Nidān: International Journal for Indian Studies

ISSN: 2414-8636

Theme: Multi-religious Entanglements in Peninsular India

Guest Editor: Ines G. Županov

Vol. 5. No. 2. December, 2020
Published at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa

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ISSN 2414-8636

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Editorial Preface

2020 has been a singular year for us, and we at Nidān are hardly exceptional for feeling burdened by the global chaos of the CoVid-19 pandemic. While some of our contributors could hardly move out of home, or do fieldwork, with libraries and archives also remaining shut, many contributors were stuck abroad, in the middle of lockdowns and travel bans, unable to meet family, friends, and colleagues, but as virtual, zoom-skype presences. Our sense of reality receded this year, becoming transformed into a hybrid form that was, on the one hand isolating, but on the other, catapulted us as global scholars, able to meet across continents with never-before-imagined ease. This is also the year when Nidān editor-in-chief, Professor P. Pratap Kumar invited me to write the editorial preface for the December 2020 issue. While I thank him for this, I also want to thank Professor Ines Županov for guest editing this year's issue and bringing together a dedicated team of scholars on religion in Peninsular India. This issue brings together cutting-edge research on the histories of religion, based on a closer reading of archaeological records, political discourse, as also folklore, and I congratulate all contributors for their excellent scholarship. Nidān ran a double special issue this year, wherein the articles on Peninsular India were accompanied by two excellent articles on religion and ethnic identity, using demonstrations in India around the CAA (Citizens Amendment Act) as a base. We have, again, just like the July issue, interesting book reviews, one of them much in the spirit of research on Peninsular India in this issue. I am grateful to scholars and peer reviewers for their contributions in this difficult time, and I am grateful to the Sabinet team and the UKZN website managers for their support. While I hope our readers will enjoy this issue, I take the opportunity to wish all our readers, supporters, editors and editorial board, management team, reviewers, and contributors a productive, optimistic, and safe 2021.

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Table of Contents

Nidān, Volume 5, No. 2, December 2020, pp. 1-4
ISSN 2414-8636
doi.org/10.36886/nidan.2020.5.2.1

Introduction: Multi-religious Entanglements: Folding Past and Present

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A copper plate, a ritual and a conversation in the three articles published in Nidān's December 2020 issue address as much, each following its own rhythm of narrative, a completed diachronic process and the synchronic structure of relationships (White, 1980: 7). They are case studies that will interest both historians and anthropologists. At the center of each "story" that the authors record and capture in order to explore a longue durée history of practices and concepts, in the chronologically first two articles, and in the third, an ethnographic picture shot of the contemporary political mood, the context of religious plurality is highlighted as a capillary source nourishing cultural imagination of the peoples inhabiting the Indian Ocean and Peninsular India.

In the Nidān July 2020 issue, the conversation was open to reflect on South Asian resilient multi-religious morphology in the three articles focusing on borderland and marginal communities as well as "foreign" textual (religious) traditions torn between indigenization and dissent. In the present volume, each article takes on the presence of "religious others" as essential for the construction of the community since it seems to be the very stuff on which its interior social cohesion is created and maintained. This fact does not exclude latent animosity, as we can see in the article on Shvetambara Jains in Western India in which Muslims as a category continue to be a problem in spite of the existence and maintenance of strict social distance (ignorance, spatial separation).

Beyond different methodologies and from different disciplinary perspectives, all three articles – Manu Devadevan's "The Tarisappalli Copperplate Grant and the First Christians of India"; Brenda Beck's "A Contemporary Tamil Patti Pongal Ritual: Winter Solstice Concepts and Historical Precedents found in Ancient Mesopotamia"; Andrea Luithle-Hardenberg, "The Citizen Amendment Act of 2019 and its Lack of Impact on Shvetambara Jains in Western India: Cautious Debates on Religious Freedom and Minority Rights" – propose fascinating analyses of particular, even singular events which serve them as clues to understanding a wider configuration of social and cultural meanings in which these historically situated events were or are embedded.

Manu Devadevan terse but economic article puts a spotlight on the oldest document or object attesting to the presence of Jews, Muslims and Christians in Kerala, the Tarisappali Copperplate grant issued in 849 by a Chera king Sthanu Ravi. This document is important for the history of Kollam which became

important city and emporium in the lucrative pepper trade that connected from the medieval period the whole maritime Euro-Asia. The plate – in fact five plates – records a grant of land to the church (*palli*) of Tarisa by the Venadu chief Ayyandigal Tiruvadi and itself is a standard land grant document with minute description (and prescription) of duties, revenues, labor arrangements, land occupation and cultivation rights, tax exemptions and its relation to the trading groups (Anjuvannam and Manigramam) and to the king. It is evident from the text that the importance of the church extended far beyond the "religious" services that it was supposed to provide, but that is was in fact functioning as an economic hub and the center of international trade. The witnesses to the grant were Arab Muslim traders, eleven of them, depositing signatures in Kufic script, the ten Christian and Muslim signatures are in Pahlavi script and there are five Jewish signatures in Hebrew, in addition to presence of the whole local royal, administrative and commercial elite.

The main thrust of Devadevan's article is to point to the fact that the grant shows a deep embeddedness and implication of the Christian Church in the local regime of agrarian production and land relations, all the while serving as a nerve center of the overseas merchant networks. This is of course not the whole story, but a "screen shot" of one particular moment in the history of Kerala's dynamic and religiously plural society of the medieval period. As if arrested in time, the witnesses belonging to different religious communities stand shoulder to shoulder to celebrate the inauguration of, perhaps, a new mercantile and financial enterprise under the guise of the church. The point not emphasized enough, according to Devadevan, is the extent to which the new Christian church resembled in its structure the temple, which relied primarily on its extended agrarian base.

Since Devadevan prefers to stay close to his philological and epigraphical analysis without venturing into larger comparative framework, and since there is a dearth of similar documents for other Semitic religious endowments in the same period, we are still left with questions and hope that the article will invite further research on religious and trade networks and the way in which they were domesticated locally.

Just as Devadevan's article is economical and refusing to speculate further in any direction but the one his document allowed him, Brenda Beck leans on her long experience in the field of Tamil folklore and ethnography in Kongunadu and explored by way of looking into a ritual, *Patti Pongal*. Beck's interest in linking this ritual to which she first attended in 1965 and took pictures of some of its scenes was resuscitated by her recent visit in 2020. Beck provides a detailed description of Patti Pongal ritual which is a recurring calendrical event linked to the winter solstice. Each symbolic element in the ritual from the constructing of a pond (*teppakulam*) and the shrine to Seven Virgins, placing the pot full of grain and the sugar cane tripod, and the bullock cart race are given metaphorical explanation against the backdrop of Tamil mythology and folk beliefs. Beck's ethnographic erudition is impressive and she is able to link the smallest of the details to the larger universe of Tamil devotional iconography and literature. Tamil agrarian world comes out as full of "dark" cruel (blood drenched) moments

and suspended in astral connections, a mess and a clockwork. Beck's enthusiasm for this life world is contagious.

Both Beck's and Andrea Luithle-Hardenberg's article raise an old but never resolved (nor resolvable) question of disciplinary boundaries between history and anthropology. The history of a ritual is a perfect example of history congealed in a repeated act (in the present) which nevertheless may lose or acquire new meanings. Hence the focus on history in Beck's article since she wants to reclaim these lost worlds of signification.

For Andrea Luithle-Hardenberg, on the contrary history is important but in this article it is only a pretext to talk about the present. Like Beck, she has revisited her fieldwork just before the covid-19 pandemic and had fresh anthropological observations to share. The first part of her article deals with the history of the political context in which Shvetambara Jain community in Western India (mostly Mumbai) navigates between being labelled as "Hindu" and struggling to be recognized as a separate religious community. This ambiguous position is uncomfortable, argues Luithle-Hardenberg, because even among the community there is no hard consensus. They recognize advantages in contemporary India to be recognized as belonging to majority religious family, but at the same time the only way to preserve their identity is to preserve a minority status. Historically speaking, it is well known that many local sects disappeared precisely because they failed to keep the distinction between them and the "Hindu" environment. If the majority "Hindu" society is indeed threatening the survival of the Shvetambara Jain community, the real "other", Luithle-Hardenberg claims, is "Muslim", the largest minority in contemporary India, currently feeling the brunt of the rabid Hindutva nationalism.

It is in the second part of the article where she provides the results and analysis of her recent fieldwork among the Shvetambara Jains in Mumbai. The setting was a one-week long *diksha* festival during which three lay people got to be initiated into the Jain ascetic order, which is, by the way, the most important mechanism of identity distinction from the Hindus. According to the author, it was during these festivities that she interviewed various members of the community about their opinion concerning the recent, nationally widely contested Citizen Amendment Act. She shows how the interior cohesion of the Shvetambara Jains is a priority when faced with any other political movement around them even if they had to espouse unpopular views. "Not taking sides" in the CAA agitation was a difficult position to maintain.

