

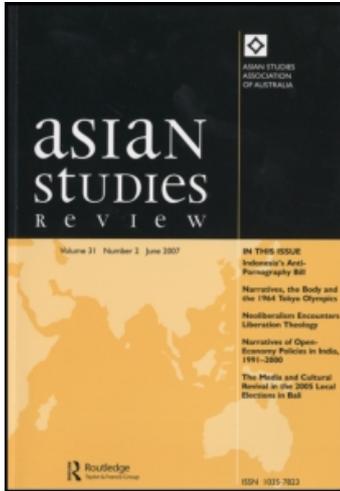
This article was downloaded by: [Australian National University]

On: 18 May 2011

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 933549259]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Asian Studies Review

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713613499>

## Mythology Wars: The Indian Diaspora, “Wendy's Children” and the Struggle for the Hindu Past

McComas Taylor<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The Australian National University,

Online publication date: 16 May 2011

**To cite this Article** Taylor, McComas(2011) 'Mythology Wars: The Indian Diaspora, “Wendy's Children” and the Struggle for the Hindu Past', Asian Studies Review, 35: 2, 149 – 168

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/10357823.2011.575206

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10357823.2011.575206>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Mythology Wars: The Indian Diaspora, “Wendy’s Children” and the Struggle for the Hindu Past

McCOMAS TAYLOR\*

*The Australian National University*

**Abstract:** *A schism has appeared between sections of the Indian diasporic community and members of the Western academy over the authority to present and interpret Hindu mythology. This paper tells the story of these “Mythology Wars”. It focuses on critiques of Western scholarship by self-identified Hindu critics, primarily Rajiv Malhotra in his articles ‘RISA Lila–1: Wendy’s Child Syndrome’ and ‘RISA Lila–2: Limp Scholarship and Demonology’ (Malhotra, 2002 and 2003). The primary foci of diasporic criticism are Wendy Doniger’s writings, including *The Hindus* (2009), and three works by other scholars, Jeffrey Kripal (*Kālī’s Child*, 1995), Sarah Caldwell (*The Blood-thirsty Tongue and the Self-feeding Breast*, 1999) and Paul Courtright (*Gaṇeśa*, 1985). There is no end in sight to the Mythology Wars. It is unlikely that critics in the diaspora will become less vigilant or less vocal. While members of the Western academy may become more circumspect and more sensitive to the potential strife they face, they are unlikely to impose any form of self-censorship. The defence of “academic freedom” has a long and deep history.*

**Keywords:** *academic freedom, Indian mythology, Indian diaspora, Wendy Doniger, Rajiv Malhotra*

## Introduction

On a chilly evening in March 2010, demonstrators converged on the New School, a university in downtown New York. Mobilised by the United States Hindu Alliance (USHA) and the Hindu Janajagruti Samiti, they paraded behind barricades holding placards that read “Support fairness”, “Don’t reward mediocrity”, and “Her book is a work of fiction”. The participants had been required to register with the alliance beforehand, and were asked to “adhere to the high standards of USHA and Hindu

---

\*Correspondence Address: mcomas.taylor@anu.edu.au

Scriptures”. They were advised that “the use of any profane, indecent or uncharitable language is strictly prohibited”, and that vegetarian samosas would be served after the march.<sup>1</sup>

Inside, the National Book Critics Circle, an association of 600 book reviewers, was about to announce its annual awards. Among the nominations was a work by prominent scholar Professor Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (Doniger, 2009). According to information provided to the demonstrators by USHA:

Almost all of [Doniger’s] books contain factual errors, mischaracterizations and hatred for Hindus . . . Dr. Doniger’s Sanskrit credentials are as good as the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s scholarship on the Hebrew Language and the Jewish Scriptures . . . But, due to the support she receives from the University of Chicago Divinity School, a private Christian Institution, and major American Publishers, many have endorsed her books without considering her qualifications and overlooking Hindu Sentiments . . . Her book titled *Hindus – An Alternative History* is a work that promotes bigotry, racism and intolerance. No civilized or decent human being, organization or society will ever support such a book given Dr. Doniger’s persistent verbal violence against the Hindus.<sup>2</sup>

Doniger, who has also published under the name Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty, is one of the world’s leading scholars on Hindu mythology. She holds a PhD from Harvard, and the equivalent, a DPhil, from Oxford, as well as six honorary doctorates. She is the Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor of the History of Religions at Chicago, and has written sixteen books and over 300 articles. Over thirty years she has led numerous professional societies, including the American Academy of Religion, and has supervised 62 PhD students. Her 41-page CV reads like a *Who’s Who* and *What’s What* of South Asian Studies over the past four decades.<sup>3</sup>

Oblivious to what the USHA called “the pain and anguish this Author of Hate has caused for a billion Hindus”, the National Book Critics Circle chose not to reconsider its nomination, but nonetheless gave the award to another author. Undaunted, USHA pledged further action against Doniger, who was labelled a “first rate bigot and racist”, who “[i]n her effort to impose her perverted views on Hindu Scriptures . . . has employed the most indecent, distasteful and provocative language known to writers of any language”.<sup>4</sup> Nor, the USHA proclaimed, would “those who willingly and deliberately support her Anti-Hindu Agenda, including its publisher – Penguin Books” be spared.<sup>5</sup>

A “first rate bigot and racist” or a multi-published author and much-garlanded scholar? How could one individual be so deeply reviled, and yet so highly honoured? This is the story of the “Mythology Wars”, the struggle between members of the Indian diaspora in the United States and the Western academy for the right to represent Hindu mythology. I will focus on critiques of Western scholarship by self-identified Hindu critics, primarily Rajiv Malhotra in his articles ‘RISA Lila-1: Wendy’s Child Syndrome’ and ‘RISA Lila-2: Limp Scholarship and Demonology’ (2002 and 2003). These and critiques by other members of the diaspora have recently

appeared in *Invading the Sacred* (Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007). The primary foci of criticism are works by Doniger including *The Hindus* (2009), and by three other scholars: Jeffrey Kripal (*Kālī's Child*, 1995), Sarah Caldwell ('The Blood-thirsty Tongue and the Self-feeding Breast', 1999) and Paul Courtright (*Gaṇeśa*, 1985).

### **Kripal's *Kālī's Child***

To understand the Mythology Wars, we need to begin in rural Bengal, where the charismatic mystic and saint, Swami Ramakrishna, was born in 1836. As a child he experienced ecstatic states and mystical visions, and as his reputation and following grew, he took up residence in a temple at Dakshineswar, 10 kilometres north of Calcutta. As one of the most influential holy men of the day, Ramakrishna attracted a considerable following among the upper-class, high-caste gentry.

Ramakrishna's teachings may be viewed as an amalgam of two traditions – on the one hand, an orthodox Vedāntic stream emphasising personal purity, sanctity and good works, and on the other, a heterodox Tantric tradition focused on the Divine Mother Kālī. Tantric practices often incorporate the consumption of "impure" substances including alcohol, meat and bodily fluids, and "impure" acts, including ritual sexual intercourse, transgressive practices which are viewed as scandalous by non-practitioners. After Ramakrishna's death in 1886, his discourses were preserved in the writings of his followers, some of which emphasised the Vedāntic aspects, while others reflected the more Tantric features.

