witzel (1995: 312).

<sup>10</sup> Other Nazi Indologists include Paul Thierme, Wilhelm Hauer, Ludwig Alsdorf, Ernst Schneider, Hermann Lommel, Richard Schmidt and many others – all big names in German Indology, cited with reverence even today. See Pollock (1993).

<sup>11</sup> Chakrabarti, 1999:37. Aryanism has taken its toll not only on European countries but also in Asia and Africa. A recent study on Iran demonstrates how the Aryan Myth is being used in Iran to further the hegemony of Farsi speakers at the cost of Azeri and other minorities. See Asgharzadeh (2007).

<sup>12</sup> Day, p. 74 sqq., 133-134, 179-184 etc. for Indo-Aryan speakers.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance, Deshpande (2006: 102-103).

<sup>14</sup> See Chitalwala (1984) and Kenoyer (1998), pages 26, 44, 126 etc.

<sup>15</sup> Wakankar 1988), Ramgopal Shastri (1985), Erdosy (1989), Chaubey (1993) etc.

<sup>16</sup> Schetelich (1990), Levitt (1989).

<sup>17</sup> See Arvind Sharma (2000) for a detailed overview.

<sup>18</sup> See also *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, Sūtrasthāna 2.5 which gives the opinion of 'other teachers' that śūdra-s can be educated in all branches of learning except the Mantra portion of the Veda-s, and without being invested with the sacred thread.

<sup>19</sup> See Poewe and Hexham (2015), *in passim*.

<sup>20</sup> In fact, whereas the Jews formed barely 1% of Germany's population, śūdra-s formed a significant chunk, if not the majority of Āryāvarta's population.

<sup>21</sup> See the commentaries of Śabara, Kumārila and Prabhākara on *Jaimini Sūtra*-s 1.3.10.

<sup>22</sup>See also *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 36.4 and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.1.4.12 for śūdra participation in acts of *yajña*-s.

<sup>23</sup> In fact, this is an example why our interpretation of Jaimini's *sūtra*-s regarding śūdra-s' right to perform *yajña*-s is admissible because the *Kalpasūtra*-s typically debar the Rathakāra from *yajña*-s, whereas Jaimini clearly gives them this right. See Minkowski (1989).

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# Chapter 9

## A Rejoinder to *A Rasa Reader*: An Insider View

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### 1. Introduction

India has a long and deep tradition of aesthetics that discusses the performing arts and literature. While it is not possible to explain all aspects in full detail in a single book, it is important to explain the most important concepts in a manner that even a reader who is new to the subject can appreciate and to place issues in perspective. But we find Pollock's treatment of the subject rather biased without explaining the main concepts; while it is perfectly legitimate for any scholar to have his own opinions and preferences, it is not acceptable for an academic tome to misrepresent, distort and selectively explain issues according to the author's prejudices. This paper attempts to analyze Pollock's interpretations and translations in several specific issues and to showcase his methodology in distorting the tradition to suit his thesis.

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\*pp. 287–312. In: Kannan, K. S and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*. Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

## 2. Language and Style of Writing

A *Rasa Reader* (Pollock 2016) is part of a well-organized, well-funded enterprise to present Indian classical schools of thought to the Western world, presumably American scholars, students and general public. While there is not one new topic in Pollock (2016) that is not addressed in *A History of Sanskrit Poetics* by P.V. Kane or the work of the same name by S.K. De, Pollock's method is very different. He has also arranged the various writers and the translations of selected passages in the order that is conducive to the line of argument that he presents, while the texts themselves are not presented.

The annotations and comments on the developments in the classical aesthetic tradition provided by the author are often of a disparaging and prejudiced nature. Where the issue may have two sides to it, Dr. Pollock goes out of his way to portray it in negative light. It is not clear whether it is the only side he comprehends or whether it is deliberate.

For instance, from Section 1 of the Introduction -

“For one thing, there was no unified sphere with a particular designation we could translate by the English term “art”. There were separate cultural domains of poetry (*kāvya*), drama (*nātya*), music (*sāmīgīta*, consisting of vocal and instrumental music and dance), and less carefully thematized practices, with terminology also less settled, including painting (*citra*), sculpture (often *pusta*), architecture (for which there was no common term at all), and the crafts (*kalā*), which could include many of the preceding when that was deemed necessary. In these disparate domains there was never any dispute, at least overtly, about what was and was not to be included, though sometimes works passed into and out of a given category according historically changing reading or viewing practices. Furthermore, almost everything outside the literary realm, let alone the cultural realm, remained outside classical Indian aesthetic analysis (including nature: though Shiva was a dancer, God in India was generally not an artist.”)

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 1)

The above passage reveals not only a warped outlook but also displays several factual errors. Texts of *Śaiva Tantra* dating to the early centuries enumerate sixty-four *kalā*-s or arts. (Jayaa 2006: 39). How convenient and novel to insert *kalā* under “crafts”! It is a wrong translation and distorts the picture. *Pusta* is also wrongly translated as sculpture; it is art put together with glue, paper (any cellulose

material available at the time), cloth, sticks, paste and paint. Art, artist and artisan are closely related in any society and India was not any different to other cultures of the world in this. Pollock raises a non-issue as if it were of peculiar significance in India. Moreover, it is not anybody's responsibility to convince a foreigner of the elegance of our views on Lord Śiva, but we can say that we have no reason to hold Pollock's view as worthwhile. That he considers himself authority to pronounce these views is worth noting. As David Frawley writes, most Westerners do not go beyond the surface in what they see of Indian culture.

“My intention in the present book is to help correct the distortions about Lord Shiva present in academic and popular accounts, which focus on the sensational side of Shiva and downplay his yogic implications. So far, few thinkers in the West have understood the profound wisdom and meditative insights behind such apparent figures of polytheism and nature worship as epitomized in Lord Shiva.”

(Frawley 2016: 13)

“The western mind tends to reduce Shiva to iconographic and anthropomorphic appearances, which derive from a very different cultural milieu of ancient India.”

(Frawley 2016: 27)

Was there any form of art in Europe or elsewhere in the world (America did not count at that time) in the 3rd or 6th or 10th centuries that was not in India? Were there any abstract artists, just *kalākāras*, anywhere in the Western world, without specific reference to the particular form of art? If you called a person an artist, would you not also be able to say what form of art it is that you mean? The term *kalākāra* means artist. One who makes art is *kalām karoti*. In Sanskrit grammar the word would be derived as *kalākara* but becomes *kalākāra* to show that art is the person's vocation and he is not just working at artistic activity for the moment.

The Veda-s and all subsequent literature celebrate God as the ultimate Creator, not in the sense of manufacturing something on an assembly line but artistically envisaging and conceptualizing before giving it form. He is referred to as the foremost “*Kavi*”, artist with original creativity. Many are the poems that praise Brahmā's artistic ability in having created the breathtakingly beautiful Sarasvatī, his first creation. A poet is called *kavi* because he is truly endowed with the

creative genius, creating art out of practically nothing. So not only is Pollock overstepping his authority in stating his view on what God in India generally was, but is also mistaken on the facts.

Simpler English is also seen in his writing, when he chooses, but it is not to explain a concept to advantage or portray the tradition in flattering light. Again, the merits of his observation are highly debatable and facts point out to their being ridden with error. Sample the following, from Section 1 of the Introduction.

“As for questions of creativity and genius (*pratibhā*), Indian thinkers certainly were interested in them, but they never thought it necessary to develop a robust theory to account for their nature or impact on the work. Interpretation was never thematized as a discrete problem of knowledge in literary texts ... Critical judgements were certainly rendered, ... but literary evaluation itself was not framed as a philosophical problem. Last, while careful attention was directed to beauty (*saundarya*), especially in literature (which does have a role to play in aesthetic reflection), beauty was typically disaggregated ... never became an object of abstract consideration in and of itself.”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 1)

This whole paragraph serves well to set the tone of Pollock’s study, but means next to nothing in every sentence. How much of abstract considerations can one discuss or share? In the very process of discussion, they cease to be abstract. Pollock’s observations are belied by the fact that Bhartrhari has addressed these issues. *Pratibhā* means flash of immediate (without mediation), intuitive illumination. *Prati + bhā*, to shine, illumine. It is what enables the mind to take a decision, the creative function of the mind that can envisage and create poetry to convey that idea and emotion to others. The logical structure that it may have is beyond description.

“It is clear from all this that, as conceived by Bhartrhari, *pratibhā* is something very comprehensive. It is a flash of understanding that takes in a situation and prompts one to do something to meet the situation.”

(Iyer 1969: 87)

“Thus he (Bhartrhari) compares *pratibhā* to the latent *śabda* in an infant, whence the ability to learn a particular language springs.”

(Narayanan 2012: 89)

Vāmana says that the very germ of poetic skill is creative genius,

*kavitvabījai pratibhānam* 1.16 (Shastri 1989: 37). This is an inborn characteristic that one has within oneself. Yes, Vāmana does say that it is something that the individual has brought along from a previous birth. This is to mean that it is an inherited characteristic, in modern parlance, and that it cannot be imparted to the person. Yes, Vāmana was not aware of DNA and RNA and how different random gene combinations can give rise to new characteristics. But even we cannot fully answer why two brothers may not be equally creative or talented and can only guess that their DNA must be different. Modern genetics is constantly developing and we never have all the answers we seek. In the same way Vāmana guessed that the poet may have brought his spark of genius with him at birth, the point being that it is inborn. Bhāmaha says that even the dull-witted can be taught the sciences (*sāstra-s*) with the help of a good teacher, but the creative spark is rare indeed (Sastry 1970: 2). This does not warrant Pollock connecting poetic genius with transmigration, as he does towards the end of his Introduction.