This issue of Nidān will provide food for thought for all students of Indian history and society who are passionate about Indian heritage and wise enough to think beyond static divisions and religious essences as they came to be perceived today. India is suffering of political monochromism imposed by Hindu nationalist agenda, but deep bellow at the level of a lived experience, as we see in all three articles the society coheres around different ideas and objects. When powerful ideologies fuelled by new communication technologies interfere they mobilize millions of people around invented and downright wrong and false stories, the violence they engender is horrific. The three articles in this volume refer to

smaller communities where local adjustment, accommodation and mutual trust still hold their world together.

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Nidān, Volume 5, No. 2, December, 2020, pp. 5-26
ISSN 2414-8636
doi.org/10.36886/nidan.2020.5.2.2

The Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplate Grant and the Early Christians of India

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Abstract

Historical assessments on precolonial Kerala generally identify the Christians of the region as a community of traders. Their presence as agrarian entrepreneurs is oftentimes described at some length, but only in the context of pepper production. Little is said of Christian involvement in other spheres of agriculture, especially wet-rice cultivation. The purpose of this paper is to propose a revision to the trade- and pepper-centred perspective. It examines the Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplate Grant of 849 to place in relief the larger regimes of agriculture and the revenue systems associated with it in which the Christians, as well as long-distance trade, were deeply implicated from very early times.

Keywords: Tarisāppaḷḷi, St. Thomas Christians, Kollaṃ, Maruvān Sapīrīśō, Cēras, maritime trade, agrarian economy

Introduction

The history of Christian, Muslim and Judaic presence in precolonial Kerala is closely connected to the historical networks of Indian Ocean trade. Historiography and the sources informing it are unambiguous on this count. Writing of a popular legend about the arrival of Islam in Kerala, Sebastian R. Prange has recently observed that the story-world thereof "is not invented of whole cloth but consistent with the way in which historians have come to understand the trading world of maritime Asia" (Prange, 2018: 2). Three and half decades ago, Kirti Narayan Chaudhuri wrote in his characteristically poetic vein:

> The countries of the Indian Ocean did not share a common destiny during the period under review, as those of the Mediterranean may have done under Philip II. But there was a firm impression in the minds of contemporaries, sensed also by historians later, that the ocean had its own unity, a distinct sphere of influence. Means of travel, movements of

> peoples, economic exchange, climate, and historical forces created elements of cohesion (Chaudhuri, 1985: 3).

Chaudhuri was not writing about the south-western seaboard of India *per se*, but his words reflect the broader intellectual contours of histories of maritime trade and its underlying relationship with religion. Most historians share this position, even when, unlike Chaudhuri, they lack the gift to turn trade history into poetry. In the context of Kerala, they place the arrival and domestication of Semitic faiths at the intersection of trade, politics and religion. In the introduction to his collection of essays on maritime India, Pius Malekandathil speaks of an 'ecology of the sea' which involved fight against its furies on the one hand and tapping its resources on the other.

In this process of tapping the resources of the sea, a typical professional culture linked with fishing, salt-panning or a sea-borne trade, a food culture with rich ingredients of sea species, a religious culture where the sea becomes the central component of devotional practices and rituals, a social networking, where bonds established by collective sea-faring evolved over years, were made to become the basic features of the coastal societies of India, as in the case of any other country (Malekandathil, 2010: xii). The arrival and domestication of Semitic faiths is placed in this frame of understanding with seafaring as its hinge as it were.

What is amiss in these assessments of the 'basic features' of coastal life is the agrarian component, and when it figures in the greater body of discussions as it oftentimes does in the maritime histories of Kerala prominently, it is limited to pepper production, with little reflections on the spheres of agrarian life that centre on grain production. As a matter of fact, next to nothing has been written on the ways in which Christians, Muslims and Jews were implicated in the region's agrarian economy, save in the pepper economy, before the eighteenth century. As it turns out, though, the rather impressionistic picture we gather from our sources, which unfortunately are not quantifiable, shows that in terms of the area, the swathes of pepper orchards were hardly a match to the extent of land under paddy cultivation in pre-colonial times.[1] Histories of trade, as well as histories of the people who adhered to one or other of the Semitic faiths, have always overlooked this fact. Tied as they are to narratives of seafaring and pepper production, the region's Christian, Muslim and Judaic population do not figure in the larger agrarian histories of the region. This perspective calls for revision.

[1] The sources available for making an estimation of agriculture include inscriptions and palm leaf documents (which historians now call the *granthavari*s), many of them containing documents concerning land transactions. Most *granthavari*s have documents that are not older than the sixteenth century. As far as earlier periods are concerned, we are almost completely at the mercy of copper plate and temple inscriptions, which are not as numerous as in the adjoining Karnataka or Tamil Nadu and begin to shrink in numbers from the late thirteenth century onwards.

Regrettably for us, sources that might help us to take up the existing perspective for reassessment are nearly non-existent for the first millennium of our era. This is as true for Kerala as it is for other parts of the South Asia. Inscriptions that shed light on people practicing Semitic faiths are few and far between, and the ones carrying charters of land endowments made to them are close to a naught. We have an exception to this state of affairs in the famous Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplate Grant of 849 CE, issued from the port-city of Kollaṃ. In this paper, I propose to make a description of this grant against the backdrop of historical developments in ninth-century Kerala and, in the light of this description, present an alternative to the trade-alone assessment found in existing histories. The focus will be limited to Christianity, as West Asians of other faiths—Muslims, Jews and perhaps Zoroastrians too—figure only as witnesses to this grant made to a Christian church.

The Existing Histories

The Book of Duarte Barbosa, written sometime in the second decade of the sixteenth century, begins its account of Kerala with a terse and graphic statement of the same perspective. "They say," writes Barbosa on the legend that Prange is also alluding to,

> that in ancient days there was a heathen king, whose name was Cirimay Pirencal, a very mighty Lord: And after the Moors of Meca had discovered India they began to voyage towards it for the sake of pepper, of which they first began to take cargoes at Coulam, a city with a harbour, where the king oft times abides…. And continuing to sail to India for many years they began to spread out therein and they had such discussions with the King himself and he with them, that in the end they converted him to the sect of the abominable Mafamede (Barbosa, 1921: 3).

For all their empirical richness and alleged conceptual rigour, historical accounts dovetail neatly with the impression that sources such as these create, when it comes to their treatment of processual historical developments. They also tend to appreciate the Semitic faiths as alien, at least to the extent that these faiths did not originate within Kerala. Such an approach is rarely noticed in assessments related to Buddhism, Jainism and faiths that have their roots in the vaidik, āgamik and tāntrik traditions, none of which can claim Kerala or south Indian origins. With alien-ness implicit or stated in so many words in the analytic, it becomes necessary to invoke patronizing tales of tolerance, cohesiveness and symbiosis between the 'alien' and the 'native' faiths, which is at times done with the 'refined' conceptual trope of inclusiveness. We are then left with a story that explores, in Elizabeth Lambourn's words, "the degree of their distinctiveness or embeddedness, and the ways in which this is negotiated" (Lambourn, 2018: 13).

It is not surprising, then, that existing conventions of historiography on precolonial Kerala have little to say on the agrarian foundations of the 'trading'

faiths. Part of the blame must rest on the nature of the surviving sources. There are no accounts before the eighteenth century, which tell us that Muslims were involved in agricultural production. But if Barbosa's estimate is not seriously off the mark, a fifth of the region's population was Muslim in the early sixteenth century and was mostly native, speaking the local language (Barbosa, 1921: 74). We cannot by any stretch of imagination regard them all as traders. No document exists concerning agrarian Jews for any period (unless there is something in the vast Dutch archives that remain largely unexplored). Christian involvement in pepper production (to the extent of a monopoly) is known from a Portuguese document of 1529 (Malekandathil, 2017: 356). It need not be posited that these Christians were responding to increased demand for pepper in the wake of Portuguese presence on the south-western coast by expanding their portfolio to include agriculture. Already in 1346, Giovanni Marignolli had found the St. Thomas Christians to be proprietors of pepper gardens. He knew Kerala as the place where the whole world's pepper is produced.

> Now this pepper grows on a kind of vine, which are planted just like in our vineyards…. When they have ripened, they are left to dry upon the trees, and when shrivelled by the excessive heat the dry clusters are knocked off with a stick and caught upon linen cloths, and so the harvest is gathered…. And there is no roasting of pepper, as authors have falsely asserted, nor does it grow in forests, but in regular gardens; nor are the Saracens the proprietors but the Christians of St. Thomas (Yule, 1914: 216-17).