Among those who prioritised the socially acceptable Vedāntic aspects of Ramakrishna's teachings was his chief disciple Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda travelled and spoke widely in the West and is credited with an important role in the creation and propagation of this strand of middle-class neo-Vedāntic Hinduism. In 1897, Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission to promote this vision. This movement now has 171 centres all over the world. Ramakrishna, the ultimate source and inspiration of the movement, is regarded as the "Avatar of God for the Modern Age", and is thus placed on a par with Jesus Christ, Lord Krishna and the Prophet Mohammad.<sup>6</sup>

Psychoanalytic readings of Ramakrishna have a long history. The first was Romain Rolland's *La Vie de Ramakrishna* (The Life of Ramakrishna) (Rolland, 1953 [1929]). In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud credits Rolland's work on Ramakrishna as the basis for theorising the "oceanic feeling" as an origin of religious sentiment (Freud, 1961 [1929], p. 12 n.1). Other psychoanalytic studies of South Asian religions, although not specifically of Ramakrishna, include works by Erik Erikson (1970), Richard Lannoy (1971), Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (1980) and David Smith (2003), and, most significantly, the work of prolific Indian psychoanalyst, Sudhi Kakar (1978; 1990; 1991).<sup>7</sup>

In 1993, one of Doniger's doctoral students, Jeffrey Kripal, submitted a dissertation entitled 'Kālī's Child: The mystical and the erotic in the life and teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa'. Kripal's thesis was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1995, and won the award for the "Best First Book in the History of Religions" from the American Academy of Religion the following year. It subsequently received many laudatory reviews (e.g. Haberman, 1997; Urban, 1998; and Hawley, 1998).

Kripal's research draws primarily on the saint's "secret talks", in which the Tantric aspects of his practice predominate. Kripal argues that Ramakrishna was a "conflicted, unwilling, homoerotic Tāntrika", the spiritual child of the Tantric deity Kālī, whose ecstatic and mystical experiences were "profoundly, provocatively, scandalously erotic" (Kripal, 1995, pp. 2–3). In her foreword to *Kālī's Child*, Doniger predicts that the book will "delight many readers, infuriate others, and generate a great deal of creative controversy" (Kripal, 1995, p. xi). The author himself also expects devotees of Ramakrishna to be "particularly troubled" by his interpretation and predicts that the book will "surprise, shock and awe" (Kripal, 1995, p. xiii). Both expectations were duly fulfilled.

There was a time when the parallel universes of the Indian diaspora and the Western academy had few points of contact and *Kālī's Child* would have passed unnoticed by the Hindu community. Scholarly journals, books and conferences were beyond the reach of most Hindus in India, and Indians in the West, well on their way to becoming an eminently successful immigrant group, had little time for the sleepy backwaters of academia. Transnational migration enabled by globalisation brought increasing numbers of Indians to the United States, their numbers doubling every decade. From 400,000 in 1980, to 800,000 in 1990, to 1.7 million in 2000, there are today about 3 million Indians in the United States.<sup>8</sup>

The Internet has also provided unprecedented connectivity among the growing diaspora, and ever-larger numbers of highly educated, articulate Hindus in the United States have now come into contact with Western scholarship on Hinduism. Indian attitudes to the academy have shifted from disinterest to a more critical and assertive position. This shift coincided with, and was possibly stimulated by, a new self-consciousness and self-confidence following the economic reforms of 1991. Concomitant with the re-emergence of India on the world stage was an upswing in Hindu-nationalist politics at home, and the ascent to power of the right-leaning Hindu-oriented Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (1998–2004). These changes in demographics, interconnectedness, and the political milieu in India meant that for the first time a book such as Kripal's could not escape the critical attention of the diaspora.

The first salvo in the Mythology Wars was fired in the year 2000 by Swami Tyagananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, principal teacher at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society in Boston, and Hindu chaplain at MIT and Harvard.<sup>9</sup> Entitled 'Kali's Child Revisited or Didn't Anyone Check the Documentation?', the critique begins with a 40-page essay, followed by a 130-page point-by-point refutation of Kripal's book (Tyagananda, 2000). The essay was first distributed at the American Academy of Religion conference in the year 2000.<sup>10</sup>

Tyagananda, clearly an "insider" vis-à-vis the Ramakrishna tradition, specifically identifies Kripal as an "outsider", and repeatedly argues that Kripal either misunderstood the original Bengali sources, or intentionally misrepresented them. "[Y]es, the criticism the book received was due to its conclusions regarding Ramakrishna's purported homosexuality. But Kripal's conclusions came via faulty translations, a wilful distortion and manipulation of sources, combined with a remarkable ignorance of Bengali culture" (Tyagananda, 2000, pp. 2–3).

Tyagananda argues that Ramakrishna was far from being a misogynist homosexual, and that Kripal misunderstood and misrepresented the roles of Tantra

in Ramakrishna's life: "Unfortunately, Kripal is not in a position to judge what Tantra *feels* like in Bengali. Sadly, he has spent a mere eight months in the city of Calcutta; he understands neither the language nor the culture" (Tyagananda, 2000, p. 30, original italics). Tyagananda also rejects Kripal's thesis that Ramakrishna's mystical experiences could be associated with, let alone arise from, sexual conflict: "Put simply, in the Hindu tradition the mystical and the sexual just don't mix" (Tyagananda, 2000, p. 36). Kripal had argued that to understand Ramakrishna, it was important to consider "the social place of a particular author". Tyagananda turns this analytical perspective back on its author: what is Kripal's "social place" such that it led him to "distort the texts or invent warped translations"? "We may wonder about the author's personal or religious background; we may wonder about the author's social or academic background" (Tyagananda, 2000, pp. 43–44).

Tyagananda's paper unleashed a storm of controversy: letters to newspapers, a great deal of discussion in academia, and a response, part-apology and part-rebuttal, from Kripal.<sup>11</sup> In the second edition of his book, the textual errors identified by Tyagananda were corrected, but the author's conclusion on Ramakrishna's sexuality remained unchanged. A decade later, the controversy over *Kālī's Child* rumbles interminably on in blogs, websites and online forums.

This opening skirmish is important because it foreshadows many of the key themes that recur in the Mythology Wars. These include the roles of self-identified Hindu residents of the United States on the one hand, and Doniger and other scholars on the other. Tyagananda's critique was the first significant, publicised attempt by a member of the diasporic Hindu community to engage critically with the Western academy and to challenge its monopolistic authority to represent Hinduism. It was the first time that "insiders" disputed the privileged position of "outsiders". Many points raised by Tyagananda continue to colour subsequent critiques of Western scholarship: the inability of Western scholars to "really understand" Hinduism, their lack of experience in Indian societies, their inability to understand texts accurately, their habitual "twisting" of facts to fit preconceived theories, and the assertion that Western Freudian psychoanalysis is inapplicable to Indian subjects.<sup>12</sup> Another influential aspect was Tyagananda's philological methodology: his approach to challenging an unappetising theory was to attack its textual basis, hence the painstaking sentence-by-sentence analysis in which every reference is checked and every typographical error logged.

By the time of the 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), "Mythology Wars" was a major concern for both scholars and the diaspora.<sup>13</sup> Swami Tyagananda addressed a panel entitled 'Defamation/Anti/Defamation: Hindus in dialogue with the Western academy', in which he defended the right of both sides to express themselves, but suggested that, "if this leads to conflict and misunderstanding, then it may be helpful to examine whether there is something wrong with the way we are using our freedom" (Tyagananda, 2001).