As to the concept of beauty simply being a description of a thing of beauty disaggregated into its parts, it is not a correct observation. In fact, discussions go to great lengths to say that in the case of beauty, the whole is more than the sum of its parts and beauty is beyond the aggregate of its beautiful parts. A woman, for instance, may be perfect in every limb and yet not be attractive, but another who may bear some defect in a specific limb may be considered very beautiful despite the flaw! These discussions form a part of large treatises and it takes a discerning eye to spot these theoretical discussions amidst many topics.

Important issues in Indian thought in a serious academic tome such as Pollock (2016) are cursorily and perfunctorily mentioned in a rather condescending manner, just for the record whereas it is expected of a teacher to present a topic in proper perspective to students before reading translations of selected text sections, evaluating advanced discussions or embarking on value judgement. The book claims to be of interest to the general reader but does little to explain anything. The book derives its value and gravity solely from the presentation of passages from the classical tradition of India, considering that so few people, even among Indians themselves know anything on the subject.

### 3. Key Issues in Interpretation

The next point in our discussion is whether Pollock has even understood important issues in proper perspective. Sanskrit language is such that it takes a great deal of sagacity to understand the import of words such as *rasa*, *nyāya*, *dharma*, *bhāva*, *vyakti*, *kārya* etc in different contexts. What looks like the same word need not give the same meaning in two different sentences. We first examine here the *Rasa* theory formulated in our earliest extant source, the *Nātyaśāstra*.

#### 3.1 *Rasa* Theory in Drama as per Indian Tradition

The *Rasa* theory is introduced in the context of a stage performance and the *Nātyaśāstra* refers to even more ancient verses on *bhāva* and *rasa*. The performance is naturally conceived and rehearsed with the purpose of giving enjoyment to the audience only upon which it can be called successful. The spectator is taken to a high level of aesthetic appreciation by dramatic devices consisting of story, characters, plot, music, dance and dialogue. Why does the spectator become moved to an emotional climax? The stimulation is after all not real, staged and in no way affects the real-life interests of the spectator. The answer is the art experience called *rasa* or *nātya rasa* wherein the emotional reaction of the spectator reaches a climax. All of us have certain latent emotions within us. When a story or drama strikes these chords, we are able to empathize with the characters in it. When our feelings are fanned and taken to an acme by the turn of events, there is *rasa* experience. Way back in the *Nātyaśāstra*, Bharata has shown that aesthetic experience can be a great stress-buster, providing relief to those worried by daily cares and sorrows of the world (Rangacharya 1986: 4).

The latent or dormant emotions in every human being are many; those that can be raised to a climax through the process of *nātya* are known as *sthāyi-bhāva*-s. These are love, anger, grief, vigour, fear, revulsion, laughter and amazement. Many other emotions would boil down to one of these upon analysis, e.g. envy or jealousy would ultimately be depicted by anger at the rival's success. Not all emotions can prevail for the duration of the performance and be taken to a zenith.

Pollock asks why there should be only eight *sthāyi-bhāva*-s, why sentiments such as maternal love or hatred should not be included in the list and this leads him to question whether, after all, the tradition

even understands what constitutes a *sthāyi-bhāva* (Pollock 2012: 197). To this we may remind the reader that Bharata speaks of *bhāva* in *nātya* – dramatic emotions and is not listing all possible human emotions. *Sthāyi-bhāva*-s are only those emotions which can be fanned to a crescendo, leading to *rasa* experience. Maternal love is a real, powerful human (and animal) emotion that exists in the real world. Upon dramatization, the audience may feel empathy and should the story lead to the maternal sentiment being hurt, it evokes *karuṇa rasa* which does not correspond to maternal love as *sthāyi-bhāva*. Jealousy, or hatred, for example are other human emotions not listed under *sthāyi-bhāva* as their depiction would depend on anger at the rival's success, etc, which is already listed. While the Sanskrit writers of yore were admittedly experts in classification, they tempered it with common sense, divorced from which the modern scholar's conclusions border on the absurd.

*Rasa* is said to be the cumulative result of *vibhāva* (stimulus), *anubhāva* (reaction) and *vyabhicāri-bhāva* (transitory states), the mood that the performance evokes. The famous *rasa-sūtra* states – “*vibhāva-anubhāva-vyabhicāri-saṁyogāt rasa-niṣpattiḥ!*” (Dwivedi 1996: 34).

When the audience beholds the empty stage (or blank movie screen in modern times) at the moment the curtain goes up, there is great anticipation and curiosity, but the spectator does not have any direction for his emotions to proceed in yet. The *vibhāva*-s are the determinants that stimulate a particular mood and give direction to the series of emotions. For example, the appearance of a clown with ungainly attire and wobbly gait, leering and rubbing his belly would excite hilarity. The appearance of a young, comely lady, smiling and laughing, with downturned glances in the company of a smiling, attentive young man would elicit interest in a love theme. But if a tender lady was unsuspecting and the handsome young man came in stealthily, brandishing a sword with evil intent, it would arouse suspense and trepidation – not thoughts of love – in the audience. If the scene was dimly lit and some hideous monsters appeared in the shadows, it would incite fear or *bhayānaka rasa*. Modern cinema has decided advantages in technological simulations, but even way back in ancient times, drama managed its resources well enough to depict *adbhuta*, the wonderful. *Vibhāva*-s are of two types, *ālambana* (primary or foundational) and *uddīpana* (inflaming or fanning) (Narayanan and Mohan 2017: 44).

The *anubhāva*-s are the ensuant states of mind in different conditions. Unless the characters react emotionally to the situation, with the actor's mind concentrated on the sentiment, the portrayal will not be convincing.

The *vyabhicāri-bhāva*-s are the changing moods enacted by the actors in different situations to convey different feelings to the spectator so that the plot can be developed, culminating in *rasa*. These are enumerated as thirty-three, for the convenience of the actors to train and practice honing their skills and their number is not vital to the aesthetic theory.

As academic scholars of the present century evaluating the merits of the discussions in ancient treatises, we are like armchair critics and require greater imagination to understand what the words mean to those in the field, such as an actor, playwright or stage director. Literature, *kāvya* was divided into two categories, *preksya* (to be viewed) and *śravya* (to be heard), but *rasa* was not divided into something that could be seen and something that could be heard. It is aesthetic, emotional relish whereby beauty is savored. Pollock's caption of *rasa* seen and heard is to be taken with a pinch of salt and the treatises do not substantiate that view. Nowhere is it said that *rasa* is visually perceptible or visible, nor is it audible. He insists on translating *rasa* as "taste" everywhere, although there are many words that suit it better. *Rasānubhava* and *rasāsvāda* correspond to "rasa experience," not "taste". Pollock wrongly translates 'pratyakṣa-kalpa-samvedanā' quoting from *Abhinavabhāratī* as "visual perception" (Pollock 2012: 191). The word "visual" is not warranted: perception includes all the senses and here Abhinavagupta is clearly speaking of literature leading to *rasa* experience when the reader is able to imagine the situation as if real, not "seeing" it as a picture.

The account of "rasa seen" in drama discounts the effect of rhythm, music, songs and pregnant pauses that build up mood, anticipation and aesthetic delight. Can one watch a performance with ear plugs on? Bharata speaks of the tempo of *nṛtta* (pure dance) building up the mood and beauty of the performance, hence aiding attainment of *rasa* in addition to *nṛtya* which includes *āṅgika abhinaya* or acting.

Pollock (2016) gives new translation of *vibhāva* as "factor" but does not explain it at all. Anything that has any bearing on the equation at hand is a "factor" and the word conveys no particular information.

Adya Rangacharya, for instance, translates it as “stimulant,” as it determines the emotional response of the spectator (*vi+bhāva* = *viśeṣena bhāvayati*). He writes that *vibhāva* is that which leads to a perception; so *vibhāva* is a cause (Rangacharya 1986: 55, 64). In going into some detail about *śrigāra*, “sexual instinct” is mentioned in Pollock (2016) as if it were of exceptional importance in the Indian system. “Sexual instinct” is common to almost all forms of life and does not merit special attention in a book on art and aesthetics, but Pollock goes into only this basic emotion as *sthāyi-bhāva*, apparently unable to explain any other. He does not connect any of the components to show that they combine to form a comprehensive whole. He writes -

“From such an analytical perspective the play looks like a jumble of disconnected components..... They are ultimately combined into a whole, where each component is at once preserved and subsumed,...”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 3)

Referring to the play as a “jumble” of its components is as good as referring to blue cheese as a jumble of casein, mould, fungus and maggots.

The allegation that the *Nātyaśāstra* only speaks of *rasa* in the character, not in the spectator, that the latter notion appeared only later in the tradition and hence classical aesthetics did not have any theory of aesthetics in the abstract sense, wherein aesthetic enjoyment was discussed, is untenable. Please note the words, “discerning **viewers** relish the stable emotions when they manifest by the acting...” – *nānābhāvābhīnayavyāñjītān ....sthāyibhāvān āsvādayanti sumanasāḥ preksakāḥ harṣādiṁśca adhigacchānti* | - *Nātyaśāstra* (Dwivedi 1996: 90) in the sentences immediately following the first discussion on *rasa* in Chapter VI.

The *Nātyaśāstra* has maintained from the beginning that *rasa* is developed in the performance, and that the connoisseur partakes of it by *sādhāraṇīkarāṇa*. As a modern-day parallel, can we not see the late Michael Jackson imbued with aesthetic ecstasy when he performs “Thriller” or “Heal the World” and do we not feel it too? Can it be said that it is in one and not the other?

Pollock explains his reasons for choosing his own translations in favor of those more widely used. In the Preface he says -

“For the same reason and in the hope of recovering a sense more faithful to the tradition, I have sometimes rejected a widely used translation –“love in separation” for example, in favour of “the erotic thwarted” which reflects the aesthetic system’s own understanding of *vipralambha śringāra*.”