Being proprietors of vines that spread out 'upon the trees' in 'regular gardens' meant that the St. Thomas Christians were owners of orchards on which fruit trees and palms such as those of the coconut and areca nut were under cultivation. The St. Thomas Christians were, in other words, cultivators who were not into pepper production alone. Limited as they are, these important pieces of evidence point to Christian involvement on the agrarian front more extensively than the pepper-centred view concedes.

A second difficulty in the existing histories is their inability to shed light on the making of institutional structures based within the local economy, functioning among other things as supporting nodes for sea-bound trade. In the absence of such structures, maritime trade would be of an *ad hoc* order. Being seasonal in character, *ad hoc* trade would be hard to maintain for long, especially in the context of the risk and uncertainties involved in sea travel. Long-standing trade spanning across centuries would have been well-nigh impossible without support from institutions that had strong economic and political links with local groups and were capable of generating resources from within the region. This problem is yet to find its place in maritime histories of Kerala.

The Ninth-Century Context

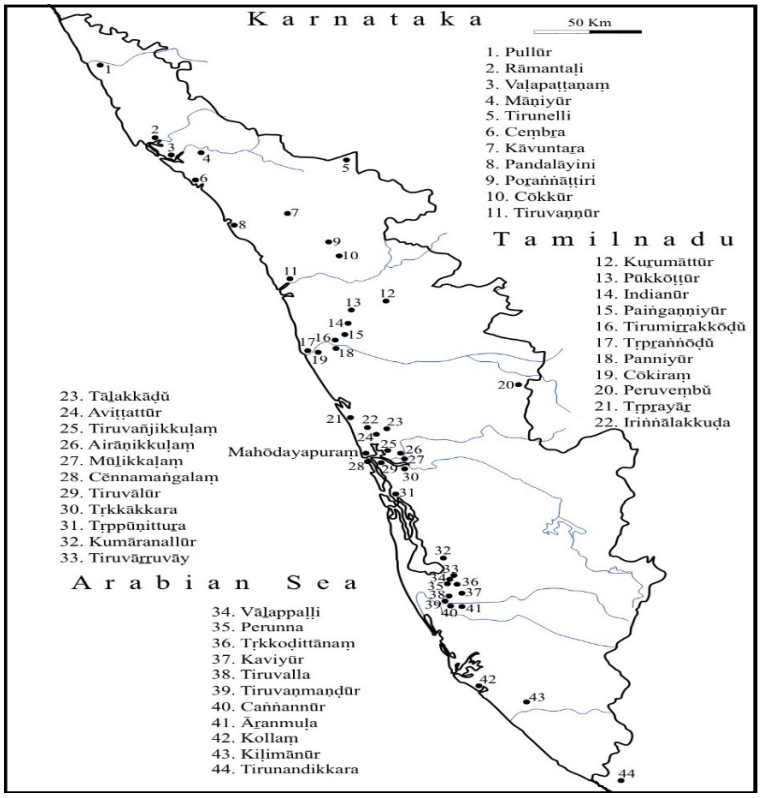
Kerala was witness to two major developments in the ninth century. The first of these was the commencement of a wave of urbanisation, that saw the rise of important cities such as Koḍuṅṅallūr (Mahōdayapuraṃ), Kollaṃ (Kurakkēṇikkollaṃ), Ēḻimala (Ēḻilmalai) and Vaḷapaṭṭaṇaṃ (Vaḷabhapaṭṭaṇaṃ), in addition to scores of temple-centred settlements that had the demeanour of urban centres. A look at the distribution of urban centres and temple settlements in Kerala in the ninth and the tenth century points to the extent to which wet-rice agriculture had spread in the region (see Map 1).[2] The endowments made to many a temple in this period give us a broad sense of the centrality of wet-rice agriculture in the making of this political economy.[3]

A few urban enclaves had arisen in Kerala in the first three centuries CE. We get glimpses of these places of exchange from several hundred Tamil songs composed mostly in the second and the third century and compiled in the seventh century as the eight anthologies, *Eṭṭutogai*. These centres included Muciṟi and the unidentified places mentioned in Graeco-Roman sources, such as Tyndis (the Toṇḍi of the *Eṭṭutogai* songs) and Nelcynda. By the early fourth century CE, they had all gone into oblivion as part of the pan-Indian urban decay that occurred between ca. 150 and 350 CE.[4] Sources, both literary as well as archaeological, do not point to the existence of urban centres in Kerala for nearly five centuries after the early fourth century CE. Some coastal settlements might have functioned as centres for exporting pepper. In the mid sixth century, Cosmas Indicopleustes identified three such centres in Kerala, Salopatana, Nalopatana and Poudopatana, in addition to two others further north, Parti and Mangarouth (McCrindle, 1897: 367). A new wave of urbanization had commenced in several parts of South Asia from the sixth century. It gained momentum only after the ninth century, though, and the rise of urban centres in Kerala occurred against the backdrop of these larger subcontinental developments.

[2] The relationship between the spread of plough-based wet-rice agriculture and the making of temple settlements is discussed in Gurukkal, 1992.

[3] The evidence thereof sheds light on large-scale paddy transactions in the temple, and aspects of tenancy, cultivation rights and transfer of land through mortgage and other means. These are discussed in detail in Devadevan, 2014.

[4] On urban decay, see Sharma, 1987. There are several difficulties in Sharma's thesis which has led to widespread criticism, but the critics generally overlook the data that Sharma presents. A revised statement of the urban decay thesis is made in Devadevan, 2020: 12-14; 419-420.



Map 1: Major Settlements of the Cēra Period (Courtesy: Author)

Between the eighth and the tenth century, a few important centres of maritime trade had arisen on the west coast. Some of them were riverine ports situated a few miles away from the coastline, connecting them with the agrarian hinterland through the waterways. The oldest of these, Navsārī (Navasārikā) to the south of present-day Sūrat in Gujarat, had developed in the early eighth century as an outpost of the Caḷukyas[5] of Bādāmi (Vātāpi) with a lateral line of the house governing the city and its hinterland. By the ninth century, Sañjān (Saṃyāna) in southern Gujarat had come into prominence, and by the close of the tenth century, there were a few more entrepôt centres on the Konkan coast, such as Khārēpāṭan (Balipaṭṭaṇa) in Maharashtra and Candōr (Candrapura) in Goa (Chakravarti, 1990: 2016).

These ports had brisk trade with West Asia and northern Africa, and welcomed a number of non-local settlers from within India as well as from Persia and the Arab world. Inscriptions from Sañjān confirm the presence of the Pañcagauḍas of eastern India and traders from Bhinmāl (Bhillamālā) in Rajasthan, who both owned religious establishments in the town with land attached to it (Chakravarti, 1990). These records also identify the administrator of the town as a Tajik (Tājika) called Sugatipa Madhumati, son of a certain Śayyārahāra. He was in the Rāṣṭrakūṭa pay and resolved a dispute concerning a plot of temple land,

[5] Historians spell the name of this dynasty as Cāḷukya, but in their records rulers of this line identified themselves as Caḷukyas. The spelling popular now occurs only from later times, when it comes to be used by the chiefdoms of Veṅgi, Vēmulavāḍa, etc., and by the rulers who succeeded the Rāṣṭrakūṭas in 972, viz., the Kalyāṇa Cāḷukyas.

which had cropped up between the Pañcagauḍas and the Bhinmāl traders. The second part of his name is believed to be a Sanskrit rendering of the Arab name Muhammad, and his father's name recorded in the inscription thought to be a Sanskrit adaptation of Shahryar (Ibid.). The legend of the Zoroastrians (Parsis), recounted in the sixteenth-century text *Kissā-e Sañjān*, identifies Sañjān as the place in India where they first settled after their exodus from Persia (Williams, 2009). The rise of the Kollaṃ and Koḍuṅṅallūr ports in Kerala in the ninth century and the grant of land to a Christian church in Kollaṃ were part of this larger process on the west coast of India.