### **'RISA Lila-1: Wendy's Child Syndrome'**

The AAR meeting of 2001 was also addressed by Rajiv Malhotra, a self-described Indian-American entrepreneur, philanthropist and community leader. Malhotra had graduated from St Stephen's College, Delhi, in 1971, and came to the US to pursue

degrees in physics and computer science, where his subsequent career spanned the software, telecom and media industries (Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, p. 472, n.5). He left the business world in 1995 to establish the Infinity Foundation, a non-profit organisation that “seeks to promote East-West dialogue and a proper understanding of the Indian civilizational experience in the world, particularly in the United States and India”. The foundation, based in New Jersey, holds that “indigenous non-Western civilizations [should] get a seat on the table as equals in crafting the frameworks of discourse, rather than simply being used as exotic artifacts to be plugged into an overall Euro-Centric framework”.<sup>14</sup> This view was apparent in Malhotra’s presentation to the AAR panel, which was entitled ‘Panch (Five) Asymmetries in the Dialog of Civilizations: A Hindu View’ (Malhotra, 2001).

He maintained that Hindus were excluded from mainstream academic debate (for example, the RISA-L email discussion list) and had therefore started their own Internet forums (such as Yahoo and Sulekha.com). He concluded with the call, “Learning from the way blacks and women achieved symmetry, we need non-Hindus in RISA to stand up to blatant asymmetry before real progress is made. Hopefully, we can together evolve a better and more liberal understanding of Hinduism” (Malhotra, 2001).

A year later, Malhotra issued a major critique of RISA, and of Western scholarship on Hinduism in general (Malhotra, 2002). In ‘RISA Lila-1: Wendy’s Child Syndrome’, Malhotra decried the way in which Doniger and her “children” – her students and others who undertake “psycho-sexual” analyses in Hindu studies – dominate the “incestuous cult” of RISA, which in turn dominates Indological discourse, shapes public opinion and teaches its own brand of “eroticised” Hinduism to South Asian “kids” in US universities. He, like most subsequent diasporic critics, makes a habit of referring to Doniger and other scholars by their first names, a device that seems simultaneously to patronise and trivialise the authors. Malhotra argues that Wendy’s children are “psychosexual deviants or other misfits in their own culture”, and are subject to anal and genital obsessions. “Wendy’s Child Syndrome” is the “projection of the scholar’s personal psychosis upon the subject matter”, and results in the eroticised interpretations of Hindu mythology (Malhotra, 2002).

Malhotra’s article has been characterised as the “tipping point” in the relationship between the diaspora and the academy: “The paper, which received over 8,000 hits within a week, transformed the Hindu perception of the Western academic community from one of adulation, or at least acquiescence, to one of suspicion and even hostility” (Sharma, 2004). ‘RISA Lila-1’ has found a wide readership and to date has been viewed 60,000 times and has generated nearly 500 comments, the vast majority of them favourable.

Malhotra uses four case studies to make his point. First he includes a long section on Kripal’s *Kālī’s Child*, in which he draws heavily on Tyagananda’s rebuttal. Second, he critiques two works by Sarah Caldwell: ‘The Blood-thirsty Tongue and the Self-feeding Breast, Homosexual Fellatio Fantasy in a South Indian Ritual Tradition’ (1999) and *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence and Worship of the Goddess Kali* (2001). Third, he critiques Paul Courtright’s *Gaṇeśa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings* (1985). Finally, he returns to one of the “insider-outsider”

themes raised by Tyagananda in a section entitled ‘How Reliable is Wendy Doniger’s Sanskrit?’ In the following sections, I will outline Malhotra’s case against these authors. It needs to be noted that the entity Malhotra conceives as a unified, homogenous group of scholars whom he calls “Wendy’s children” is in reality a diverse body of individuals with differing relationships with Doniger herself. While Kripal studied under Doniger, others such as Caldwell have only a passing professional relationship with her.

### **Caldwell’s “Blood-thirsty Tongue”**

Sarah Caldwell served as co-chair of the Hinduism Group of RISA 2000–03, and co-chaired the panel entitled ‘Who Speaks for Hinduism?’ at the AAR annual meeting mentioned above. Caldwell was never a student or protégé of Doniger’s (S. Caldwell, email communication, 11 June 2010).

In her essay, she analyses myths and ritual enactments centred on Bhagavati, the local form of the Goddess Kālī, in Kerala. These performances are undertaken during the dry season in order to ensure the fertility of the land and its people. Caldwell’s particular interests are the deity’s red protruding tongue, which she takes to represent the Goddess’s insatiable thirst for blood/semen, and the role of the deity’s breastfeeding, to which she attributes erotic overtones (Caldwell, 1999, pp. 343–44). The author suggests that “themes of eroticism and aggression in the mythology are male transsexual fantasies [which reflect] intense preoedipal fixation on the mother’s body and [express] conflicts over primary feminine identity” (Caldwell, 1999, p. 339).

Caldwell argues that “the absence of the father in the early childhood experience redirects the whole spectrum of infantile psychic impulses toward a very intense and multivalent psychic relationship with the mother or her substitutes” (1999, p. 359). This is particularly relevant in Kerala, where 30 to 40 per cent of the adult male population leave the country to work in the Persian Gulf, returning only once or twice a year (Caldwell, 1999, p. 341).

Malhotra invites readers to “judge for [themselves] as to whether scholars like her represent Hinduism in a balanced manner” (Malhotra, 2002). It is clear that Malhotra finds Caldwell’s psychoanalytical approach and “eroticisation” of mythology unbalanced. He notes that Caldwell was sexually abused by a family member when she was a child, and argues that her interpretations are evidence of “how the scholar’s own psychosis is entering her supposedly objective work”.<sup>15</sup> According to Malhotra, such scholarship may best be understood as “a psychodrama that uncovers the scholar’s own warped pathologies, often hidden beneath deep wounds of past trauma”. Malhotra continues:

This projection of the scholar’s personal psychosis upon the subject matter, using very loose and arbitrary interpretations to stretch the facts and to seek similar pathologies elsewhere, is the very definition of *Wendy’s Child Syndrome*. One could, therefore, enjoy reading the book, *Kali’s Child* as an insight into one particular Wendy’s Child, namely, Jeff Kripal. Caldwell’s writings should, likewise, be seen as an autobiographical projection of a traumatized Western Feminist struggling with feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

Starting out as psychosexual deviants or other misfits in their own culture, many such scholars find hospitality and meaning in India, but later make U-turns for various reasons, especially upon realizing that there is a lucrative market, both for negative exotica and for positive cultural loot (Malhotra, 2002).

There are a number of important issues here. First, Malhotra questions Caldwell's ability to "represent Hinduism" in what he calls a "balanced manner". This question lies at the heart of the Mythology Wars: who has the right and power to represent Hinduism? Critics such as Malhotra are repelled and disturbed by eroticised analyses of the characters and myths they know and love. The positive, "right-handed", middle-class neo-Vedāntic Hinduism of peace and light, yoga and the *Bhagavadgītā* is the socially acceptable form of Hinduism that they desire to be presented in the West. For them, neo-Vedāntic Hinduism is the only Hinduism, or alternatively, is the only Hinduism that matters. These critics – English-speaking, urban, educated and middle-class – may be genuinely unaware of the esoteric, tantric "left-handed" traditions that thrive in other social milieus. They would certainly be correct in maintaining that the "left-handed" traditions are not representative of the form of Hinduism with which they are most familiar, or that is "typical" among educated urban elites. Later in his article, Malhotra states that Doniger, and by implication her "children", raises the visibility of Indian civilisation "in the wrong ways and for the wrong reasons". They have "turned it into stereotyped exotica and erotica, trivializing its rationality and its spiritual truth-claims as fodder for psychoanalysis, and hiding its relevance for today's world" (Malhotra, 2002).