(Pollock 2016: Preface)

It is interesting that Pollock should consider himself closer to the sense more faithful to the tradition and able to reflect the aesthetic system’s own understanding (by his own assessment). Love in separation or yearning, gives one sense, but “thwarted” presents a distorted picture. While love thwarted may be unfulfilled, love that is yet to be fulfilled is not necessarily thwarted. *Vipralambha* only means “not in communion” and does not warrant translation as “thwarted”. In the least, it fails to evoke the sense of aesthetic portrayal of the yearning of love. There is nothing “thwarted” about the states of *vāsakasajjā nāyikā* or *abhisārikā nāyikā*, important aspects of love in separation, highly celebrated conditions of *śringāra*, which Pollock’s definition clearly does not cover.

### 3.2 *Rasa* in Poetry

Coming to poetry in Chapter One it is said -

“And rasa as first theorized for literature in performance was emotion the spectator could *see*.”

(Pollock 2016: Chapter One, section 1.2)(*italics as in the original*)

This is a fundamentally wrong notion and has no basis; it is Pollock’s innovation. Presenting the issue of literature that is heard as identical with literature that is read in private is only part of the picture. Pollock, by his own declaration, ignores the embellishments of sound, as unnecessary fuss and focuses only on the meaning of poetry to study its accomplishment of *rasa* for the reader. He may not find embellishments of sound of any worth, but the fact is, the sound of an utterance is as vital as its meaning in its aesthetic appeal. Poetry heard also includes variations in tone and other forms of expression which are not available in the private reading. This may be part of Pollock’s strategy to belittle the sound of chanting of the *Veda-s*; for him, the *Veda-s* are text on paper and would be represented by their meaning, perhaps even in translation. That may be his view and what

he can grasp, but our tradition has always maintained that the audible aspect is what comprises language and the written form is but an aid to recall it, as recognized by early writers on Sanskrit literature such as A. B. Keith.

“We are apt to regard with styles largely by the sounds preferred by different writers, but there is no doubt that the effects of different sounds were more keenly appreciated in India than they are by us, and in the case of the *Gitagovinda* the art of wedging sound and meaning is carried out with such success that it cannot fail to be appreciated by ears far less sensitive than those of Indian writers on poetics.”

(Keith 1928:195)

In Section 4.3 of the Reader -

“...when Bana... exclaims how hard it is to produce a beautiful poem and make “its rasa clear,” he is referring to emotions in the text, not its impact on the reader.”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 4.3) (*spelling as in the original*)

This is highly disputable as it can be better translated as “with its rasa clear” and refers to the *rasa* in the poem equally to that in the *sahṛdaya*; of what worth is the *rasa* in the composition unless it is relished by the reader? Emotions cannot be said to lie in the text as smoothness or roundness in a stone sculpture. It is hard to differentiate between the *rasa* in the text imbued by the poet, and the *rasa* in the connoisseur. The two are united in heart, in the experience that has arisen in the creator’s mind and is experienced by the spectator or reader, the *sahṛdaya*. Treatises discussing aesthetic experience do not differentiate between the two. P. V. Kane writes on this verse that *rasa* is that sentiment which rules a composition and which is the object of the poem to present to the mind of the reader (Kane 1918: 148).

In Section 9 Pollock says -

“...since the time of Bhāmaha, the view that the cultivation of literature produces pleasure, but also “instruction” - - in this context always instruction in the four “ends of man”, love, wealth, morality and spiritual liberation with the two outcomes equally balanced. This old view came to be embodied in the very definition of *rasa* at a relatively early stage.”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 9)

Pollock seeks to show that the conceptualization and ratification of *rasa* was enmeshed with instruction in the *puruṣārtha*-s, but that was not the case. Fine literature was described as not only giving pleasure, but also offering some beneficial instruction in addition, viz., learning about the ways of the world so as to advance one's own *puruṣārtha*-s. Bhāmaha and other early writers take pains to state that *kāvya* should NOT seek to instruct, but only to charm and that any instruction should be a purely incidental gain. Fine literature was required to have something more to offer than pure pleasure so as not to be vacuous. Indian writers never went to the extent of modern writers such as Lev Tolstoy who said that beauty should satisfy our moral nature in purity and embody the virtue of truth and justice (Srinivasachari 1958:12).

To look into *śrīgāra* closely, consider the situation when a particular spectator may feel aroused at viewing Rāvaṇa proposition Sītā (or Kīcaka, Draupadi) in drama; this is more a reflection of the person's individual proclivity than the aesthetic theory; normally, a spectator would feel revulsion and fear. *Rasa* theory would only accept it as *śrīgāra* if Rāma were to express love towards Sita or Kṛṣṇa towards Rādhā. Pleasure admittedly has many degrees, low, middling, high and supreme. The *rasa* theory says that the highest aesthetic experience is one of pure bliss – it does not dictate that no person can or will feel aesthetic pleasure as a response to vulgar art.

V. M. Kulkarni discusses *Rasa* theory and *puruṣārtha*-s in a whole chapter of the same name and quoting Abhinavagupta writes that even of instruction in the four goals of human life, *ānanda* (delight) is the final and major result (Kulkarni 1998: 89). Many writers in poetics have named *vyutpatti* as one of the requirements of a poet and also one of the gains to a reader of poetry. *Vyutpatti* is knowledge of the ways of the world and the cultural contexts; in other words, the sense of what is deemed right and wrong, which would also be equivalent to what could advance one's success in the four yardsticks or goals of life, which are also called *puruṣārtha*-s. So, this is an issue of common occurrence in the real world, not one of orthodoxy or dogma peculiar to Indian society. Pollock is unable to explain the practical value of *vyutpatti* and uses it to show that *rasa* theory is obsolete, belonging only to the 'pre-modern' era.

Consider -

“...if Scripture commands us like a master, and history counsels us like a friend, literature seduces us like a beloved.”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 9)

This is an incorrect translation, if it refers to Mammaṭa’s famous Verse 2 of *Kāvyaprakāśa*, which says that literature “counsels like a beloved” - *kāntā-sammitatayopadeśayuje* (Jha 1966: 2). Mammaṭa’s *vṛtti* further says that while the *śāstra-s* (technical treatises) command like a master, *itihāsa* (*Purāṇa-s* and epics) teach like a friend, literature counsels sweetly and gently like a beloved. “Seduces” is not warranted here. It is shocking that a scholar of Pollock’s credentials should err on a simple translation in order to present a perverted picture.

The relevance of “propriety” is also exaggerated and misrepresented in the Reader. Propriety is not so much a moral value as cogency in attainment of *rasa*. Aberrations that jar, defects that mar and detract from the lucid flow of thought should be avoided in order to achieve *rasa*, that is all. To put this in perspective, it would be quite distracting and considered outside of propriety to portray in English drama a peasant addressing a young Queen of England as “My bonny lass” in her court, not so much because it is improper on the yokel’s part but because it may offend the audience’s sensibilities.

The *Nātyaśāstra* speaks of the hero adhering to propriety so that the audience is able to give him free and frank admiration, lending themselves fully to enjoy the play. As an example in modern literature, if young Harry Potter had not exhibited a fine sense of ethics, there may not have been any sequel to the first story! Propriety was more a pragmatic issue than any characteristic of *rasa*. To be sure, there would have been instances of debauched men and women indulging themselves in pleasure of possibly immoral and indecent situations but these do not form part of discussions on poetics. The *rasa* of aesthetics was by definition impersonal, not pertaining to personal sensory pleasures. To understand what was within propriety and what was not, familiarity with the cultural ethos of the play would be required, as anybody who tried reading Walter Scott without knowing something of Scottish history would attest!

### 3.3 *Rasa in Bhakti*

With the advent of the Bhakti Movement all over India, philosophical discourse shifted from highly sophisticated, technically intricate debates of Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā, Advaita Vedānta, Buddhism, etc, into a more emotional path, where the devotee attained bliss by immersion in devotion to the Supreme. With devotional *stotra*-s, *bhajan*-s, *satsaṅg*-s and dance becoming very popular, *bhakti* was the *rasa* that people evoked in every nook and corner of the country, through Sanskrit and vernacular poetry. Naturally, *bhakti* was delineated as the prominent *rasa*, with its own *vibhāva*-s and *anubhāva*-s, in addition to the traditional nine, by writers such as Rūpa Gosvāmi. It is not certain that this development warrants a heading such as “No Rules for the Number of Rasas”. Metaphysics and allegories are often combined in Indian art and literature. When saints such as Caitanya Mahāprabhu are regarded as the incarnation of Rādhā and Krṣṇa, when devotees are said to have been *gopī*-s in their previous births, so blessed as to partake of the Lord’s company and love, rather than checking on the veracity of such statements, the modern scholar should pause to reflect on the gravity of the notion for those who value them and move on if he does not accept their explanations. It is relevant and coherent for those who do understand. We cannot ask, as Pollock does (Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 7), why the language of aesthetics is used to describe the devotees’ relationship to God.

### 3.4 Who is a *Rasika*?

After much study, there are some fundamental questions he raises in Section 9 that ought to have been answered earlier -

“Nothing said so far, however, explains how viewers and readers are able to taste rasa in the first place and to grasp its social-moral logic.... How, in short, does a *rasika*, a person able to taste rasa, come to be a *rasika*?... And after all, what special training is required for getting lost in a book or film? Perhaps more than we know, since although it may seem to be a natural human capacity, Indian thinkers saw “nature” quite otherwise. A *rasika* may largely be born, not made, but who is born a *rasika*?”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 9)

It has already been discussed that *rasa* had no social-moral logic. That is a misinterpretation by Pollock, who often sees things “otherwise”.

Two issues are discussed closely together in the treatises and he has not been able to sift them.

It is good to relate an issue with a modern example as discussions then become clearer. To be sure, anybody can intuitively enjoy a book or movie and be lost to the world. But it is well-known that if one is taught how to review a book, one would understand it so much more deeply. The same goes for movie-making. A person who knows something about direction or story technique or some other detail of movie-making might admire it even more. An average person can appreciate popular or 'light' music, but it takes a connoisseur to understand classical music. And the same applies to a *rasika* of literature. The more one knows about its different aspects, the more one is charmed by fine poetry. The training and guidance that go into a poet-aspirant benefit the *rasika* equally well.