Coeval with the making of urban centres and port cities was the second development, viz., the advent of the state. The regions to the east of the Western Ghats, consisting of the Tamil, Kannada and Telugu speaking regions, had a longer history of state formation and had gone through the entrenchment of the state as an institution under the Pallavas of Kāñcīpuraṃ, the Gaṅgas of Kōlāra (Kuvalālapura), the Kadaṃbas of Banavāsi, the Caḷukyas of Bādāmi and the Rāṣṭrakūṭas of Māḷkhēḍ (Mānyakhēṭa). These states were organized on the lines of the maṇḍala model, in which the king was an overlord who enlisted the services of chiefdoms that were either fully subservient to the overlord or enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy as the cases might have been. The services that the chiefdoms rendered were primarily in the form of military assistance in their capacity as warlords and collection of taxes, rents and other dues in their capacity as revenue farmers (Devadevan, 2020: 29-88). Kerala on the other hand remained in pre-state conditions until the ninth century, when the Cēras commenced their rule from Koḍuṅṅallūr.[6]

Several centuries before the rise of the Cēras of Koḍuṅṅallūr, a chieftaincy with that name ruled over the Koṅgu region of Tamil Nadu and parts of central Kerala. These older Cēras were among the numerous chieftains that exercised power over the Tamil country before the rise of the state. Together with two other prominent chieftaincies, the Cōḻa and the Pāṇḍya, the Cēras were identified as Mūvēndar, i.e., the three major chiefs. It is not easy to ascertain when these chieftaincies rose to power. They are already mentioned in the rock edicts of Aśōka in the third century BCE.[7] It is also hard to say whether the Cēras of Koḍuṅṅallūr and their contemporaries to the east of the Western Ghats, the Cōḻas of Kuṃbhakōṇaṃ and the Pāṇḍyas of Madurai, had any connections with the old chieftaincies.[8]

[6] See Narayanan, 2013 for a comprehensive monographic account of the Cēras.

[7] Major Rock Edict II, *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum*, vol. 1 (Inscriptions of Asoka).

[8] The most prominent authority on the Cēras of Koḍuṅṅallūr, M.G.S. Narayanan, is not in favour of tracing continuity between the two houses. He identifies the older chiefdom as the Cēras of the Kongu region, and suggests that this house continued to rule over Kongu well into the eighth century. They were defeated repeatedly by the Caḷukyas of Bādāmi, Pallavas of Kañcīpuraṃ and the Pāṇḍyas of Madurai, exercising overlordship over them. The Cēras or their overlords might have appointed governors to administer their territories in Kerala. These governors, Narayanan posits, might have carried out "a political revolution" with support from the brahmana oligarchy of the region to establish a new state with Koḍuṅṅallūr as its seat. See Narayanan, 2013: 90-91.

The Cēra state followed the maṇḍala model and functioned as a monarchy with a few houses of subordinate chiefdoms in its service. In the absence of *praśasti*s (royal eulogies) in the Kerala inscriptions, it is not possible to ascertain if these rulers followed patrilineal or matrilineal succession. Circumstantial evidence points to the latter. We know the order of succession of a few rulers with precision. Sthāṇu Ravi (by which is meant Ravi, son of Sthāṇu) was followed by Rāma Rājaśēkhara (i.e., Rājaśēkhara, son of Rāma), and Gōda Ravi (Ravi, son of Gōda) succeeded by Indu Gōda or Indēśvaran Gōda (Gōda, son of Indu / Indēśvaran) and after him, by Bhāskara Ravi (Ravi, son of Bhāskara). In none of these cases did the throne pass from father to son. Sthāṇu Ravi commenced his rule in 844-45. It is not possible to learn whether he was the founder of the state or had one or more predecessors. He is the earliest ruler known to us from epigraphical as well as literary sources, and is also identified with Kulaśēkhara, the poet and playwright king who relinquished throne to become an Āḻvār Vaiṣṇava saint.[9] The northernmost chiefdom in Kerala, Kōlattunāḍŭ and the southernmost chiefdom, Vēṇāḍŭ, were the most powerful among the warlord houses in the region. Both were in Cēra service in the ninth century, in addition to several others.[10]

The ninth-century context in which the Tarisāppaḷḷi grant was made should be appreciated in the light of this discussion and not drawn along the lines of developments in maritime trade alone. For it had to do for the most parts with widespread expansion of agriculture that brought into being a number of temple-centred settlements, initiated the process of urbanization, and made way for the making of the state.

The Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplates

Kerala is known to have attracted Christian, Muslim and Jewish settlers for more than a thousand years. Legends that are not older than the sixteenth century date the arrival of Christians to the year 52 CE,[11] the Jews to 68 CE,[12] and the

[9] Kulaśēkhara wrote two Sanskrit plays, *Subhadrādhanañjaya* and *Tapatīsaṃvaraṇa*, when he was king, and composed two devotional poems, the *Mukundamālā* in Sanskrit and the *Perumāḷ Tirumoḻi* in Tamil, after renunciation (Devadevan, 2020: 230).

[10] On the structure of the Cēra state, see Veluthat, 2009. For an extensive history, see Narayanan, 2013.

[11] The arrival of St. Thomas in Kerala in 52 CE is a widely popular belief in Kerala. The *Raṃbān Pāṭṭŭ*, completed on 3 July 1601 by Tommā Raṃbān, is the oldest known source upon which this legend is based. This text says that St. Thomas arrived in Kerala in 50 CE and made conversions for eight days (lines 23-24), after which he left for Mailāpūr and returned to Kerala again in 51 CE (lines 47-48) and converted 3000 unbeliever locals, including members of the royal family, and 40 Jews, and built the first church within a year and a half (lines 49-56). The date 52 CE was apparently determined by the date that the *Raṃbān Pāṭṭŭ* assigns the first church built in Kerala. The text of the *Raṃbān Pāṭṭŭ* in recitation is available in the link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyKC2uBuhJY (accessed on 15 November 2020). Also see Visvanathan, 1995.

[12] The date assigned for the arrival of Jews comes from sources that are even later than the *Raṃbān Pāṭṭŭ*. The oldest reference to it seems to be a manuscript of 1767 from Munich, which

Muslims to the time of the Prophet in the early seventh century.[13] The oldest document from within Kerala that attests to the presence of these groups is the Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplate Grant issued in 849, which was the fifth regnal year of the Cēra king Sthāṇu Ravi (r. 844-45 – 870-71).

Christians and Jews are not known from anywhere in Peninsular India in considerable numbers from the first half of the first millennium.[14] We know from the second century text, *Acta Thomae*, that Thomas the apostle had reached India and met with the king Gondophares, known from other sources as a Parthian ruler (James, 1983: 365ff).[15] The reference here is to the Sind region over which Gondophares held his sway. Gondophares was in power in the fourth or fifth decade of the first century CE.[16] The territories held by Gondophares included large parts of Sind, but this is certainly no evidence to argue that Thomas had reached Sind. On the other hand, Eusebius, the early fourth century historian of the church, was perhaps speaking of the Sind when he referred to the visit of Pantaenus of Alexandria to India in the late second century. "They say," he wrote of Pantaenus, "that when he reached the Indians, he found that the apostle Bartholomew had planted the first seeds of the faith among them, and had left Matthew's gospel written in Hebrew, and that Pantaenus brought it back when he found it there at that time" (Rufinus of Aquileia, 2016: 207).

There is greater certainty over the state of affairs in the latter half of the millennium, although the developments are too poorly documented to make a narrative account possible. Cosmas Indicopleustes reported of a Christian church in Kerala (which he called Male) during his travels in the mid sixth century, but he didn't indicate the place or give credible information concerning the people attached to the church. He also spoke of a church in Kalyāṇ, provided with a bishop appointed from Persia (McCrindle, 1897: 119). From the time of the Persian Catholicos Sabrisho I (596-604), we hear of occasional contacts with India. Sabrisho I received presents of perfumes from India (Tisserant, 1957: 14), and Persian bishops were travelling to India by the time of one of his successors, Ishoyabh II (628-46), perhaps at not so infrequent intervals (Ibid., 15). By the time of Timothy I (780-823), we already hear of the Indian Christians referring to themselves as disciples of St. Thomas who had little to do with the see of Mari, i.e., the Syrian church. Raids over Sind and Gujarat between the second and fourth decades of the eighth century by warlords in Umayyad pay

reports that a rabbi from Kerala, Jeches Kel Rachbi, informed Tobias Boas of the arrival of 10,000 Jews in Koḍuṅṅallūr in 68 CE. On this source, see Schoff, 1915: 284-285.

[13] The extract from Barbosa that we cited earlier in this paper is one of the oldest instances that trace Kerala's Islamic connections back to the time of the Prophet.

[14] A comprehensive discussion of the surviving evidence on the early Christians is found in Neill, 1984: 26-49. Oral traditions concerning the Bené Israel Jews of Konkan speak of their arrival in the region several centuries before the rise of Christianity, but no written documents exist to substantiate these claims. See Abbink, 2002: 5 for a discussion.

[15] The *Acta Thomae* is generally thought to be a third century text, but Lanzillotta, 2015 has suggested a second century date.

[16] Very little is known of Gondophares, and much of our information comes from numismatic sources. An assessment of these sources is found in Macdowall, 1965.

might have familiarized the peninsula with Islam, but the oldest Muslims we know of from contemporary sources are the ones figuring in the Tarisāppaḷḷi Plates as signatories to the deed.