The fact that members of the diaspora are unaware of "left-handed" traditions, find them distasteful or regard them as atypical does not mean that such traditions do not exist. For the scholar, the little known, the secret, the repressed, the "left-handed" are naturally attractive objects of study. Scholars may not perceive their professional role as being to "represent Hinduism in a balanced manner", but rather to contribute to the global accumulation of knowledge. Critics such as Malhotra have either misunderstood, or seek to misrepresent, what the academic enterprise is attempting to achieve.

A second point of interest is Malhotra's appropriation of scholarly criticism of Caldwell's work. An essential aspect of knowledge production in the academic domain is the validation of new knowledge through the process of peer review. This includes anonymous reviews by other scholars as a work passes through the editorial process, and reviews of finished works in learned journals. Malhotra cites a scholarly review of Caldwell's work by Cynthia Humes, in which aspects of the analysis were found to be "unconvincing" and "sensationalist" (Humes, 2001, p. 901).

Humes' review of Caldwell's work is an example of robust scholarly criticism. The goal of critique within the academy is to produce better scholarship through a dialectical process. Critics from the diaspora have sought to appropriate these reviews, not as a means of refining or improving the work under consideration, but as a means of discrediting the author and his/her work. One might use the old Maoist formulation: peer criticism is the equivalent of "contradictions among the people"; we disagree but we can work together to bring about a new synthesis, and

our differences are reconcilable. In the hands of the diasporic critics, these scholarly critiques are portrayed as “contradictions between the people and the enemy” – that is, as being insuperable and terminal. We will see this again in the appropriation of Witzel’s criticism of Doniger’s Vedic work.

Malhotra argues that Caldwell “gives white people individuality and agency, whereas Indians, and especially Hindus, are being denied individuality and agency” (Malhotra, 2002). The interesting point is that this criticism is cast in terms of race, nationalism and religion. This view emanates from a postcolonial milieu in response to historical and religious discourse that had been produced and codified, primarily by members of the colonising powers. Not that American scholars of the twentieth century were ever directly part of the imperial project in India, but they are seen to have inherited the sins of their fathers, because contemporary scholarship is inextricably and genetically linked to the imperialist, Orientalist past.

Partly as a result of the pressure of the Mythology Wars, Caldwell withdrew from academia in 2002, and does not intend to return to it (S. Caldwell, pers. comm.).

### **Courtright’s *Gaṇeśa***

The third work problematised by Malhotra is Paul Courtright’s *Gaṇeśa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings* (1985). The elephant-headed deity is one of the most popular and beloved images in India. Courtright’s work is a source-book of original texts with interpretations, including psychoanalytic ones, of various themes that run through the mythology. Courtright summarises part of the myth of Gaṇeśa’s origin in which Śiva unknowingly cuts off his own son’s head and replaces it with the head of an elephant (1985, p. 5). He interprets this myth in terms of an oedipal relationship between Gaṇeśa as son, Pārvatī as mother, and Śiva as father:

[F]rom a psychoanalytic perspective, there is meaning in the selection of the elephant head. Its trunk is the displaced phallus, a caricature of Śiva’s *liṅga*. It poses no threat because it is too large, flaccid, and in the wrong place to be useful for sexual purposes . . . So Gaṇeśa takes on the attributes of his father but in an inverted form, with an exaggerated limp phallus – ascetic and benign – whereas Śiva is “hard” [*ūrdhvaliṅga*], erotic, and destructive (Courtright, 1985, p. 121).

Courtright also suggests that Gaṇeśa, who had been guarding but not entering the inner chamber of Pārvatī’s house, is like a eunuch guarding the women of the harem. He quotes Hildebeitel in relation to eunuchs, saying, “They have the reputation of being homosexuals, with a penchant for oral sex, and are looked upon as the very dregs of society” (Hildebeitel, 1980, p. 162). Courtright continues:

Although here there seem to be no myths or folktales in which Gaṇeśa explicitly performs oral sex, his insatiable appetite for sweets may be interpreted as an effort to satisfy a hunger that seems inappropriate in an otherwise ascetic disposition, a hunger having clear erotic overtones. Gaṇeśa’s broken tusk, his guardian’s staff, and displaced head can be interpreted as symbols of castration . . . This combination of child-ascetic-eunuch in the

symbolism of Gaṇeśa – each an explicit denial of adult male sexuality – appears to embody a primal Indian male longing: to remain close to the mother and yet be acceptable to the father. This means that the son must retain access to the mother but not attempt to possess her sexually (Courtright, 1985, p. 111).

Courtright's book, a specialised, scholarly work of limited appeal outside academic circles, had reposed in relative obscurity for nearly two decades. Dragged into the limelight by Malhotra's critique, it achieved instant worldwide notoriety. It is easy to see how a non-academic reader, especially a member of a "traditional" Hindu faith community, would be offended by the suggestion that Gaṇeśa, the most family-friendly of deities, might be compared to a castrated eunuch with a penchant for oral sex, and whose trunk represented a limp penis. This is especially true when Courtright's thoughtful academic propositions were taken out of context, and were repackaged to stir up the maximum level of public indignation.

This was just the beginning of the battle over Gaṇeśa's trunk. In October 2003, a widely distributed email invited people to sign an online petition (Malhotra, 2003). The petition, which was later traced to the Hindu Students Society of the University of Louisiana, was titled 'Against the Book Insulting Ganesha and Hinduism'. It was addressed to the President of Emory University (where Courtright taught), the Governor of Georgia, US President Bush, Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee, members of India's Parliament, the US-India Congressional Caucus and the US Attorney General (Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, p. 266, p. 467).

The petition noted that the 2001 edition of Courtright's book (published by Motilal Banarsidass in India) had a "nude cover picture" of the deity (actually a photograph of a fourteenth-century bronze statuette) and contained many "insulting interpretations" and "insidious passages", most of which had been highlighted in Malhotra's 2002 critique. According to Malhotra, these were "clear-cut examples of hate-crimes inflicted on innocent Hindus who worship Ganesha, Shiva and Parvati" (Malhotra, 2002). The petition called on the author and the publisher to "give an unequivocal apology to Hindus", to expunge the offending passages, to immediately withdraw the book, and to cease the use of the book in teaching (Malhotra, 2003). Within a few days of its release, the petition had attracted over 7,000 signatures, but some of the petitioners' comments included death threats (Malhotra, 2003). Courtright is quoted as saying, "Gopal from Singapore said, 'The professor bastard should be hanged' . . . A guy from Germany said, 'Wish this person was next to me, I would have shot him in the head'. A man called Karodkar said, 'Kill the bastard. Whoever wrote this should not be spared'. Someone wanted to throw me into the Indian Ocean" (Vedantam, 2004).

Although the petition was apparently inspired by his critique, Malhotra sought to distance himself from it, in part because of its emphasis on "feelings" rather than reason, and in part because of the abusive comments. With the threat of legal action looming, the petition was withdrawn in November, but the book was now the centre of an international controversy. It was reported that the powerful right-wing Hindu organisation Shiv Sena had written to President Bush demanding its withdrawal.<sup>16</sup> A discussion on the RISA-L email list rapidly descended into abuse.<sup>17</sup> The story received coverage in the *Washington Post* (Vedantam, 2004). On 3 November 2003,

the respected Indian publisher, Motilal Banarsidass, succumbed to perceived public pressure, and posted large newspaper advertisements across India announcing that the book was to be withdrawn. This was met by a counter-call from Western scholars for a boycott of Motilal (Malhotra, 2003).