Now, the question would arise why two people may never acquire the same skill, no matter how much training is directed at them. Talents differ hugely. One person seems gifted and quickly becomes adept; while another may simply have to choose another line, in the arts, in sports, in vocations even. (It is well-known that most of the great artists of the Western world underwent much training and apprenticeship before their creative genius could dazzle. Would Pollock call Michelangelo a "craftsman"?) The same goes for a sensitive spectator, a *rasika*. There are some people so gifted as to deeply appreciate the creative genius' endeavor and others who may not be so moved by it. So, in short, in addition to acquired characteristics brought by experience, a person is a function of his inborn talents and sensibilities.

Pollock translates the name of the text "*Sahṛdaya Darpaṇa*" as "Mirror of the Heart" which would be better suited as translation of "*Hṛdaya Darpaṇa*"; the "Sa" in "*Sahṛdaya*" appears to be left out in his translation! "*Sahṛdaya*," meaning, "those who sympathetically respond to poetry in their own hearts, or sensitive spectator" (Kulkarni 1998: 6), is a very important concept in Indian aesthetics, which Pollock ignores.

## **Saṁskāra – Memory Impressions**

Pollock makes much of the mention of memory of past lives and pretends not to see the main point, calling *rasa* “contingent” on it. He says –

“There is no doubt a good answer to the obvious question why the endless cycle of transmigration would not eventually endow all people with all predispositions, but our thinkers do not provide it.”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 9)

In reply, we can say that they did not provide what was common knowledge that the endless cycle would constantly endow those predispositions that the person’s actions merited and no other! There is more common sense than mysticism in classical discussions on *rasa* which can be explained completely in down-to-earth terms, requiring no other-worldly notions. If Pollock translates *saṁskāra* as memory of past lives, he is on the wrong track. He does not appear to know the word *saṁskāra* which may be behind the following statements –

“To understand *rasa* as a historical form of thought, however as I try to enable the reader of this *Reader* to do, is to confront a theory clearly contingent on a nonmodern worldview and understanding of literary art. Its full conceptualization is intimately tied to a number of primary, uncontested, and largely non-transferable Indian pre-suppositions – about the threefold psychophysiology of Samkhya, for example, or the storage of memories of past lives, or even transmigration.”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 12)  
(spelling and *italics as in the original*)

In the above statements, Pollock himself admits that he does not understand the concept of *rasa* and gives us leave to discount everything he says in the Reader. He wrongly renders *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* as “sensitivity, volatility and stolidity”. These are only a few features of the three *guṇa*-s and cannot be said to represent them, just as orange colour cannot represent sunlight. There is nothing in modern science that negates in essence the Sāṅkhya philosophy that the world is made up of matter and spirit, that the myriad variety we see in the insentient world is due to different permutations and combinations of the three characteristic features although the primordial material is one.

*Saṁskāra* is a primary, well-accepted and characteristically Indian concept that is very important to the understanding of *rasa*. It is memory, the mental impression formed by any experience and aids in cognitive and motor functions. We are not after all, like sensory automatons, but constantly use stored experience in all our activities – speaking a language, cooking, reading, driving to the supermarket, making purchases...anything. When the experience stored by *saṁskāra* is recalled, it is called remembrance. It even helps in the grasp of a sentence, as we hear only one syllable or sound at a time and the whole utterance is a collection of all the evanescent phonemes uttered in temporal sequence. When the last syllable reaches the ear, the first one is lost but we still grasp the whole sentence using *saṁskāra* of all the phonemes. Repeated practice of singing, or playing a musical instrument, or a sport, or revising our lessons creates the *saṁskāra* that enables us to become expert in our chosen field. A person who is cultured and refined, as the outcome of training and education, and having refined taste is also said to have well-cultivated *saṁskāra*.

In the case of aesthetic response, *saṁskāra* is the emotional baggage that each person carries with himself or herself into the auditorium. It goes without saying that a young person in love, a fond mother, a young man going through heartbreak, a war widow, or a recently bereaved son may all respond differently to the scenes portrayed in the play according to their own emotional make-up. The ideal spectator, Bharatamuni says should have a clean slate and be totally receptive, but the influence of *saṁskāra* in fact is very difficult to avoid. The same dramatic representation can evoke varying emotional response due to *saṁskāra*. *Saṁskāra* is not the same as *vāsanā*.

India was not unique in operating on “uncontested notions”; it is more common than we may admit as would be apparent if, for instance, the construction of the magnificent statues of Mary, Queen of Scots and her cousin Queen Elizabeth I, representing those monarchs lying entombed beneath in Westminster Abbey, their hands folded in eternal prayer, were to be “etiolated”.

## 4. Misleading Subheadings

The subheadings, which are meant to influence the reader's perspective, give a negative connotation to the development of the tradition, suggesting that the evolution was confused, lacking a logical progression, as the relevant details are not provided. In fact, the contents of each section are not even consistent with the subheadings, which seem more like the author's annotations rather than true representation of the discussion. While the passages presented in the section represent the developing tradition, the headings and subheadings form implicit value judgement on the development. The *Rasa* Theory of Bharata as applicable to dramatic performance was universally accepted across the centuries, as it is relevant even today, in the best of Broadway productions. *Rasa* as the essence of ecstatic aesthetic joy was later discussed in the context of literary appreciation. It is not as if one rasa changed into the other or that the later definition replaced the earlier. If a person delights in the experience of viewing a theatrical performance, can we say that he is not capable of being moved by literature - a poem that he can read? In subsequent centuries when devotion took a prominent position in the lives of the people (and they viewed fewer dramatic performances) through *satsaigs* and *bhajans*, *bhakti* was delineated with much importance as a *rasa*, in addition to the traditional nine. Pollock's subheading, "No Rules for the Number of Rasas" is almost gleeful at finding a seeming flaw in the old arguments of the tradition that did not appear to understand its own rules and forgot to seek permission from the West! The Sanskrit tradition is explicit in holding that *śāstra* should be in accordance with the realities of the world and that the world will not obey the dictates of *śāstra*.

### The Means to Cognition – *Pramāṇa*-s

Indian philosophy is clinical in its precision of its discussions and one of the most important topics of discussion is *pramāṇa* - the means to cognition. But even these rigorous *pramāṇa*-s which are valid in the real world we live, are said not to explain aesthetic experience! It is beyond the logic of phenomenal or transactional world. This experience is admittedly different to any other in the real world which is ruled by empirical experience and practical considerations. Therefore, *rasa* experience was termed *alaukika* – beyond the real world and its rhyme and reason! In the context of aesthetics, the real world is considered *laukika* – mundane. But art is given a

superior ontological status, not explained by the rigorous *pramāṇa*-s. Nyāya philosophy clearly states that poetry is outside the ambit of its discussions on language when it comes to *vyañjanā vṛtti* or suggestion. After promising “fresh translations” on key words, Pollock insipidly repeats the word “mundane” for *laukika*, perhaps being uncertain of its full import.

## Mundane and Supermundane

In Section 6 of the Introduction, Pollock writes

...”for this “savoring” of *rasa*, or “rapture”, as he calls it, Abhinava reserves the qualification “supermundane”. But even this assessment, and much of the understanding of literature that accompanied it, was to be overturned in the coming centuries.”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 6)

Pollock is unable to annotate or explain what “supermundane” might mean. It is a very important concept that is essential to the *rasa* concept and it has never been overturned. While it is generally agreed that *rasa* experience is *alaukika* there were other thinkers who tried to liken the aesthetic pleasure to other experiences in the world, pointing out its *laukika* aspect. We are dealing with art experience here and no two people’s experience need be identical. Two shades of meaning do not make an issue self-contradictory or illogical. The word *laukika* is used in different connotation. The fact that there are a number of views on the subject only point to the depth of discussion and analysis and it is not as if a writer is contradicting himself. If one theory is accepted as the only rigid view, it may not conform to every single person’s experience as different people may be in different stages of aesthetic sensibilities. Bharatanatyam Guru Natyavidushi Jayaa translates “*alaukika*” as “spiritual”.

“... and there are four levels of experiencing beauty.....At the level of spiritual search for meaning, the artiste is on a quest to know the deeper meaning of life and to represent this search and its results, if any, in works of art. It recognizes a reality beyond the senses, beyond imagination, and beyond the visible truths of joy and sorrow, and certainly beyond the considerations of saleability and markets. The work is an effort to realize the divine.”

(Jayaa 2016: 271)

There were writers who delineated *rasa* experience in its similarity to that in real life, as art mirrors reality in many ways; there were others whose aesthetic experience was at a different level and who therefore pointed out the transcendental level of art experience as *alaukika*, Abhinavagupta being the foremost among them. If a modern scientist were asked to choose between a model of the world as made up entirely of atoms and molecules, or one with gravity waves or one with matter waves or one solely with electromagnetic waves or one made up entirely of quarks, which one should he select as the only true one? Later, in Section 7 we find -

..But here too, disagreement among later commentators, including one in the sixteenth century who boldly rejects Mammata's position, shows the growing inadequacy of such an appraisal".

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 7)

Variations in view on a subject such as art appreciation and aesthetics point to richness of thought rather than "growing inadequacy". In today's world, we have discordant theories on topics such as model of the universe, model of the atom, cosmology, economics, trade embargoes, politics, business practices, etc. to name a few. How can a large country with a long history produce concurrent writing across the centuries so that each concept is neatly formulated and packaged for the modern man's consumption or rejection, rather like manufacture on a factory assembly line? On one hand Pollock says that no theory was satisfactory, but were a treatise to endorse a prior thinker's views, he complains that the writer had nothing to add.

## 5. Why the Pechant for Gloom?

Tracing the intellectual history of *rasa* by arranging passages concerning *rasa* in an order convenient to present Pollock's line of argument is not enough to truly comprehend how the performing arts and literary styles evolved over the centuries. Change is the sign of life, and the discussions on aesthetic appreciation evolved along with changes in the trend in the arts. Changes in the theory did not stem from inherent flaws. To fully trace the development of *rasa*, its significance in society and validity in human psychology is also necessary.