Known variously as Kollaṃ Copperplates, Quilon Copperplates and Syrian Christian Copperplates, and somewhat exotically as Tabula Quilonensis, the Tarisāppaḷḷi Plates were issued from Kollaṃ, twenty-five years after the commencement of a new era that came to be widely used in Kerala in the following centuries. The era was in fact named Kollaṃ after the city. The city is called Kurakkēṇikkollaṃ in the plates in question. No contemporary source speaks of the city before the time of the Tarisāppaḷḷi grant, but Kollaṃ seems to have attained some renown as an important port by the mid-ninth century. In the accounts on India and China that Abū Zayd al-Sirāfī compiled in 851, Kollaṃ was already an important port in the Indian Ocean trade network. Kūlaṃ or Kūlaṃ Mālī, as the city is identified in these accounts, attracted brisk trade with China. Each Chinese ship paid a thousand dirhams as duty. The duty on other ships ranged from ten dinars to one dinar (Kennedy and Toorawa, 2014: 31). The journey between Muscat and Kollaṃ took a month's time when the winds were favourable. In the eastward journey, Kollaṃ was the point after Muscat where ships in Abū Zayd's time halted to take freshwater (Ibid.: 33). Kollaṃ grew to great eminence in later times because it emerged as a major port of call in the Indian Ocean trade owing in large parts to its pepper trade. It was in this city that Marignolli had landed in 1346, and the Muslims in Barbosa's account had allegedly procured their earliest cargoes of pepper from here.

In the ninth century, the city was administered by chiefs of the Vēḷ line (*vēḷ-kula*), perhaps as their principle seat. The locality (*nāḍŭ*) to which the city belonged derived its name Vēṇāḍŭ (Vēḷ-nāḍŭ) from this line of chiefs. The antecedents of the Vēḷs are not known. In the Tarisāppaḷḷi Plates, they are already subordinate to the Cēras of Koḍuṅṅallūr.

Kollaṃ's significance also owed to the fact that throughout the period of Cēra rule, which ended in the first quarter of the twelfth century,[17] it was the only port between Maṅgalūru and Kanyākumāri, other than Koḍuṅṅallūr, to have witnessed regular maritime traffic. Ports existed at Ēḻimala and Vaḷapaṭṭaṇaṃ in Kōlattunāḍŭ, but they were less often frequented. Important ports in Kerala history such as Kocci, Kōḻikkōḍŭ and Ponnāni hadn't taken shape yet;[18] they arose at different times between the late twelfth century and the fifteenth century, long after the Cēra state had collapsed.

[17] 1122 is the last known date of the Cēras.

[18] Some writers consider Ponnāni as the location where the old port of Tyndis or Toṇḍi stood. See, for instance, Casson, 1989: 297.

The Tarisāppaḷḷi Plates record grants made to a Christian church[19] by the Vēṇāḍŭ chief, Ayyanaḍigaḷ Tiruvaḍi. The church (*paḷḷi*) was named Tarisā, which might refer either to the Abbasid city of Tarsa (Tarsus) in Turkey or to a certain Teresa of whom we have otherwise no information. The grant (*viḍupēṟŭ*) was given as *aṭṭippēṟŭ*, i.e., conferred with due libation of water, an equivalent to *dhārā-pūrvaka* occurring in Sanskrit records from other regions of the subcontinent. The deed is executed on five plates, one of which carries names of witnesses from West Asia. Of the other plates, two were engraved in a different hand. And for this reason, the deed was treated as two separate grants ever since T.A. Gopinatha Rao published them in the *Travancore Archaeological Series* in 1920.[20] The view that these plates constituted two different records was not current in the nineteenth century when Hermann Gundert and William Logan wrote about them. Some years ago, M.R. Raghavavarier and Kesavan Veluthat restored the text to its original form as a single document.[21] Owing to disputes between the Marthoma and Orthodox factions of the Malankara Syrian Church, a part of the plates is now held by the former at the Pūlattīn Aramana in Tiruvalla, and the other part by the latter at the Dēvalōkaṃ Aramana near Kōṭṭayaṃ.

Ayyanaḍigaḷ's grant seems to have been an event of exceptional importance. It was made in the presence of Vijayarāga, a representative of the Cēra state who would become king in ca. 883-84. Another important figure present when the deed was drawn, Rāma Tiruvaḍi, presided over the junior line (*ilamkūṟŭ vāḻkiṉṟa*) of the Vēḷs. If this chief was married to a sister of Sthāṇu Ravi's and if the Cēras practiced matrilineal succession as has often been posited (in which the throne passes to the ruler's sister's son rather than his own son), we doubtless have in him the father of Sthāṇu Ravi's successor, Rāma Rājaśēkhara (r. ca. 870-87 – ca. 883-84). Eight others were taken into confidence while making the grant. One of them was Sundaran, a scion of the Vēḷ line. The others were two functionaries of the state, identified as the *adhikārar* and the *prakṛti*, the leaders of two trading groups, the Añjuvaṇṇaṃ and the Maṇigrāmaṃ,[22] the chief of Punnattala, the chief of occupants at Pōḷai and the 600, i.e., commander of a body of troops consisting of 600 soldiers. Twenty-five men from West Asia witnessed the deed, which included eleven Arab Muslims whose names are recorded in Kufic script. The fourteen others consisted of Christians, Jews,

[19] It is unclear as to what was meant by the "Christian church". Many historians regard this as a church of the St. Thomas Christians, but the copperplates examined here do not necessarily point in this direction.

[20] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, vol. 2, nos. 9 (I) and 9 (II).

[21] The revised text is presented in Raghavavarier and Veluthat, 2013. Our discussion is based on this revised text. This volume also reproduces earlier assessments of the Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplates.

[22] The Añjuvaṇṇaṃ and Maṇigrāmaṃ were among the major corporate groups of traders found in various parts of the subcontinent in these centuries. The former, known from other sources as Haṃyamāna or Hañjamāna and identified by historians as an Arab body called Añjuman, was mostly active on the west coast and at times on the east coast too. The Maṇigrāmaṃ was more widely present throughout southern India and made its present felt even in Gujarat. It is also known to have been active in Southeast Asia, where it was called Baṇigrāmaṃ. On the Añjuvaṇṇaṃm see Subbarayalu, 2009 and on the Maṇigrāmaṃ, Abraham, 1988.

Muslims and possibly Zoroastrians. Ten of them had their names written in the Pahlavi script and the other four in the Hebrew script (see Fig. 1 and 2 for these signatures).

Signatures in Kufic Script	**Signatures in Pahlavi Script**	**Signatures in Hebrew Script**
Maymun ibn Ibrahim	Farrox s/o Narseh s/o Sahraban	Hasan Ali
Muhammad ibn Manih	Yohanan s/o Masya s/o Wehzad	Sahak Samuel
Sulh ibn Ali	Sahdost s/o Mardweh s/o Farroxig	Abraham Kuwami
Utman ibn al-Marzuban	Senmihr s/o Bayweh	Kurus Yahiya
Muhammad ibn Yahya	Sina s/o Yakub	
Amru ibn Ibrahim	s/o Mardweh	
Ibrahim ibn al-Tay	Maroe s/o Yohanan	
Bakr ibn Mansur	Farrbay s/o Windad-Ohrmazd	
al-Kasim ibn Hamid	Mard-Farrox s/o Boysad	
Mansur ibn Isa	Azadmard s/o Ahla	
Ismail ibn Yakub		

West Asian Signatories to the Tarisāppaḷḷi Grant[23]

The Church was built by a certain Eśōdāta Pirāyi. Elsewhere in the deed, it is identified as the church of Maruvān Sapīrīśō. It is likely that Eśōdāta Pirāyi built the church at the instance of Sapīrīśō. Little is said of Sapīrīśō in the deed. The early nineteenth century *Niraṇaṃ Granthavari* identifies a certain Savarīśu, who arrived in Kerala in 825 CE, as a merchant, which in all likelihood is a reference to Sapīrīśō (Thomas, 2017: 100). Historians generally regard Sapīrīśō to be a merchant (Narayanan, 2013: 94; Baum and Winkler, 2003: 54; Subbarayalu, 2009: 160).[24] And they mostly regard Sapīrīśō's as a Syrian church (Katz, 2000: 33; Menon, 2008: 64).[25] The document itself does not warrant this conclusion. It is uncertain if the Syrian church had a presence in Kerala before a section of the Christians chose to affiliate with it in 1653 during the Koonan Cross Oath as an act of rebellion against the 1599 Synod of Udayaṃpērūr that had brought them under the Roman church. Sources, which include the travel accounts of Marignola and a letter of John of Monte Corvino who visited Kerala in or shortly after 1291, only tell us of the St. Thomas Christians. Portuguese records also

[23] Source: Cereti, 2009.