I mentioned, in relation to Tyagananda's critique of *Kālī's Child*, his attempt to disprove Kripal's theory by challenging the textual basis of his assumptions. This took the form of cross-checking *Kālī's Child* line-by-line against original sources. A similar critique of *Gaṇeśa*, modelled on Tyagananda's methodology, was undertaken by two Indian Americans, Vishal Agarwal (a biomedical materials engineer) and Kalavai Venkat (a consultant with degrees in business administration and physics). Their article was first posted on the Sulekha.com website, and was subsequently reprinted in *Invading the Sacred* (Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, pp. 190–247).

Agarwal and Venkat's article is a catalogue of factual errors, perceived offences, and alternative interpretations. First, they attempt to demonstrate that on many innocuous and non-controversial points Courtright is in error. That is, they question his integrity as a scholar. Secondly, they attempt to prove that Courtright's psychosexual interpretation of *Gaṇeśa* is unsustainable. In some cases Courtright and his two critics quote from different editions of the same text; in others the critics quote from different texts to disprove a point that Courtright seeks to establish. This makes it difficult for a non-expert to adjudicate between the many competing sets of textual claims. Agarwal and Venkat also apply this methodology to Courtright's original doctoral dissertation, on which the book was based, pointing out simple spelling errors and typographical mistakes (Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, p. 245). They also attempt to demonstrate, rather superfluously, that the trunk as "limp phallus" is not attested to in the original sources; nor is the idea that *Gaṇeśa* is a eunuch (Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, pp. 229–36).

Errors are as regrettable as they are unavoidable, yet it is difficult to argue that misspelling *Mahābhārata* as *Māhahārata* would cause offence to Hindu sensibilities. Nor does the critique succeed in its second goal of challenging Courtright's Freudian interpretation of *Gaṇeśa*. In fact, no amount of textual criticism or typographical nitpicking can disprove a view. The fact that Courtright holds this view, and that apparently many of his reviewers and peers in the academy find it illuminating, productive or insightful, cannot be undermined by philological fault-finding. It is possible to disprove a fact by presenting a counter-fact, but interpretations and opinions are not subject to proof or disproof. Malhotra, Agarwal and Venkat, like many successful members of the Indian diaspora, have backgrounds in the natural sciences. This perhaps explains their tendency to see the positivist, scientific "fact" as the basic unit of currency in academic discourse. Had their training been in the humanities or social sciences, they might have been more attuned to the nuanced status of ideas and theories that predominate in these disciplines.

Arvind Sharma provides a useful insight into this question in his article 'Hindus and Scholars' (Sharma, 2004; Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, pp. xv-xvi). He observes that the controversy "is not always about *facts* which may be adjudicated on the basis of evidence but often about *interpretations*,

especially psychoanalytic ones, which do not seem susceptible to such verification". He sees this in terms of "cognitive" and "non-cognitive" statements. Cognitive statements are those which are falsifiable or testable ("Gaṇeśa has a trunk"). Non-cognitive statements are not falsifiable: "Gaṇeśa's trunk is like a limp phallus". Different kinds of criteria are used to judge each class of statement. Sharma maintains that the new challenge is to adjudicate differences of opinion between the faith community and the academic community, on the basis of criteria acceptable to both (Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, p. xvi). We will return to Sharma's constructive approach below.

In 2004, a delegation from the diasporic faith community met with the Dean of Emory University to object to Courtright, his scholarship and his book. Among the pieces of evidence presented to the University was a copy of Agarwal and Venkat's article. Not surprisingly, the delegation's demands were politely but firmly declined (Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, pp. 273–79). As a result of the publicity surrounding Gaṇeśa's trunk, the criticism of Courtright's book has "gone viral" on the Internet. A Google search on the words *limp, phallus* and *Ganesha* now yields 74,000 hits.

### Doniger's Sanskrit

Let us return to Malhotra's fourth and final case study: "How reliable is Wendy Doniger's Sanskrit"?<sup>18</sup> In November 1995, an email discussion arose on the Indology list concerning English translations of the *R̥gveda*. Professor Michael Witzel, an international authority on the Vedas, when discussing the desirability of a new English translation of the *R̥gveda*, made the following remark:

It would be of \*great importance\* [original emphasis] to get Geldner translated [from the German] since it is the only adequate, in fact the only complete translation since Griffith (a hundred years ago), as O'Flaherty's [i.e. Doniger's] translation of a tenth, 108 hymns (in Penguin), is idiosyncratic and unreliable just like her Jaiminiya Brahmana or Manu (re-)translations, and as no complete translation is in sight.<sup>19</sup>

When requested by another list member for some examples of Doniger's "idiosyncrasy and unreliability", he responded on 7 November 1995. Witzel noted in Doniger's translation of RV 10.95 (O'Flaherty, 1981, p. 253), "43 instances which are wrong or where others would easily disagree. In short: UNRELIABLE and idiosyncratic".<sup>20</sup>

Witzel, like Doniger, is one of the giants of South Asian studies. He is Wales Professor of Sanskrit at Harvard University, and has had an illustrious career. As in the case of Courtright vs Agarwal et al., there is little point in a non-expert trying to adjudicate between the two. It is immediately clear, however, even to the untrained eye, that their approach to the Vedas will be different. At the time of this exchange, Witzel was directing a complete, new scholarly translation of the *R̥gveda* (into German). Doniger, on the other hand, had produced an abridged, paperback translation for Penguin for a popular, non-scholarly audience. Obviously the demands and constraints of these two projects were very different. At least some of

Witzel's criticisms of Doniger may be explicable in these terms alone. Using the old Maoist allusion again, this was a "contradiction among the people".

More significant for us is the way in which the diasporic critics latched onto this exchange. Few if any (except perhaps Agarwal and Venkat) have any expertise or formal qualifications in Sanskrit. They are in general unable to produce their own critiques of Doniger's knowledge of Sanskrit, with the result that Witzel's criticism, first publicised by Malhotra, has been widely repeated:

Professor Michael Witzel of Harvard was once publicly challenged to prove his claim that Wendy Doniger's knowledge of Vedic Sanskrit is severely flawed. Witzel's claim seemed as audacious as saying that the Pope is not a good Catholic. Therefore, Witzel quickly published on the web several important examples of Sanskrit mistranslations by Wendy Doniger . . . It is said, that Witzel was privately reprimanded for being so critical of the Queen of Hinduism. Witzel was unfairly demonized and blackballed – it was certainly his right to criticize such blatant blunders, especially given the clout and power enjoyed by Wendy. If gods, goddesses and saints can be deconstructed by her, then why should her work be exempt from criticism? The [ . . . ] examples raise some doubts over whether she should be the Queen (Malhotra, 2002).

Thus Witzel's "domestic" squabble with Doniger over some fine points of Vedic grammar is conflated in the hands of Hindu critics, until "Doniger knows less Sanskrit than Ahmadinejad knows Hebrew".

### ***The Hindus: An Alternative History***

This brings us back to Doniger's own work, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. By the time it appeared in 2009, there had been a decade of bad blood, flaming, and hurtful personal attacks on both sides.<sup>21</sup> Doniger's *Hindus* is "alternative" because most preceding histories have been filtered through male, Brahminical, Sanskritic and then white, Orientalist lenses. The author's intention is to re-envision the full sweep of Indian history from the four "alternative" perspectives of women, dogs, horses and outcasts. Anyone familiar with Doniger's earlier work will immediately recognise the playful, iconoclastic, and inherently controversial style.