A good Rasa Reader ought to have a more detailed study involving historical and social conditions that make rasa relevant in every epoch. Instead, Pollock presents Indian society as confused, holding weird notions. To be sure, ancient and even medieval (and perhaps even today) India has had its share of superstitious beliefs, as anywhere in the world. Modern physics and chemistry have influenced the outlook of all people on this globe. But these do not form a part of logical discussions on poetics and are not relevant. We only need to understand human emotions and their response to stimuli. Although we live in a modern world with amenities very different to that of ancient times, our emotional responses have not changed as much as our technological advancements and hence classical Indian aesthetics still have much to offer, being as relevant today as two millennia ago. The use of electric lights, microphones, loudspeakers and mechanized curtain do not change the principles of stagecraft many of which were recorded in the *Nātyaśāstra*.

Pollock's language is unnecessarily gloomy. In Section 3 of the Introduction he refers to "the demise of dramaturgical theory after about the thirteenth century". He makes no reference to the many Sanskrit texts on performing arts which focused on music and dance, as theatre had moved in that direction by the thirteenth century. Drama had moved more into the vernacular languages, but was in no danger of demise. There are other places where Pollock makes some rather strange, meaningless, baseless and unwarranted statements, such as, in Section 8 of the Introduction "It was the Buddhists who invented compassion - and that is not the *karuṇa* of aesthetic discourse." Are any such sudden, inexplicable statements of any relevance in this discussion? Pollock appears to build on his own pre-conceived notions. There are many places where he expresses his views with no reference to the basis of the notion. He provides no quotations for us to verify the translation. This issue is discussed in the paper, "From Rasa Seen to Rasa Heard" also, which discussion we find utterly confounding. The relevance or the import of this innovative enquiry ascribing new meaning and motive to the notion of "compassion" is baffling. Bharata and Abhinavagupta are quoted on their views on what would constitute pathos in a performance, but Pollock mentions only the words "pity" and "compassion" and analyzes the Indian psyche based on his own translation of these passages.

Even stranger is the following paragraph from Section 10 -

“Theory is related, however obscurely, to practice, and the history of rasa theory roughly maps against the history of practice of Sanskrit literature - understanding “literature” in the sense accorded to the category in Sanskrit culture itself. In that sense, Sanskrit literature was an invention of the beginning of the Common Era,...”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 10)

This paragraph truly indicates what thin ice Pollock is skating on and makes one question his ability to comment upon any classical study of India. Nowhere is theory derived independently of practice. A rule-book for administration of a pedagogic institution, for instance, would be formulated based on what a good administrator found effective, by trial and error. The rules may be recorded for the purpose of clarity, uniformity in case of change in administration or even to aid in managing franchised institutions. A gifted composer or writer may produce several successful works before theorists begin to study and describe his style. In modern science, research findings always corroborate theory. The cuisine of a region develops with the ingredients available in that geographical location and the cultural practices peculiar to the place after which gourmets speak of the distinct flavours of the region. Similarly, a language develops gradually based on which its grammar is systematized. In music and dance too, as in literature, once the artistic urges have created a distinct style, theory is formulated to describe it.

Theory is always preceded by practice. Only after the practice attains a state of some maturity can its theory be formulated. For example, in Sanskrit literary styles of expression, *rīti*, the treatises tell us that initially there were three styles *Vaidarbī*, *Gaudiyā* and *Pāncālī*, named after the geographical regions where they originated, but were practiced everywhere over time, owing to their popularity (Shastri 1989: 16).

Pāṇini has meticulously recorded the state of the language as it was spoken in his time. It is certain that classical Sanskrit must have flourished for a few hundred years prior to his treatise. When Bharata wrote or compiled the *Nātyaśāstra*, it is certain that the codified practices of the Sanskrit theatre must have flourished for at least a hundred years before he began to compile them. Pāṇini explains words that mean professional actor, dancer, etc. There is no possibility

of Sanskrit literature being an invention of the beginning of the Common Era, whatever be the sense in which Pollock uses the phrase. The literature or performing art tradition of a culture and a civilization is not to be referred to as an “invention”.

## 6. Universality of Indian Concepts

It is a fact that classical thought in India on the internal working of the mind was very advanced and intricate. From linguistics to aesthetics to yoga and processes of cognition, the analysis of the human mind is unparalleled. This makes many issues discussed in the Sanskrit traditions take on universal relevance, not just pertaining to Indian society. And as the human mind has changed little in two or three millennia, many issues are as relevant today as when they were first formulated. The profundity of many concepts such as *ātman*, *manas*, *buddhi*, *dhyāna*, *śabda*, *rasa* etc. cannot be ignored. They have spread to Europe and other parts of the world through translations in the middle centuries and have influenced the development of thought in those countries, far more than is acknowledged.

It is not surprising then, that some scholar should attempt to show how *rasa* theory can be applied in today’s scenario, in the context of the plays of Shakespeare, for example. Just as a study of *rasa* from being seen to being heard has been for Pollock, this evaluation of *rasa* theory may have attracted the scholar for its novelty and scope of academic study. But Pollock does not appear to be pleased with such tendencies – in Section 12 of the Introduction he writes:

“...There is a proclivity in a certain strain of postcolonial thought to assert claims to conceptual priority: the precolonial is always supposed to have preempted colonisation in its theoretical understanding of the world. This is demonstrated for classical Indian aesthetics by awarding it a kind of superior insight and universal applicability (“Rasa in Shakespeare” is the genre of study that I have in mind).”

(Pollock 2016: Introduction, section 12)

Perhaps much of the misconceptions modern people have is based on the notion that Sanskrit grammar, *dharmaśāstra*-s and other works were *prescriptive* texts. They were in fact *descriptive* texts and point out to the prevalent practices and their justification at that time. It is not the fault of the *śāstra*-s if a modern scholar does not grasp them in proper perspective. As Yāska said way back in the 8th century

B.C.E., it is not the pillar's fault if the blind man does not see it! *naisa sthāṇoraparādho yadenamandho na paśyati | puruṣāparādhah sa bhavati!* (Sarup 1967: 115).

## 7. Conclusion

Classical Indian thought has always attracted intellectual quest among foreign scholars. But where the intentions may not be honorable, it seriously changes the color of things. Even more than in literature, in academic study, unbiased presenting of information is expected of a teacher. If Pollock (2016) is a harbinger of things to come, as a first in a series that will address philosophy, religion, linguistics, etc, it does not bode well at all.

Sanskrit treatises on virtually every topic are the tip of the iceberg, with a vast body of literature in vernacular languages that is hidden forever from us. Even if a manuscript were to be found intact, there is scarce the scholar who can decipher that ancient script or interpret what it means. But the Sanskrit text shines through the centuries yielding a wealth of information on those times. There was not one idea or concept in philosophy or science that was not known to the common man; there were no secret concepts for secret cults. It is very wrong to hold Sanskrit tradition as anything but representing society as a whole.

India's hospitality should extend to sharing our knowledge systems with those who are interested but not to the extent of accepting anything said by anybody as the outcome of partial understanding or hidden agenda. We owe it to posterity to preserve our traditional knowledge systems, so that they have a fair chance at evaluating them and perhaps derive benefit. In pursuing novelty in Indological research, let not the Western scholar's vision of Goddess Lakṣmī be portrayed as Goddess Sarasvatī to us! If at the end of several brilliant Western careers, we have nothing left of culture to show our children, what do we gain with our riches?

“From Rasa Seen to Rasa Heard” (Pollock 2012) is a novel, innovative way to phrase the study, but it is nothing more than that, an attractive caption. Pollock (2016) is simply a thesis of the author despite its limitations and appears convincingly arranged but lacks depth and balance required to be considered as serious study material. Its

greatest contribution may be waking up more people to the issue of Indian aesthetics. The book itself could have been titled, “From Rasa Seen to Rasa Heard” for, a text book on *Rasa* it is not.

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**Kāvyālaṅkāra.** See Sastry (1970).

**Kāvyālaṅkārasūtra.** See Shastri (1989).

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# Chapter 10

## Othering and Indian Population Genetics

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### Abstract

Sanskrit, an ancient language of the Hindu civilisation and other Indic cultures across the globe, is hypothesised as “a source for legitimising power by a tyrannical kingship (Oriental despotism)” that was yet paradoxically subservient to the priesthood, in pre-colonial India. In simple words, the language was supposedly used by upper-caste groups for the explicit “othering” of minorities and lower-caste groups – so claims Professor Sheldon Pollock.

Recent population genetics analysis shows that an “abrupt” start (in genetic timescales) of castes-by-birth (used synonymously with endogamous groups) is found to coincide with the foreign invasions of India (Islamic rule under the Delhi Sultanate and the Madurai Sultanate) and appears to have been modelled on the Arab-Muslim clan-tribal endogamy. Until then the entire population of India appears to have been genetically admixing freely, that is entirely exogamous. Prior to the availability of definitive genetic data, the

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\* pp. 313–330. In: Kannan, K. S and Meera, H. R. (Ed.s) (2021). *Chronology and Causation: Negating Neo-Orientalism*. Chennai: Infinity Foundation India.

presence of same patrilineal (matrilineal in some sects) *gotra*-s amongst the various castes classified under the different *varna*-s was well known, yet ignored by the social scientists.

Genetic evidence also indicates that the most proximal group to the Brahmins are the lower castes at the so-called bottom of the *varna* “hierarchy” (labelled as Scheduled Castes, and more recently as Dalits) and somewhat surprisingly the Muslims of North India.

Archival records (of the colonial British Indian government and the East India Company) from the early colonial time period show that casteism (caste-based discrimination) and untouchability was largely alien to the Hindus till the arrival of colonial education that completely replaced indigenous educational system and the implementation of land “reforms” by the British, which regressively curtailed tenancy rights and reallocated the ownership of lands out of tune with longstanding local customs.