[24] My own view was not different until recently. In a paper that I published in 2014, I had identified Sapīrīśō as a Syrian Christian merchant. I had no occasion to reconsider this view when the paper was reprinted in a collection of essays published earlier this year (Devadevan, 2020: 126).

[25] Insofar as the Maṇigrāmaṃ is mentioned in the Tarisāppaḷḷi copperplates, Rajan Gurukkal has even suggested that it was in fact a Syrian Christian trading body (Gurukkal, 1992: 93), a view that other historians do not endorse.

speak only of the St. Thomas Christians who allegedly followed the 'Nestorian heresy.' We have noticed the presence of people from the Persian church in India in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries. Domenico Ferroli suggested in his work on the Jesuits in Malabar that Maruvān Sapīrīśō is a Syrian name, Maran-Sabr-Isho, which means "My Lord Jesus is my hope" (Ferroli, 1939: 78). Whatever the meaning of the term, Sapīrīśō was certainly associated with the Persian church, which is oftentimes referred to as the Assyrian church as well. In all likelihood, he was none other than Sabrisho II, the Persian Partriarch who was in office from 831 to 835 and the fifth Patriarch to hold the office after the seat of the Patriarchate moved from Seleucia-Ctesiphon to Baghdad sometime during the Patriarchate of Hnanisho' II (773-780).[26] If this is true,[27] there should be no harm in identifying Eśōdāta Pirāyi with Isho'dad of Merv, the famous biblical commentator who was appointed Bishop of Ḥadatta after the incumbent, Abraham of Marga, became Patriarch upon the death of Sabrisho II in 835. Isho'dad was an eminent figure in the Christendom of the ninth century, whose claim to the Patriarchate after the death of Abraham of Marga in 853 was dashed when the Caliph al-Mutawakkil appointed Theodosius to the office.[28]

[26] See the list of patriarch prepared by David Wilmshurst in King, 2019: 803.

[27] Legends from later centuries recount the arrival of two bishops from West Asia, Mar Sapōr (Śābūhr) and Mar Prōth (Aphrōth), and there is what István Perczel calls a 'widespread misreading' that identifies Sapīrīśō with Sapōr (Perczel, 2019: 666), but even when he rightly recognizes that this identification is false, he considers Sapīrīśō member of 'a lay merchant community' (Ibid. 667).

[28] Not much is known of his life. 'All we know,' writes Margaret Dunlop Gibson, 'of Isho'dad is that he was a native of Merv, and became bishop of Ḥadatta in Assyria, being much admired for his erudition, wisdom, and splendid personal appearance. We gather from Assemani and Bar-Hebraeus that after several untoward experiences in the election of their Patriarchs, who were speedily removed by death, all the Christians in A.D. 852 committed the choice to Abraham bin Noah, who nominated Isho'dad. But Bochtjeso', the physician of the Caliph Mutawakkil, persuaded his master to appoint Theodosius, and the Christians rejoiced in the interest which the prince condescended to shew in their affair' (Gibson, 1911: vii).

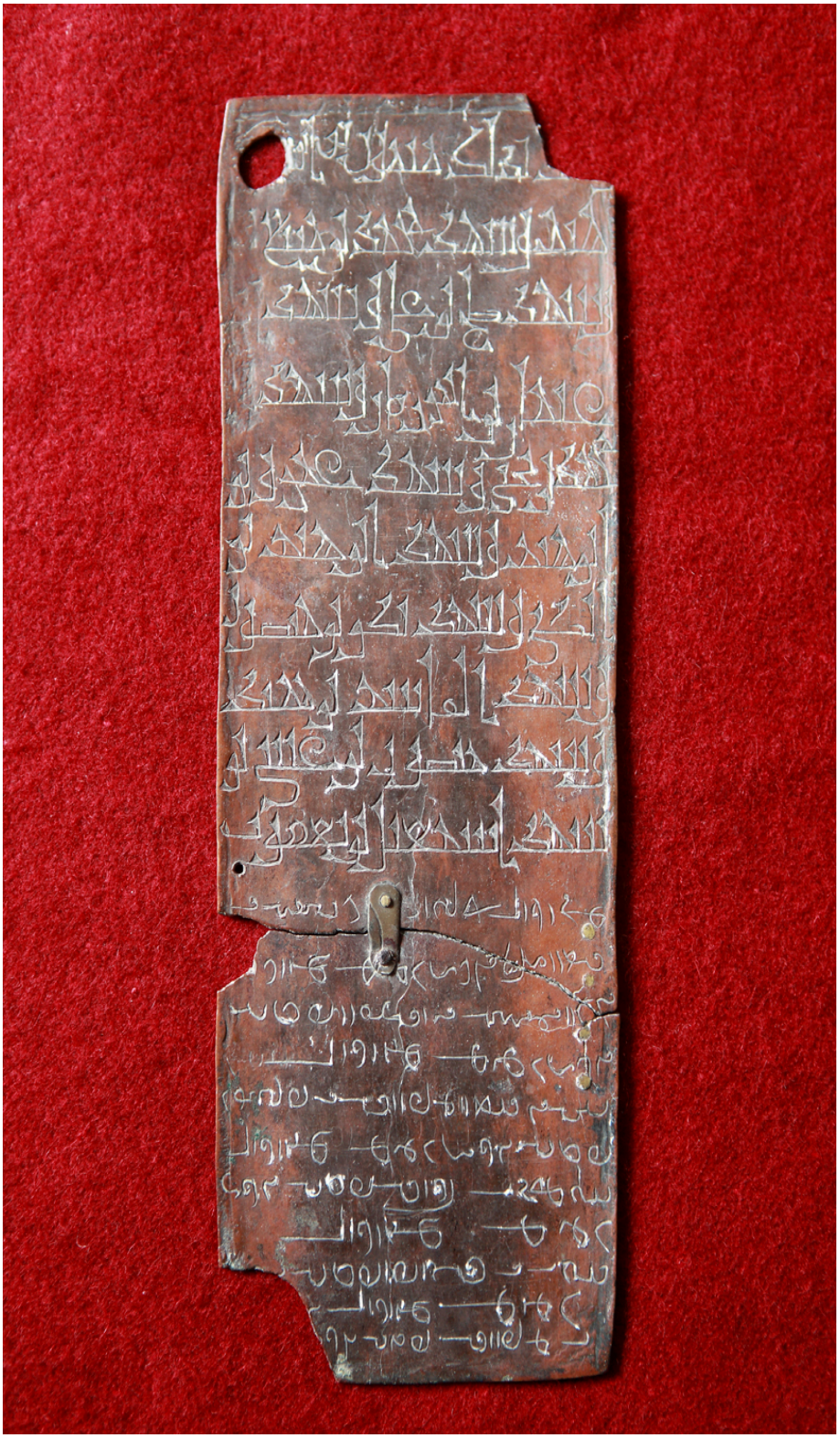


Fig 1: Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplates Plate 5 Recto, Kufic and Pehlavi Signatures
(Courtesy: Kesavan Veluthat)

Fig 2: Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplates Plate 5 Verso, Pehlavi and Hebrew Signatures (Courtesy: Kesavan Veluthat)

The grant places thirteen families at the service of the church, of which one is a Vaṇṇār (washer-folk) family, four are Īḻavas (toddy tappers) and the remaining eight, families serving the Īḻavas. A range of dues payable by the thirteen families are exempted, which possibly means that the dues are to be transferred to the church and not remitted to the state. The dues include a fee for using ankle-bands while climbing palm trees for toddy tapping (*taḷaikkāṇaṃ*),[29] fees on ladders (*ēṇikkāṇaṃ*), fee for thatching the hutments (*manai meyppān koḷḷuṃ iṟai*), fee collected from the elite Īḻavas called Cānṟār for either gathering fuel or for keeping their homesteads lit with a lamp (*cānṟān māṭṭu*), billeting (*iravu cōṟŭ*) and *kudanāḻi*, which is a *nāḻi* measure of paddy per pot of toddy sold. The list of exemptions includes gold lent on loan as principle or capital (*mēnipponnŭ*) and the interest it generates (*polipponnŭ*).

[29] The term *taḷai* also means the rope fastened to an animal, and in this sense, *taḷaikkāṇaṃ* can be interpreted as the grazing fee collected on each animal. Given the Īḻava context of the grant, it is appropriate to take this due as a fee on ankle-bands used for tree climbing.