Early scholarly reviews of *The Hindus* have been largely favourable: "erudite . . . , richly rewarding" (Smith, 2009, p. 304), "in many ways a tour de force" (Gilmartin, 2010, p. 344). It has also been well received by reviewers in the popular press, for example, by Pankaj Mishra in the *New York Review of Books* (Mishra, 2009). Other favourable reviews have appeared in *Booklist*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Washington Post*. On the other hand, Indian critics in the blogosphere were quick to condemn it as "porn fiction",<sup>22</sup> and an online petition called on Penguin to withdraw it from sale:

The following is a petition from concerned signatories to the Penguin Group asking for an apology for the publication of the factually incorrect and offensive book 'The Hindus – An Alternative History' by Wendy Doniger. We expect Penguin Group to withdraw the book immediately. 'The Hindus: An

Alternative History' is rife with numerous errors in its historical facts and Sanskrit translations. These errors and misrepresentations are bound and perhaps intended to mislead students of Indian and Hindu history. Throughout the book, Doniger analyzes revered Hindu Gods and Goddesses using her widely discredited psychosexual Freudian theories that modern, humanistic psychology has deemed limiting. These interpretations are presented as hard facts and not as speculations. Doniger makes various faulty assumptions about the tradition in order to arrive at her particular spin. In the process, the beliefs, traditions and interpretations of practicing Hindus are simply ignored or bypassed without the unsuspecting reader knowing this to be the case. This kind of Western scholarship has been criticized as Orientalism and Eurocentrism. The non Judeo-Christian faith gets used to dish out voyeurism and the tradition gets eroticized.<sup>23</sup>

There follows a long list of "factual errors" and "derogatory, defamatory and offensive statements", à la Tyagananda, Agarwal and Venkat. By May 2010, the petition had attracted nearly 10,000 signatories, of whom Agarwal was the seventh.

There are two ironies in accusations of Orientalism in this context. First, the diasporic understanding of Hinduism as a singular, monolithic entity is evidence of an internalisation of an early Western Orientalist apprehension of religion in general and "Hinduism" in particular. The way in which Orientalist constructions of Hindu traditions were internalised by forerunners of diasporic critics, such as Rammohan Roy and Vivekananda, has been described by Halbfass (1988), Oddie (2006), Frykenberg (1993) and Lorenzon (1999). Secondly, the fact that diasporic critics attack Doniger for being Orientalist is doubly ironic, as her "alternative history" is explicitly intended to counter earlier Western Orientalist views of Hinduism, especially Hinduism as viewed and understood by Orientalism through an upper-caste Brahminical lens.<sup>24</sup>

The readers' reviews on Amazon.com provide another forum where critics may vent their spleen: "Let me not even go into the racist and hateful tone of her chapters when she actually deals with Hinduism. Her claims that she loves the Hindu culture is like a Pedophile claiming that he 'loves' children" (Vishal Agarwal, 3 February 2010); "The 'Alternate history' Doniger presents, is a stink of bald lies to fit her Hinduphobic Indology" (M. Rao Tammavaran, 2 March 2010); "The author's ignorance, lack of direct experience with the culture, scorn, pettiness, convenient omissions, and oblivion to the times of her subject come through very well. What does not come through is the subject itself. There are many huge factual errors in this book, Wendy owes an apology to her readers" (U. Balu, 4 February 2010).<sup>25</sup>

Many of the issues that colour these critiques – insider vs outsider, language competence, Freud, offence to "feelings", selective use of material, Orientalism, religion, race and personal attacks – have a clear genealogy that may be traced through the earlier case studies above.

## Reflections

These clashes represent the struggle between two epistemic systems for the right to produce knowledge about Hindu Mythology for public consumption. On the one

hand are members of the diasporic Hindu faith community in the US; on the other, members of the Western academy. Each epistemic community has its own “regime of truth”, to use a Foucauldian term; its own processes and mechanisms for the production of true discourse, its own means and standards for validation of knowledge, its own rules for determining who is authorised to make statements that count as true, and its own means of disseminating knowledge.

Western academic practice bears a heavy historical burden. No matter how “Post-Orientalist” we would like to appear, we cannot deny that Oriental Studies was the handmaiden of colonialism and imperialism. In the issues, concerns, theories and approaches to knowledge production, we are the lineal descendants of Orientalism. The objects of our study, no matter how much we love them, are still our “Other”. No matter how unimportant the matter of race may seem to Western academics, the fact that many have white skin is not lost on people on the other side of the barricade.

Yet it may be said in defence of the Western academy that it has also produced the foremost critics of Orientalism, and has led the way in re-imagining colonial pasts. This is a point largely irrelevant to the diasporic critics who prefer to portray the world of Western scholarship as a uniform, malevolent whole.

Diasporic critics find plenty of offence in the writings of “Wendy’s children”, but the truth is that these works, with the exception of Doniger’s *Hindus*, are obscure academic tracts that have little appeal or circulation outside the academy. The critics have been very effective in bringing the offending passages into the limelight, and ensuring that they achieve maximum exposure. The media in both the West and India are highly receptive to reporting the Mythology Wars, and many of the critiques have proliferated in cyberspace. Internet searches on any of these subjects produce thousands of hits as the topics are endlessly recycled on blogs, websites and forums.

It cannot be the words or the interpretations themselves that are offensive, or it would be nonsensical for critics to propagate and perpetuate them. If the description of Gaṇeśa’s trunk as a limp penis is offensive, surely it would be best to leave the reference buried, rather than spread it as widely as possible. If it is not the words themselves that offend, perhaps it is the perceived motivation of their author. If it is the intention of the agent that causes offence, not the act itself, the crux then becomes one of determining the agent’s true intention. Diasporic critics assume that the intentions of “Wendy’s children” are uniformly malign, and yet this is almost certainly not the case. Both Doniger and Kripal were aware that their work might cause offence, but this was certainly not their intention. It is inconceivable that scholars of such standing, who have spent most of their adult lives involved in the study of Indian societies and cultures, would intentionally set out to offend the very source of their intellectual (and sometimes spiritual) inspiration.

It is more likely that diasporic critics attribute malice where none is intended, and perceive offence where none is meant. Why is this happening? Individuals experience a perverse pleasure in sharing a feeling of outrage – such a cause gives one a voice and empowers one’s community. Shared outrage is a form of social glue that binds a group together. In the case of the Indian diaspora, it enables devotees to perform a new type of Hindu identity: a globalised, assertive, “muscular” Hinduism. This mirrors the rise of India as a global power, whose national hero is no longer

a Gandhi, but industrialists such as a Mittal, an Ambani or a Tata. This new identity is also emerging in response to social changes in India, notably the rise of the militant Hindu Right during the 1980s and 1990s. This assertiveness is complicated by a profound insecurity stemming from rapid social change, globalisation, and perceptions of a “Muslim threat”, as manifested in the bloody Mumbai attacks of November 2008. There is a feeling that Hindus must be strong and assertive to survive in the face of these multiple threats. Coupled with this are the fears and uncertainties experienced by all establishing diasporic communities. Indians in the West appear concerned that their children will lose aspects of their Indian identities. Parents worry that their children, like all second-generation immigrants, will lose “their culture”, especially their religious traditions. Thus a recurrent theme in the writings of the diasporic critics is the fear that Indian “children” are being exposed to other interpretations of Hinduism.<sup>26</sup>

Another important theme is that of minority rights discourse. Hindu critics often compare the situation of the diaspora in the US to that of other minority groups, especially African Americans and the Jewish faith community. The implication is that academics would never dream of subjecting other minorities to the perceived offence that Hindus have endured; nor would other minority groups endure such transgressions.