Given the evidence, the process of “othering”, based on extensive empirical historical data and population genetics evidence, can only be seen as a direct imposition by invading foreign rulers since the time of the Islamic incursions into India, which only worsened during the European colonial rule. Thus, Pollock’s hypothesis remains entirely discredited in the scientific world.

Clearly, Sanskrit is a victim of that “othering” process and claiming it as an instrument of oppression is an “attributional bias” and thus “amoral”. Such anti-empirical conclusion is arrived at by Pollock, a mere *classicist*, using a putatively novel discipline of overtly textualised and materialistic dialectical philology, called political philology, which dehumanises by de-emphasising the emotional, empathetic, and contextual aspects of language, and the entire historic time periods thus studied. A de-stressing of empathetic (humanising) components can be viewed in a clinical psychological framework as the zero-negative empathy end of the empathy spectrum, seen in the pathology of psychopathy. It can be concluded, thus, that mapping the dimensions of political philology onto a psychological framework of the empathy spectrum might provide us a novel perspective to understand the mechanics of hypothesis-forming employed by its practitioners.

## Background

Sanskrit “is the golden treasure of epics, the cradle of grammar, politics and philosophy and the home of logic, dramas and criticism” in the words of Ambedkar, one of India’s most “disruptive” thinkers. (Keer 1954:19) “Disruptive” cannot be any more traditional than this if, the antiquity of Sanskrit notwithstanding, the language deserves such critical acclaim. However, particularly recently Sanskrit has been subjected to a political-academic campaign border lining on hysteria. Thus it has become imperative – for diagnostic studies to be carried out on the manifestations of this phenomenon, analyse empirical data and contemporary scientific evidence, and to formulate a psychopathological framework to understand such phenomenon based on recent advances and understandings in the fields of clinical psychology (Baron-Cohen 2012).

It is claimed that “Sanskrit knowledge presents itself to us as a major vehicle of the ideological form of social power in traditional India,” and “The ideology of divine hierarchy... is an important part of the ancient knowledge of India, beginning with the post-Vedic Brāhmaṇa texts, with their neat order of social differences within a moral unity, and continuing through medieval dharmaśāstra texts, with their more messy, contingent and regionally varied codes.” (Malhotra 2016: 145)

Following on the above, it is concluded that

“Domination did not enter India with European colonialism. Quite the contrary, gross asymmetries of power – the systematic exclusion from access to material and nonmaterial resources of large sectors of the population – appear to have characterised India in particular times and places over the last three millennia and have formed the background against which ideological power, intellectual and spiritual resistance, and many forms of physical and psychological violence crystallised.”

(Malhotra 2016:174)

To highlight one of the most egregious of such examples from history is an infamous claim of Macaulay’s, “It is, I believe, no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgement used at preparatory schools in England.” In the same document Macaulay had acknowledged his abject ignorance of having “**no knowledge**

**of either Sanscrit or Arabic.”<sup>1</sup>** (Pritchett 2017). This can only be described as an act of monumental hypocrisy, given Macaulay’s association with the drafting of the Indian Penal Code, the evidential standards of which he clearly failed to pass.

## Castes in India

Before we go further, it is imperative that we understand at least a few of the hypotheses widely accepted as “facts” with regards to Hindu civilisation and castes. Ambedkar bravely attempted to reconstruct the putative origins of caste, though he was not the first or the last to do so. He made some astute observations in the the process, such as this:

“One thing I want to impress upon you is that Manu did not give the law of Caste and that he could not do so. Caste existed long before Manu. He was an upholder of it and therefore philosophised about it, but certainly he did not and could not ordain the present order of Hindu Society. His work ended with the codification of existing caste rules and the preaching of Caste Dharma. **The spread and growth of the Caste system is too gigantic a task to be achieved by the power or cunning of an individual or of a class. Similar in argument is the theory that the Brahmins created the Caste.** After what I have said regarding Manu, I need hardly say anything more, except to point out that it is incorrect in thought and malicious in intent.”

(Ambedkar 2014:16)

In spite of starting on the right track, coloured by the then prevailing orthodoxy in the society and his own personal ill experiences, which were indeed depressingly very many, (Keer 1954) combined with a lack of empirical data and the absence of the luxury of scientific data (population genetics, etc.) Ambedkar effectively ended up condemning the Hindus, particularly the Brahmins. He hypothesised that the class system that the Hindu society has (like other societies), divided into the four classes of priestly, military, merchant and artisan/menial used to have the flexibility of people being allowed to change their classes according to qualification. However, he says, that the open-door character was lost and they became self-enclosed units we know as castes. “Some closed the door: Others found it closed against them.” He gives the psychological interpretation as “the infection of imitation” where the non-Brahmin subdivisions whole-

heartedly imitated the Brahmin caste which had turned endogamous. (Ambedkar 2014:18) Not so surprisingly Pollock's "othering" seems to be modelled almost entirely on Ambedkar's hypothesis but rephrased in a newly invented language: *old wine in a new bottle*.

## Castes in India: Their Mechanisms, Genesis and Development

William Adam in his report on the "State of education in Bengal, 1835–38" writes on the state of the Brahmins that the students who continued their studies till they were nearly forty used to find support either through their gurus, the gifts they received on festive occasions, through their relations and "fourthly, by begging" in case all other three ways failed. (cited in Dharampal 1983:305)

It beggars belief that the Brahmins dedicated to studies alone, and nothing else, till "even" forty years of age and supporting themselves on begging were the ones who closed the doors on others, or were guilty of "othering" others. On the contrary, would not logic of human nature dictate that the Brahmins were the ones who perhaps would have found the door closed while begging for alms or when seeking matrimony, metaphorically or even literally?

W. Adam in his report mentioned above also observed that the Hindu medical men (Vaidya-s) and even Kāyastha-s were taught Sanskrit (and could study Sanskrit literature), the same could not be said of their Mahomedan counterparts, who were not taught Arabic or the sciences. He mentions the general complaint heard from the kazis that few Mahomedan priests understood Arabic though they had learnt by rote enough to allow them to perform ceremonies. (Dharampal 1983:306)

Beyond any reasonable doubt, the above establishes that the Hindu population was capable of using Sanskrit as a medium of instruction and of study for even complex subjects such as medicine, a field predominantly undertaken by a large proportion of non-Brahmins. (Dharampal 1983) While at the same time, the Muslim population had little or no knowledge of Arabic, though the Quran and its ceremonial verses were commonly used. This should be not a surprise given the fact that the caste system in Islam is as regressive as it can get:

‘As an illustration one may take the conditions prevalent among the Bengal Muslims. The Superintendent of the Census for 1901 for the Province of Bengal records the following interesting facts regarding the Muslims of Bengal:— “The conventional division of the Mahomedans into four tribes— Sheikh, Saiad, Moghul and Pathan—has very little application to this Province (Bengal). The Mahomedans themselves recognize two main social divisions, (1) Ashraf or Sharaf and (2) Ajlaf. **Ashraf** means ‘noble’ and includes all undoubted descendants of foreigners and converts from high caste Hindus. All other Mahomedans including the occupational groups and all converts of lower ranks, are known by the contemptuous terms, ‘Ajlaf’, ‘wretches’ or ‘mean people’: they are also called **Kamina or Itar**, ‘base’ or **Rasil**, a corruption of **Rizal**, ‘worthless’. In some places a third class, called **Arzal** or ‘lowest of all’, is added. With them no other Mahomedan would associate, and they are **forbidden to enter the mosque to use the public burial ground**. “Within these groups there are castes with social precedence of exactly the same nature as one finds among the Hindus.’

I. Ashraf or better class Mahomedans.

(1) Saiads. (2) Sheikhs. (3) Pathans. (4) Moghul. (5) Mallik. (6) Mirza.

II. Ajlaf or lower class Mahomedans.

1. Cultivating Sheikhs, and others who were originally Hindus but who do not belong to any functional group, and have not gained admittance to the Ashraf Community, e.g. Pirali and Thakrai.
2. Darzi, Jolaha, Fakir, and Rangrez.
3. Barhi, Bhathiara, Chik, Churihar, Dai, Dhawa, Dhunia, Gaddi, Kalal, Kasai, Kula Kunjara, Laheri, Mahifarosh, Mallah, Naliya, Nikari.
4. Abdal, Bako, Bediya, Bhat, Chamba, Dafali, Dhobi, Hajjam, Mucho, Nagarchi, Nat, Panwaria, Madaria, Tuntia.

III. Arzal or degraded class. Bhanar, Halalkhor, Hijra, Kasbi, Lalbegi, Maugta, Mehtar.”

(Ambedkar 1941: 225–226)

The current regressive Indian caste system, projected to be a unique Hindu phenomenon either erroneously or deliberately, appears to be almost entirely modelled on the above Islamic society’s hierarchy

than the Hindu *varṇa* system, which hardly ever classified people as **wretches, mean, base, worthless and lowest of all**. Arab clan-tribal system is arguably world renowned for its endogamy and dehumanising discrimination, but far less publicised for inexplicable reasons. (Weiner 2013).

It is also important to understand that the Europeans had a very limited understanding of the apparently complex Indian society, and this confused them to no end. Sadly there appears to be a significant degree of disgust arising from various misunderstandings, furthering various prejudices. Dharampal (2000: 17–18) notes that the early British Governer Generals observed that Hindu rulers in fact spent very little on themselves<sup>2</sup> but gave away a lot to the brahmins and to temples. It is to be noted here that both the terms were probably used in a much wider sense at the time to include all sorts of scholarship and to the institutions that catered to needs, not just religious, but to scholarship, culture, entertainment and comfort. “Obviously, anyone who exercised some intellectual, medical or other professional skill seems to have been taken to be a Brahmin, even by fairly knowledgeable Europeans, in this period.”