A large plot of land is also granted to the church. The Vaṇṇār and the four Īḻava families lived on this land, along with two Eravi (salt-maker) families, a Taccan (carpenter) family and four Veḷḷāla (peasant) families that had cultivating rights (*kārālar*) over the land. These occupants were to cultivate the land and, with the proceeds thereof, provide for oil and other requirements for the deity. The land had the following boundaries: *vayalkkāḍŭ* in the east which was apparently a wild stretch of wetland, the outer wall of the little gate of the palace in the southeast, the sea in the west, an orchard called *tōraṇattōṭṭaṃ* in the north and the orchard of a certain Aṇḍilan at Punnattala in the northeast. The protection of the land and its occupants was entrusted to the 600 and the two trading groups, Añjuvaṇṇaṃ and Maṇigrāmaṃ. The deed authorised the church to collect the head-price (*talaivilai*) and breast-price (*mulaivilai*), which were fees imposed for owning male and female slaves, respectively. Goods meant for the church were exempted from transit duty (*ulkŭ*, Skt. *śulka*). This included the toll of 1/60th (*aṟupatilonṟulkŭ*), apparently payable on paddy, the toll on toddy (*kaḷ vārattil ulkŭ*) and customs duty on goods imported from the sea (*aḻivulkŭ*). The per capita fee (*āḷ kācŭ*) on purchase of slaves was exempted for people associated with the church.

The church was empowered to charge a fee of eight *kācŭ* for entry and exit into its fortified precincts and four *kācŭ* for entry and exit by small and large ferries (*veḍi* and *paḍāgaṃ*, respectively) on the lands it held. This was in addition to the transit toll on goods, which Añjuvaṇṇaṃ and Maṇigrāmaṃ were to collect every day. The tenth share for the king (*kōppadavāraṃ*) was to be collected by the palace and the tenth share for the landowner (*patippadavāraṃ*), remitted to Añjuvaṇṇaṃ and Maṇigrāmaṃ. The grant was perpetual, indicated by the stock expression, "as long as the world, the moon and the sun last."

Añjuvaṇṇaṃ and Maṇigrāmaṃ were given charge of executing the matters drawn in the deed. They were empowered to withhold transit toll and weighing charges (*tulākkūli*) in case of unlawful acts against them. They were also conferred with the cultivation rights over the city.

The measuring implements, *vārakkōl* and *pañcakkaṇḍi*, hitherto bestowed upon Ayyanaḍigaḷ Tiruvaḍi, was already made over to the church. The deed confirmed this grant, awarding along with it the filling charges or *niṟaikkūli*, a fee collected on the use of the measuring vessels. In addition to these, any dues (*iṟai*) whatsoever that the land generated would go to the church. The Īḻava and Vaṇṇār families were granted a few concessions which the toddy-tapping supervisor (*tīyamāḻvān*) and the chief of fort security (*madil nāyakan*) were forbidden from obstructing. They could come to the market or enter the fort, where the Vaṇṇār could find work as armed guards and the Īḻavas could bring their carts (for selling their goods). They were not to be punished without the church's consent.

Sl. No.	Name of the Due	Nature of the Due
1.	*taḷaikkāṇaṃ*	a fee for using ankle-bands while climbing palm trees for toddy tapping
2.	*ēṇikkāṇaṃ*	ladder fees
3.	*manai meyppān koḷḷuṃ iṟai*	fee for thatching hutments
4.	*cānṟān māṭṭŭ*	fee collected from Cānṟār either for gathering fuel or for lighting their homesteads
5.	*polipponnŭ*	interest on gold loan
6.	*iravu cōṟŭ*	billeting
7.	*kudanāḻi*	a *nazhi* measure of paddy per pot of toddy sold
8.	*talaivilai*	head-price, i.e., the fee charged for owning a male slave
9.	*mulaivilai*	breast-price, i.e., the fee charged for owning a female slave
10.	*aṟupatilonṟulkŭ*	transit toll of 1/60th, perhaps on paddy
11.	*kaḷ vārattil ulkŭ*	transit toll on toddy
12.	*aḻivulkŭ*	customs duty on maritime goods
13.	*āḷ kācŭ*	per capita fee on purchase of slaves
14.	unnamed	fee on entry and exit into the fort
15.	unnamed	fee on entry and exit by small and large ferries into the church's landholdings
16.	*kōppadavāraṃ*	the tenth share of the king
17.	*patippadavāraṃ*	the tenth share of the chief (of occupants?)
18.	*ulkŭ*	transit toll
19.	*niṟaikkūli*	filling charges, i.e., the fee for using the measuring vessels
20.	*evvakaippaṭṭa iṟai*	other miscellaneous dues

Dues mentioned in the Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplates

Several things follow from the purports of the Tarisāppaḷḷi Plates. The church did not have exclusive privileges over the land. Several groups associated with it, most notably the Añjuvaṇṇaṃ and Maṇigrāmaṃ traders, held rights as well as obligations. The grant did not involve transfer of ownership to the church either, but only rights over the revenue from the land. That the palace continued to collect the king's share of the produce indicates that the state had not relinquished its revenue rights over the land completely. In other words, political control over the land was very much in place over this piece of eleemosynary endowment.

The boundaries identified in the deed for the land made over suggest that an extensive stretch of land was placed in the service of the church. The thirteen families in the church's service and the seven other families figuring in the deed—two of salt-makers, one of a carpenter and four of peasants—together would have consisted of a population of seventy-five to hundred people, perhaps even more. Another indicator of the vastness of the grant is the reference to the movement of ferries large and small within its boundaries. The extent of the land is not indicated in terms of area, but a few other grants from the Cēra times help us to get a sense of the possible revenue accruing from it by way of rent or tax.

An incomplete copperplate discovered from Vāl̲appaḷḷi near Caṅṅanāśśēri records a grant made in the twelfth regnal year (ca. 882-83) of Sthāṇu Ravi's successor Rāma Rājaśēkhara to the Kailāsamuḍayanār temple. It consisted of a paddy field at Kīraṅkaḍaṃbanār Kari measuring twenty to twenty-five *kalaṃ* seed capacity (approximately 2000 kg), a ten-*kalaṃ* (800 kg) field at Maṇḍilakalaṃ, and a 500-*nāl̲i* (500 or 125 kg)[30] field each at Kaḷḷārr̲uvāy Vēli and Kāñjikkāvŭ, in addition to a residential plot at Pīlikkōḍŭ and 150 *tūṇi*s of paddy and three dinars obtained, perhaps as rent, from a certain Kāvadi Kaṇṇan Śaṅkaran's residential plot.[31] The saline soil in the region kept productivity low so that a seed-yield ratio of 1:5 to 1:10 was possible only in some areas in the Pālakkāḍŭ district which was away from the coast. In the rest of the areas, the ratio did not exceed 1:3 (Devadevan, 2020: 127). Even at this low seed-yield ratio, Kīraṅkaḍaṃbanār Kari was capable of yielding, in modern-day equivalents, 8000 kg of paddy in two seasons, while Maṇḍilakaḷaṃ could produce 3200 kg and the two 500-*nāl̲i* plots, 500 kg each.[32] Two decades before the Vāl̲appaḷḷi grant, when Sthāṇu Ravi was still in power, a certain Puñjappaḍagārattŭ Jayantan Śaṅkaran had granted a modest-looking plot of land to the temple at Tiruvārr̲uvāy, which is close to Vāl̲appaḷḷi, for feeding brāhmaṇas once in a year during the Āvaṇi Ōṇaṃ celebrations. Of the two plots made over, one had a sowing capacity of ten *kalaṃ* and the other, 500 *nāl̲i*. Together, the two plots produced 2775 kg of paddy per season (by taking the lower figure of 125 kg for the 500 *nāl̲i* field), yielding a net quantity of 1850 kg for consumption. The annual yield, with two cropping seasons in a year, would be 3700 kg, a massive yield indeed for feeding brāhmaṇas once in a year, even when rents and other dues were appropriated from it (Devadevan, 2020: 127-28). The Vāl̲appaḷḷi and Tiruvārr̲uvāy grants were both very much modest when compared to the endowment made to the Kollaṃ church. The Tarisāppaḷḷi Plates do not give us comparable quantitative information on the extent of grain production. But its volume was substantial enough for the state to retain the tenth share of the produce that it was entitled to. The Tarisāppaḷḷi church was fundamentally an agrarian entrepreneur, so to speak. The grant points unequivocally to the

[30] 500 *nāl̲i*s would be roughly equal to 125 kg, but it is noticed that the *nāl̲i* in fact figures in the inscription as the term of *iḍaṅṅaḻi*, which then makes the figure approximately equal to 500 kg.
[31] *Travancore Archaeological Series* 2, 2: 8-14.
[32] The word *nāl̲i* is generally used in the inscription to indicate the higher measure of *iḍaṅṅaḻi*, in which case the Kaḷḷārr̲uvāy Vāli and Kāñjikkāvŭ could produce 2000 kg each.

agrarian infrastructure that facilitated the entrenchment of Christianity in Kerala.