Various parties on both sides have suggested ways of moving forward. Patton and Acarya (2001) put forward a charter of conduct, based on Gandhi’s Satyagraha principles. This six-point charter calls on both sides to renounce anger and resentment, and to refrain from personal attacks and innuendo. They urge both sides to abandon the terms “Western” and “Indian” in an intellectual determinative fashion, as if national identities necessarily determine our intellectual agenda or positions: “At best, such descriptors are ill-founded conclusions about intellectual character, and at worst, they are nothing more than sophisticated and thinly disguised ethnic slurs” (Patton and Acharya, 2001).

In another attempt to provide a corrective, Novetzke (2004) noted that there is a tendency to essentialise all criticism as coming from the Hindu Right, Hindutva, Hindu Nationalists or Hindu Fundamentalists. He called for a more nuanced understanding of expressions and enactments that happen under the banner of “Hinduism”, and urges us to “resist constructing a monolithic entity called the ‘Hindu Right’” (Novetzke, 2004, p. 196).

Arvind Sharma also charted a nuanced and constructive path forward in his article ‘Hindus and Scholars’ (2004), which was reprinted, ironically, as the preface to *Invading the Sacred*. He observes that outsiders (Westerners, Orientalists, colonialists) created and monopolised the discourse on Hinduism, but that now “insiders” are claiming the right to speak about their religion. He identifies a “response threshold”: “This Hindu community in North America has now reached the demographic critical mass, when its reactions can no longer be disregarded” (Sharma, 2004). As noted above, he perceives a mismatch between cognitive and non-cognitive approaches to knowledge. The challenge is how to adjudicate when two epistemic communities use different standards to validate these two kinds of statements – the diaspora and the academy usually appear to be talking at cross purposes. Like Patton and Acarya, he also warns against the genetic fallacy. The truth or falsity of a proposition should be determined on its own merits, not on its

genetics – that is, irrespective of its provenance and authorship; “The Hindu community wonders if the academic community can ever evoke Hinduism without condescension and the academic community wonders if the Hindu community can evoke Hinduism without sentimentality” (Sharma, 2004).

## Conclusion

There is no end in sight to the Mythology Wars. While members of the Western academy may become more circumspect and more sensitive to the potential strife they face, they are unlikely to impose any form of self-censorship. The defence of “academic freedom” has a history that is both long and deep. On the other side of the barrier, it is equally improbable that critics in the diaspora are going to become less vigilant or less vocal.

The sad truth is that the well-intentioned and potentially fruitful approaches suggested by Patton, Acarya, Novetzke and Sharma have been around for a decade, but have regrettably gained little or no traction. Members of the academy see the production of knowledge as bounded only by the rule of law and protected by freedom of inquiry. Attacks on such scholars and their works perform the socially significant function of binding and defining sections of the diasporic faith community, and provide an avenue for the performance of one form of contemporary Hindu identity. As long as this remains the case, it appears likely that Wendy’s children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will be locked in an eternal struggle with their Hindu critics, like the mythical bird Garuda fighting the nāga-serpents.

V.V. Raman in his review of *The Hindus* comments that “Those who have called into question [the] views and legitimacy of the author as a scholar of Hinduism will read it with a critical eye; they may be disappointed to find little that is seriously objectionable” (Raman, 2009). If the lack of offensive content creates a kind of disappointment, then the discovery of such material may be said to induce its opposite, a perverse kind of gratification. People like to share, even if the thing that is shared is a sense of outrage. Sharing creates a group identity and common consciousness, a bulwark of security and certainty in an alien, threatening and rapidly changing environment. One can sense a kind of righteous glee in the critiques of Malhotra, Agarwal and Venkat as they expose yet another typographical error or slip of the (phallic) tongue. Perhaps it was the glow of righteous fury, the perverse pleasure of communal outrage, that warmed the demonstrators outside the New School in New York until the samosas arrived.

## Notes

1. [http://www.ushaonline.org/Downloads/PROTEST\\_MARCH\\_FLIER.pdf](http://www.ushaonline.org/Downloads/PROTEST_MARCH_FLIER.pdf), accessed 16 September 2010, but subsequently password protected, and <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/jacketcopy/2010/03/donigerprotest.html>, accessed 4 November 2010.
2. [http://www.ushaonline.org/Downloads/PROTEST\\_MARCH\\_FLIER.pdf](http://www.ushaonline.org/Downloads/PROTEST_MARCH_FLIER.pdf), accessed 16 September 2010, but subsequently password protected.
3. [http://divinity.uchicago.edu/faculty/doniger\\_cv.pdf](http://divinity.uchicago.edu/faculty/doniger_cv.pdf), accessed 4 November 2010.
4. [http://www.ushaonline.org/Downloads/PROTEST\\_MARCH\\_FLIER.pdf](http://www.ushaonline.org/Downloads/PROTEST_MARCH_FLIER.pdf), and [http://www.ushaonline.org/Media-Press\\_Release-USHAUrgesNBCCNottoHonorDrWendyDoniger.aspx](http://www.ushaonline.org/Media-Press_Release-USHAUrgesNBCCNottoHonorDrWendyDoniger.aspx), accessed 16 September 2010, but subsequently password protected.

5. [http://www.ushaonline.org/Downloads/PROTEST\\_MARCH\\_FLIER.pdf](http://www.ushaonline.org/Downloads/PROTEST_MARCH_FLIER.pdf), and [http://www.ushaonline.org/Media-Press\\_Release-USHAUrgesNBCCNottoHonorDrWendyDoniger.aspx](http://www.ushaonline.org/Media-Press_Release-USHAUrgesNBCCNottoHonorDrWendyDoniger.aspx), accessed 16 September 2010, but subsequently password protected.
6. <http://www.belurmath.org/home.htm>, accessed 4 November 2010.
7. I would like to acknowledge an anonymous reviewer for suggesting these references.
8. US Census Bureau. Available at [http://www.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb95\\_24.pdf](http://www.census.gov/apsd/www/statbrief/sb95_24.pdf) and <http://www.census.gov/acs/>, both accessed 4 November 2010.
9. <http://web.mac.com/tyag/Home/Biodata.html>, accessed 4 November 2010.
10. <http://www.barnard.edu/religion/defamation/hawley.htm>, accessed 4 November 2010.
11. <http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~kalischi/>, accessed 4 November 2010.
12. This assertion is challenged by the existence of acclaimed Indian scholars such as Sudhir Kakar, who have undertaken successful psychoanalytical studies of Indian society and religions (1970; 1990; 1991). Kakar seems to have escaped the attention of diasporic critics, which confirms my contention that much of the criticism of Doniger and others has a racial component. See also Ashis Nandy (1995).
13. <http://www.barnard.edu/religion/defamation/index.htm>, accessed 4 November 2010.
14. <http://infinityfoundation.com/index.shtml>, accessed 4 November 2010.
15. Sadly, this account of abuse is accurate (Caldwell, 2002, p. 20).
16. <http://www.sandiego.edu/cas/theo/risa-l/oldarchives/archive03/msg07225.html>, accessed 4 November 2010.
17. <http://www.infinityfoundation.com/deNicolas.htm>, accessed 4 November 2010.
18. Reproduced in Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, pp. 66–72.
19. <http://listserv.liv.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind9511&L=indology&D=0&F=P&O=D&P=185>, accessed 4 November 2010.
20. <http://listserv.liv.ac.uk/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind9511&L=indology&O=D&F=PP&P=3192>, accessed 4 November 2010.
21. Doniger, a person able to give as good as she gets, once inferred that Malhotra was *aufgestellte Mausekrek*, “a mouse turd standing up on end” (Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007, p. 305).
22. <http://voxindica.blogspot.com/2010/03/wendy-donigers-book-porn-fiction-or.html>, accessed 4 November 2010.
23. <http://www.petitiononline.com/dharma10/petition.html>, accessed 4 November 2010.
24. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out these ironies.
25. <http://alturl.com/gj6p>, accessed 4 November 2010.
26. See particularly the cartoons on this topic in Ramaswamy, de Nicolas and Banerjee, 2007.