Empirical data from various British and European archives and colonial archives in India that “disproves” the existence of significant caste discrimination or untouchability (“othering”). Dharampal (2000: V:26–27) points out, for instance, that the village community had greater supremacy (in most cases) over land – ownership, disposal and working included. Also, regarding the question of the śūdra-ownership, he points out: “Again in Thanjavur in 1805, the number of *mirasdars* (i.e. those having permanent rights in land) was put at 62,042, of which over 42,000 belonged to the sudras and castes below them.” (Dharampal 2000: 27). As regards education and the composition of students in schools, a survey the British did in the Madras Presidency indicated “the Sudras and castes below them formed 70%–80% of the total students in the Tamil speaking areas, 62% in the Oriya areas, 54% in the Malayalam speaking areas, and 35%–50% in the Telugu speaking areas.” (Dharampal 2000: 29)<sup>3</sup>

Accounting, a subject of great practical importance and a skill considered essential in native Hindu education, was neglected in the Christian schools, for example:

“Regarding the content of elementary teaching, Adam mentioned various books which were used in teaching. These varied considerably from district to district, but all schools in the surveyed districts, except perhaps the 14 Christian schools, taught accounts. Also, most of them taught both commercial and agricultural accounts.”

(Dharampal 1983: 48)

Thus “othering” by de-skilling through European education has also been a major factor. Records from Punjab as well show an extensive and widespread Sanskrit schooling system (330,000 pupils at the time of annexation vs 190,000 in 1882) providing further evidence that “othering” has been imposed by foreign invaders (British colonialists) by elimination of Sanskrit. Data from “Leitner on indigenous education in the Panjab”:

“LIST OF SANSCRIT BOOKS USED (Balbodh and Akshar dipika)

1. GRAMMAR – Saraswat, Manorama, Chandrika, Bhashya, Laghu Kaumudi, Paniniya Vyakaran, Kaumudi, Siddhant Kaumudi, Shekar, Prakrita Prakasa
2. LEXICOLOGY – Amar Kosh, Malini Kosh, Halayudh
3. POETRY, THE DRAMA AND RELIGIOUS HISTORY – Raghu Vans, Mahabharat, Megh Duta, Venisanhara, Magh, Sakuntala, Kirat Arjun, Naishadha Charita, Ramayan, Mrichhakatika, Sri Mad Bhagwat, Kumara Sambhava and other Puranas
4. RHETORIC – Kavya Dipik, Kavya Prakash, Sahitya Darpana, Dasu Rupa, Kuvlayanund
5. MATHEMATICS, ASTRONOMY, AND ASTROLOGY – Siddbant Shiromani, Nil Kanthi, Mahurta Chintamani, Brihat Jatak, Shighra Bodh, Parasariya, Garbh Lagana
6. MEDICAL SCIENCE – Sham Raj, Nighant, Susruta, Sharang Dhar, Charaka, Bhashya Parichehed, Madhava Nidan, Vagbhat
7. LOGIC – Nyaya Sutra Vritti, Gada dhari, Vyutpattivad, Tarka-lankar, Tark Sangrah, Kari kavali
8. VEDANT – Atma Bodh Sarirak, Panch Dashi
9. LAW – Manu Smriti, Parasara Smriti, Yagya Valk Gautama, Mitakshara
10. PHILOSOPHY – Sankhya Tatwa Kaumudi, Patanjali, Sutra Britti Sutra with Bhashya, Sankhya Pravachan Bhashya, Vedanta,

Vedantsar (see also above), Yoga Sutra, Vaisesika, Siddhant Mimansa, Sutra with Muktavali Sutra with a commentary, Bhashya Artha Sangraha

11. PROSODY – Srut Bodh, Vritta Ratnakar
12. PROSE LITERATURE – Hitopadesa, Vasavadatta, Dasa Kumara Charita
13. RELIGION – Rigveda Sanhita (rare), Samaveda, Mantra Bhaga, Yajurveda, Shukla Yajur Chhandasya Archika (very rare), Vajasneyi Sanhita”

(Dharampal 1983: 351–352)

Thomas Munro, in his evidence to a House of Commons committee, had observed that “if civilisation is to become an article of trade between England and India, the former will gain by the import cargo.” referring to schools established in every village for teaching, reading, writing and arithmetic. (House of Commons Papers: 1812–13, Vol. 7, p.131). (Dharampal 1983: 42 footnote 67)

To conclude the elucidation of the empirical data from the early colonial period, and before moving on to the population genetic evidence, it shall be borne in mind that the average period of schooling in the contemporary England (say, 1835 CE – 1851 CE) was around one to two years, where even writing was excluded and also that the British, hungry for revenue, targeted to exterminate the Indian cultural and religious content and structure through starving its resources. All this was done to maintain the British rule, just as the large-scale school education was deliberately neglected till Anglicised education was viably established (Dharampal 1983: 74–75) As one can see from the above, the “absurd” superstition, for which writing was excluded from many schools in England, notwithstanding:

“Karl Marx seems to have had similar impressions of India—this, despite his great study of British state papers and other extensive material relating to India. Writing in the New York Daily Tribune on 25 June 1853, he shared the view of the perennial nature of Indian misery, and approvingly quoted an ancient Indian text which according to him placed ‘the commencement of Indian misery in an epoch even more remote than the Christian creation of the world.’ According to him, Indian life had always been undignified, stagnatory, vegetative, and passive, given to a brutalising worship of nature instead of man being

the ‘sovereign of nature’—as contemplated in contemporary European thought. And, thus Karl Marx concluded: ‘Whatever may have been the crimes of England’ in India, ‘she was the unconscious tool of history’ in bringing about—what Marx so anxiously looked forward to—India’s westernisation.”

(Dharampal 1983: 75)

## Population Genetics

The final blow to the *mythology of “othering”*, castes and its origins being erroneously placed within the Hindu civilisation and its religious philosophies comes from a series of recent *population genetics* evidences. From one of the northernmost state of Uttarakhand (Negi *et al.* 2016) to the southernmost state of Tamil Nadu (Basu, Sarkar-Roy, and Majumder 2016), data shows that the now so-called Dalits or scheduled castes are genetically closest to, in other words belong to the same larger group as, the Brahmins and Kshatriyas castes than to the other castes. Of course, this is on the background of a completely admixed pan-Indian populace. (Moorjani *et al.* 2013) This mixture of population groups across now known castes-by-birth (endogamous groups) and even geographies have lasted until very recently when it was put to an “abrupt” end during the pan-Indian Muslim rule; the “abrupt” end to exogamy (admixture) and start of endogamy (formation of castes-by-birth) also follows the wave (time lapse) of Islamic invasion, from the west of India to the east. Any social change to have occurred so “abruptly” within a few generations across such a huge geography requires unimaginable force and / or disruption. There are sufficient historical sources and evidences that could provide what these forces and disruptions could have been and their mechanisms of action. (Sanyal 2016) For one, the genesis of castes-by-birth (endogamy) as hypothesised by Ambedkar (imitation and fashion) (Ambedkar 2014) or by “othering” using language structures and literature would be inordinately protracted: genetic evidence is emphatically against such a possibility at all. (Vadivelu 2016)

Prior to the availability of definitive genetic data, the presence of same patrilineal (matrilineal in some sects) *gotra-s* amongst the various castes classified under the different *varṇa-s* was well known, yet ignored by the social scientists. Perhaps arguments and evidence were

selectively chosen and further massaged to lead to a pre-determined conclusion. (Malhotra and Neelakandan 2011; Ambedkar 1946)

Above all, why would the Brahmins and Kshatriyas “other” their own, now genetically proven, kith and kin? Pre-1857 British Indian army (the mutineers) was made up of a significant strength of Brahmins, to the extent that they were a little over one-third of the strength. (Ambedkar 1941) Does this hold a key to the anti-Brahminism and “othering” promoted by vested interests who must have been, and perhaps are even now, arguably anti-Indic?

Empirical historical data from British / European archives, hitherto conveniently ignored, confirms the findings of genetic studies variously, Dharampal (2000: 58-59) cites Carpue’s observation, “The profession of astrology, and the task of making almanacs,’ says a later writer on India, ‘belong to degraded Brahmins; and the occupation of teaching military exercises, and physic, as well as the trade of potters, weavers, brasiers, fishermen, and workers in shells, belong also to the descendants (meaning the outcastes) of Brahmins.”

Moving on from the Brahmin connections of the now so-called scheduled castes to their Kshatriya connections, we find the following empirical historical data, again correlating well with the genetic evidences being unearthed:

“The *Karnam* or *Conicoply*<sup>4</sup> (which really implied the office of the registrar of the village, a sort of secretariat, rather than a single individual) generally had an allocation of 3-4% while the *Taliar* (i.e. **the village police**, which may have included several persons) generally had an allocation of around 3%. Incidentally, it may be useful to know that **the offices of the Taliar, the Corn-Measurer, the settler of boundary disputes, and a few other village offices, were generally filled by persons from the Pariah and allied castes.** As many will know in Maharashtra, it was the *Mahars* who constituted **the village police**. ... it does imply that every person in this society enjoyed a certain dignity and that his social and economic needs were well provided for...”

(Dharampal 2000: 24)

Interestingly, Ambedkar made such a prescient proposition based on his analysis of the *R̥gveda* primarily, that *sūdra*-s are *ks̄atriya*-s. (Ambedkar 1946) Ironically, from the above analysis Ambedkar made a better Sanskrit scholar than the Western classicist Pollock,

perhaps because of the embedded (conscious or subconscious) cultural *samskāra* of Ambedkar, being born an “insider”? Indeed, Ambedkar appears to have had a pride in his cultural roots (*samskṛti*) and the ensuing *samskāra*. He noted that if one goes out of the Hindu religion, they invariably go out of the Hindu culture as well. “... Conversion to **Islam or Christianity will denationalise the depressed classes**” He rightly observed that conversion into either of these Abrahamic faiths would create the danger of their domination.(Keer 1954: 280-281).

One would not need a huge stretch of imagination to conclude that Ambedkar, in spite of his criticisms of the Hindu society and religion, was a staunch Hindu culturalist (*samskṛti*) who has clearly considered “othering” (denationalisation) as a defining feature of conversion to Christianity or Islam, if not the religions themselves. He also clearly acknowledges alien (invading) nature of these “othering” religious philosophies in his choice of words, ***national vs denationalised***. (Keer 1954: 280-281) In fact, Ambedkar was a sponsor for a constitutional amendment to make Sanskrit the national language of India. (Malhotra 2016: 166)

While Hindus celebrate and celebrated the divine black (God Kṛṣṇa, Goddess Pārvatī, Draupadī, God Viṣṇu, all stone idols were and should be black, etc.) racism (“othering”) is and was celebrated in Persian and Sufi poetry, and the much-maligned Hindus have been at the receiving end. On Rumi and his “love-filled” Sufi poetry:

“One of the geographic-historical topics is the contrast of Turk and Hindu. It was used from the earliest days of Persian poetry; but it is interesting to see Rumi’s application of this traditional pair of correlatives in his works, since the Turks are absolutely convinced that Mowlana\* himself was a Turk, quoting one of his lines in favour of this claim. However, we shall probably never be in a position to reach any definite conclusion in this respect. Rumi’s mother tongue was Persian, but he had learned, during his stay in Konya, enough Turkish and Greek to use it, now and then, in his verses. We may ask, therefore, how he represents the Turks, or the usual pair Turk-Hindu. To be sure, these words and combinations occur so frequently in his verses that one has to restrict oneself to some of the most characteristic passages from both the *Divan*\* and the *Mathnawi*:

There is one revealing poem, beginning with the lines:

*A Hindu came into thekhanqah\**.

*‘Are you not a Turk? Then throw him from the roof!’*

*Do you consider him and the whole of Hindustan as little, pour his special (part) on his whole (i.e. let him feel that he is part of **infidel Hindu India**). The ascendent of **India is Saturn himself**,*

*and though he is high, **his name is Misfortune**.*

*He went high, but did not rescue (man) from misfortunes*

*What use has the bad wine from the cup?*

*I showed the **bad Hindu** the mirror:*

*Envy and wrath is not his sign...*

...

The *nafs* is the Hindu<sup>5</sup>, and the *khanqah*\* my heart...

The last *hemistich* gives the clue: **the Hindu, always regarded as ugly, black, of evil omen (like the ‘black’ Saturn, the Hindu of the Sky, in astrology)**, and as a mean servant of the Turkish emperors, is the *nafs*, the base soul which on other occasions is **compared to an unclean black dog**. Yet, even the *nafs* if successfully educated can become useful, comparable to the little Hindu-slave whose perfect loyalty will be recognized by the Shah.”

(Schimmel 1993: 193)

Thus one can clearly envision how, when and what would have led to the origin of castes-by-birth and caste groups, in the classicist Pollock’s words “othering”. It must have and only been a foreign instrument of oppression, perhaps the earliest known use of divide and rule in India. Castes-by-birth (endogamy) that “abruptly” started during the Islamic rule of India had been nurtured, re-engineered and corrupted further into casteism and untouchability by the British and European colonial powers and their lackeys (missionaries, cultural sepoys, etc.) (Malhotra and Neelakandan 2011)

The treatment of the “black” Hindus at the hands of the Islamic invaders, particularly the Brahmins and especially with an aim to convert them to Islam, is well documented by their own court historians. Ambedkar highlights the treatment meted out the Hindus. Some highlights:

“...they [muslims] were all united by one common objective and that was to destroy the Hindu faith...Mahommad bin Qasim’s first act of religious zeal was **forcibly to circumcise the Brahmins** of the captured city of Debul; but on discovering that they objected to this sort of conversion, he proceeded to **put all above the age of 17 to death**, and to order all others, **with women and children, to be led into slavery**...The slaughtering of ‘infidels’ seemed to be one thing that gave Muhammad [of Ghazni] particular pleasure... **the Muslims paid no regard to booty**

until they had satiated themselves with the slaughter of the infidels ... Most of the inhabitants were Brahmins with shaven heads. They were put to death. Large number of books were found..... but none could explain their contents as all the men had been killed, the whole fort and city being a place of study."

Further details in (Ambedkar 1941: 50–57) discuss how the temple at Multan was desecrated with "a piece of cow's flesh", the destruction of the "temple of Bishnath at Benares", how "winning of converts became a matter of supreme urgency", how brahmins of Old Delhi faced the choice of conversion or being burnt to death, and how thousands of Hindus were taken as slaves.

So was the door closed on non-Brahmins by Brahmins, or many people formed groups and closed their doors to others (Brahmins and government clerks) to save their daughters? Ambedkar wrote further:

"These edicts, says the historian of the period, "were so strictly carried out that the chaukidars and khuts and muqaddims **were not able to ride on horseback, to find weapon**, to wear fine clothes, or to indulge in betel..... No Hindu could hold up his head..... Blows, confinement in the stocks, imprisonment and chains were all employed to enforce payment."

... All this was **not the result of mere caprice or moral perversion**. On the other hand, what was done was **in accordance with the ruling ideas of the leaders of Islam in the broadest aspects.**"

(Ambedkar 1941: 56–57)

Perhaps the selective and special degrees of brutality was saved for the Brahmins and their women, the Muslims of north India (excepting the old immigrant communities of Iranian Shias and Bohras living in India) are predominantly descendants of Brahmin women with minor contributions from the Middle East / Persia in their genes: population genetics evidence of sexual violence depicted by historians above. (Easwarkhanth *et al.* 2009)

To rephrase and repeat a statement from above: Was the door closed on non-Brahmins by Brahmins, or many people formed groups and closed their doors to others (Brahmins and other groups specifically targeted for forced religious conversions) to save their daughters? It appears that the Brahmins were the ones who were "othered."

## Conclusions

Clearly, Sanskrit is a victim of that “othering” process and claiming it as an instrument of oppression is an “attributional bias” and thus “amoral.” Such anti-empirical conclusion is arrived at by Pollock, a mere *classicist*, using a putatively novel discipline of overtly textualised and materialistic dialectical philology, called political philology, which dehumanises by de-emphasising the emotional, empathetic and contextual aspects of language and the entire historic time periods thus studied. A de-stressing of empathetic (humanising) components can be viewed in a clinical psychological framework as the zero-negative empathy end of the empathy spectrum, seen in the pathology of psychopathy. Simon Baron-Cohen reports about an incident involving a crime and its perpetrator as follows:

“Paul (not his real name, to protect his identity) is twenty-eight years old and is currently detained in a secure prison after being found guilty of murder. I was asked to conduct a diagnostic interview with him by his lawyer, and, because his violence meant it could have been unsafe for him to come to our clinic, I went to see him in the prison. He told me how he had wound up in jail. He insisted he wasn’t guilty because the man he stabbed had provoked him by looking at him from across the bar. Paul had gone over to the man and said, ‘Why were you staring at me?’ The man had replied, I assume truthfully: ‘I wasn’t staring at you. I was simply looking around the bar.’ Paul had felt incensed by the man’s answer, believing it to be disrespectful, and felt he needed to be taught a lesson. He picked up a beer bottle, smashed it on the table, and plunged the jagged end deep into the man’s face.

Like me, the barrister at Paul’s trial was shocked by the apparent lack of remorse and the self-righteousness of his plea of not guilty. In my questioning I probed further for some evidence of moral conscience. Paul was adamant that he had simply defended himself.”

(Baron-Cohen 2012 Chapter 3, Paul: Type P)

Pollock’s entire work is committed to demonstrate, against the above mountain of empirical and scientific evidence, that somehow Sanskrit and Hindus themselves are to be blamed for the infection that they are suffering from. Thence, one needs a completely novel approach to study the phenomenon called political philology and liberation philology. (Malhotra 2016)

It can be concluded, thus, mapping the dimensions of political philology onto a psychological framework of the empathy spectrum might provide us a novel perspective to understand the mechanics of hypothesis forming employed by its practitioners.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Unless stated otherwise **emphasis** (bold) found in the various quoted quotations found at various parts of this text was added by the author.

<sup>2</sup> This completely contradicts the hypothesis of oppressive kingship.

<sup>3</sup> Madras Presidency included the present-day Tamilnadu, major parts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana as well as some districts of Karnataka, Kerala and Orissa. See Dharampal (2000: 29–32) for details.

<sup>4</sup> Ironically, *Conicoply* (Kanakku Pillai) has morphed into a caste-by-birth in spite of the offices being manned by various different communities until two or three generations ago. (Dirks 2011).

<sup>5</sup> According to Sufi philosophy, ““ego” (nafs) is the lowest dimension of man’s inward existence, his animal and satanic nature” (Chittick 1983:12). However, it is an important concept as well in the gnosis (irfan) discipline in Shia Islam.

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**Late Padma Vibhushan Prof. Roddam Narasimha**  
(*Distinguished Aerospace Scientist and Academician*)

"The new group [American]...which is trying to be the dispenser of knowledge of India to us...does not realise that the Indian view...was extremely practical...Reason was never banished in India, even in adhyātmic matters...It is very important for us to take part in these discourses, put the Indian position correctly, but critically, not without argument amongst ourselves."

- on the occasion of release (2016) of *The Battle for Sanskrit*.

**Dr. Koenraad Elst**  
(*Noted Indologist, historian, and writer*)

"Pollock goes very far in demonizing Hinduism by claiming that the essence of the National Socialist doctrine was Hindu, pure and simple... He says, "Nazism is nothing but applied Mīmāṃsā". Very many Indologists are anti-Hindu, but this really takes the cake. In America, where absolute evil is associated with National Socialist doctrine, you cannot demonize anyone worse by saying this is the "essence" of Nazism...[Pollock] is entirely representative of the neo-consensus throughout Indology; so in a sense, [this] is not criticising his own personal contribution, but rather the consensus that stretches across the Indological world."

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