## References

- Agarwal, V. and K. Venkat (2007) Paul Courtright’s ‘Ganesa, lord of obstacles, lord of beginnings’: An independent review, in K. Ramaswamy, A. de Nicolas and A. Banerjee (eds), *Invading the sacred: An analysis of Hinduism studies in America*, pp. 190–247 (New Delhi: Rupa and Co).
- Caldwell, S. (2001) *Oh terrifying mother: Sexuality, violence and worship of the goddess Kali* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Caldwell, S. (1999) The Blood-thirsty tongue and the self-feeding breast: Homosexual fellatio fantasy in a South Indian ritual tradition, in T. Vaidyanathan and J. Kripal (eds), *Vishnu on Freud’s desk: A reader in psychoanalysis and hinduism*, pp. 339–66 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Caldwell, S. (2002) The heart of the secret: A personal and scholarly encounter with Shakta Tantrism in Siddha Yoga. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 10(1), pp. 10–51.
- Courtright, P. (1985) *Ganeśa: Lord of obstacles, lord of beginnings* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Doniger, W. (2009) *The Hindus: An alternative history* (New York: The Penguin Press).
- Erikson, E. (1970) *Gandhi’s truth: On the origins of militant nonviolence* (London: Faber and Faber).
- Freud, S. (1961 [1929]) *Civilization and its discontents*, translated from the German and edited by James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc).
- Frykenberg, R. (1993) Constructions of Hinduism at the nexus of history and religion. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23(3), pp. 523–50.

- Gilmartin, D. (2010) Wendy Doniger, *The Hindus: An Alternative History*. *Indian Historical Review* 37(2), pp. 338–45.
- Haberman, D. (1997) Kali's child: The mystical and the erotic in the life and teachings of Ramakrishna. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56(2), pp. 531–32.
- Halbfass, W. (1988) *India and Europe: An essay in understanding* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press).
- Hawley, J. (1998) Kali's child: The mystical and the erotic in the life and teachings of Ramakrishna. *History of Religions* 37(4), pp. 401–04.
- Hiltebeitel, A. (1980) Śiva, the goddess, and the disguises of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī. *History of Religions* 20, pp. 147–74.
- Humes, C. (2001) In her image: New studies of female divinity in South Asian art. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69(4), pp. 893–90.
- Kakar, S. (1990) *Intimate relations: Exploring Indian sexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Kakar, S. (1991) *The analyst and the mystic: Psychoanalytic reflections on religion and mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Kakar, S. (1978) *The inner world: A psycho-analytical study of childhood and society in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- Kripal, J. (1995) *Kālī's child: The mystical and the erotic in the life and teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).
- Lannoy, R. (1971) *The speaking tree: A study of Indian culture and society* (London: Oxford University Press).
- Lorenzon, D. (1999) Who invented Hinduisms? *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41(4), pp. 630–59.
- Malhotra, R. (2001) Panch (five) asymmetries in the dialog of civilizations: A Hindu view. Available at <http://www.barnard.edu/religion/defamation/malhotra.htm>, accessed 22 April 2010.
- Malhotra, R. (2002, 6 September) RISA Lila–1: Wendy's child syndrome. Available at <http://rajivmalhotra.sulekha.com/blog/post/2002/09/risa-lila-1-wendy-s-child-syndrome.htm>, accessed 1 April 2010.
- Malhotra, R. (2003, 17 November) RISA Lila–2: Limp scholarship and demonology. Available at <http://rajivmalhotra.sulekha.com/blog/post/2003/11/risa-lila-2-limp-scholarship-and-demonology.htm>, accessed 5 May 2010.
- Masson, J. (1980) *The oceanic feeling: The origins of religious sentiment in ancient India* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel).
- Mishra, P. (2009, 24 April). Another incarnation. *New York Review of Books*. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/26/books/review/Mishra-t.html>, accessed 1 April 2010.
- Nandy, A. (1995) *The savage Freud and other essays on possible and retrievable selves* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).
- Novetzke, C. (2004) The Laine controversy and the study of Hinduism. *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 8(1–3), pp. 183–201.
- Novetzke, C. (2006) The study of Indian religions in the US academy. *India Review* 5(1), pp. 91–121.
- Obeyesekere, G. (1990) *The work of culture: Symbolic transformation in psychoanalysis and anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Oddie, G. (2006) *Imagined Hinduism: British Protestant missionary constructions of Hinduism, 1793–1900* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications).
- Patton, L. and K. Acharya (2001) Toward a Gandhian pragmatics of scholarly collaboration. Available at [http://www.barnard.edu/religion/defamation/patton\\_acharya.htm](http://www.barnard.edu/religion/defamation/patton_acharya.htm), accessed 1 April 2010.
- Raman, V. (2009) Book review: *The Hindus: An alternative history*. *Choice*, August, p. 2338.
- Ramaswamy, K., A. de Nicolas and A. Banerjee (2007) *Invading the sacred: An analysis of Hinduism studies in America* (New Delhi: Rupa and Co).
- Rolland, R. (1953 [1929]) *The life of Ramakrishna*, translated from the original French by E.F. Malcolm-Smith Hayavati (Almora: Advaita Ashrama).
- Sharma, A. (2004) Hindus and scholars. *Religion in the News* 7(1). Available at <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/RINV017No1/Hindus%20and%20Scholars.htm>.
- Sharma, A. (2007) Preface, in K. Ramaswamy, A. de Nicolas and A. Banerjee (eds), *Invading the sacred: An analysis of Hinduism studies in America*, pp. xi–xviii (New Delhi: Rupa and Co).
- Smith, D. (2003) *Hinduism and modernity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell).

- Smith, F.M. (2009) The Hindus: An alternative history – by Wendy Doniger. *Religious Studies Review* 35(4), p. 302.
- Tyagananda, S. (2000) Kali's child revisited or didn't anyone check the documentation? Available at <http://www.gemstone-av.com/KCR3b.pdf>, accessed 1 April 2010.
- Tyagananda, S. (2001) Reflections on Hindu studies vis-à-vis Hindu practice. Available at <http://www.barnard.edu/religion/defamation/tyagananda.htm>, accessed 1 April 2010.
- Urban, H. (1998) Kali's child: The mystical and the erotic in the life and teachings of Ramakrishna. *The Journal of Religion* 78(2), pp. 318–19.
- Vedantam, S. (2004) Wrath over a Hindu god; US scholars' writings draw threats from faithful. *The Washington Post*, 10 April.