The recipients of the Tarisāppaḷḷi grant, and the witnesses thereof, arrived in Kerala as maritime traders. Establishment of long-standing trade relations would have remained unsustainable if trade was carried out by ad hoc means alone. In order for these relations to rest on strong foundations, it was necessary to develop local institutional structures that had close ties with political networks and drew resources from the agrarian economy. Putting in place "a regular, ongoing relationship with the hinterland to allow local products to reach the coastal centres of international exchange" (Hall, 2014: 45) would alone have been grossly inadequate, for it would address things only on the lines of the demand-supply model. Contemporary merchant groups built or patronized religious establishments and endowed them with land or interest-bearing gifts such as money or gold in the centres where their itinerant pursuits brought them. The Cōḻas and the Cēras also enlisted trading groups into its service for revenue collection, and "were held collectively responsible for the collection of land revenues from its domain" (Veluthat, 1993: 214). Among the dues they collected were "*antarāyaṃ* (a royal levy on local bodies), *kaḍamai* (a levy fastened on land), *kuḍimai* (a levy on occupancy of land), *kōyiṟṟamappēṟu* (a due payable to the *kōyiṟṟamar* or king's agents) and *nagaraviniyōgaṃ* (a local levy to support *nagaraṃ* expenditures…) apart from different kinds of market cesses and duties" (Ibid., diacritical marks modified). There have been instances where temples that the traders built and the land they endowed evolved to become important settlements of itinerant traders. One such instance related to Kerala is recorded in an inscription of 1280 from the Hassan district of Karnataka, which informs us of the creation of the *agrahāra* of Nārāyaṇapura by a Malayali trader two generations ago.[33] Sapīrīśō's church was an institution developed along these lines. We notice this pattern in most instances of long-distance trade, both overland and sea-bound, in precolonial South Asia. Inscriptions tell us that traders acquired land rights through the religious establishments they built and based their operations upon the resources it generated. Such land rights, oftentimes of a perpetual character, served to organize trade with greater regularity and lesser levels of insecurity, bringing stability to the otherwise uncertain enterprise of long-distance trade. It was not for nothing that control over land gave rise to a dispute between two non-local trading groups in Sañjān, which Sugatipa Madhumati, son of Śayyārahāra, was called upon to resolve.

Conclusion

India's first Christians, of whom the description found in the otherwise rich details of the Tarisāppaḷḷi Copperplates can scarcely be regarded as exhaustive, do not give us the impression of being a group of aliens whose economic

[33] *Epigraphia Carnatica* 9, revised edition, No. Bl. 234. For this and other comparable instances of the presence of Kerala traders in Karnataka, see Nayaka 1999.

interests the itinerant affairs of trade had circumscribed completely. Maruvān Sapīrīśō and the people associated with his church were deeply implicated in the local regime of agrarian production. As in other parts of contemporary South Asia, merchant groups linked to the church in Kollaṃ held revenue rights over land. The dues made over to the church had a major agrarian component, conferred as perpetual rights. Trade was not an autonomous economic concern but functioned within the structures of agrarian and land relations and their associated revenue regimes. We must then acknowledge that the world of peripatetic adventures that trade histories are wont to invoke were made possible only within and to the extent of the institutional stability which establishments such as the church of Kollaṃ, rooted in their respective local agrarian worlds, could ensure. It is within this agrarian scenario that the history of Christians in Kerala must be located.

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Nidān, Volume 5, No. 2, December, 2020, pp. 27-50
ISSN 2414-8636
doi.org/10.36886/nidan.2020.5.2.3

Women, Cows, and the Cosmic Womb: A Tamil Winter Solstice Festival

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Abstract

This essay examines the key symbolic elements of a winter solstice ceremony that takes place yearly in the cattle pens of local farmers living in the Kongu region of Tamilnadu. While Māṭṭu Pongal, the third day of festivities, describes the general honoring of cows everywhere, this essay will focus on a study of what happens in an actual farm setting. More specifically, it will detail what occurs inside the family's cattle pen. I will attempt to broaden out and explore the possible symbolic underpinnings of the entire paṭṭi poṅkal event. It is hoped that a deep look into the background myths and associations this unique set of rituals encompasses will serve to broaden the reader's appreciation of some very ancient Hindu beliefs. I will explore a variety of related stories and symbols that point to the central, iconic importance of cows. In particular, I will discuss the idea that humans, at their core, are believed to strongly resemble bulls and cows.

Keywords: Paṭṭi Poṅkal, Māṭṭu Pongal, Tamilnadu, Kannimār, teppa kulam

Introduction

This essay examines the key symbolic elements of a winter solstice ceremony that takes place yearly in the cattle pens of local farmers living in the Kongu region of Tamilnadu. This area of India's most southern state is comprised of a high upland alluvial bowl surrounded by tall mountains on three sides. Intermittent but very visible hills dot the fourth part of its perimeter. This is a landscape that rests atop a raised plain and has no adjacent seacoast. The Kongu area was, until recently, somewhat isolated from the rest of the state. Traditionally, the Kongu people were heavily dependent on rainfall to support their farming efforts. Even with modern, mechanized deep-well pumps, the lack of reliable natural precipitation means that the region is not well-suited to wet crops like rice. In addition, the population is almost entirely non-Brahmin. Those

few Brahmins who do live in Kongu's rural areas mostly serve as priests at its largest and wealthiest temples. All lesser shrines are served by non-Brahmins. As a result, the Kongu area remains culturally distinctive even though its largest city, Coimbatore, is a very modern, hi-tech, and vibrant urban hub. Similarly, the paṭṭi poṅkal (English: the cattle pen pongal) has a distinctive character that differentiates it from many other, more familiar and more widespread Hindu rituals.

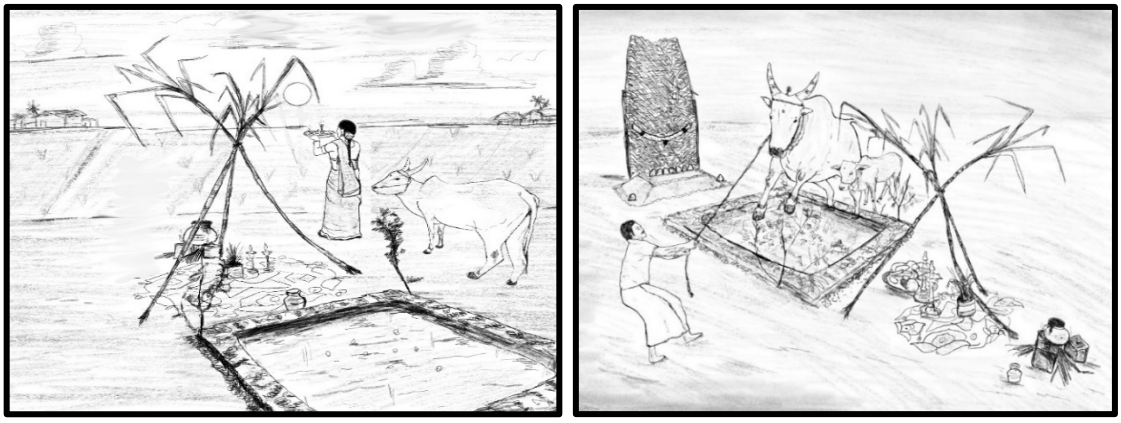

Figure -1 A Kongu Tamil farm family's paṭṭi poṅkal: winter solstice rituals

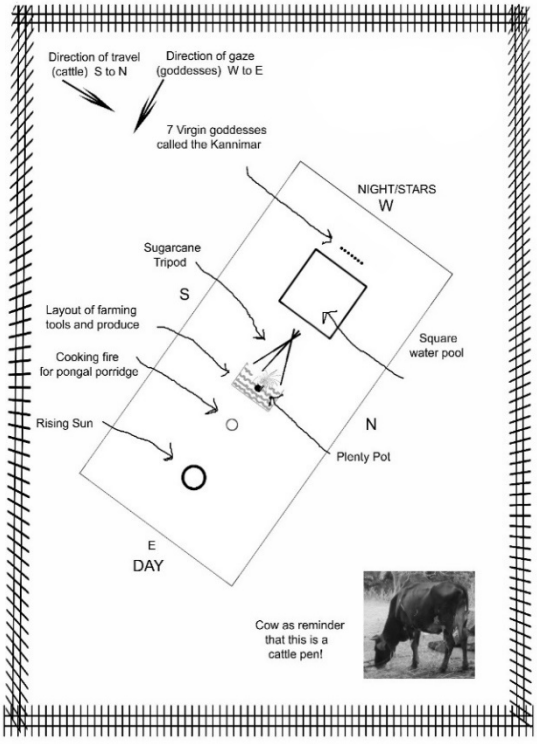

Figure -2 The spatial layout of the paṭṭi poṅkal rituals.

The layout and symbolism of the paṭṭi poṅkal, furthermore, appears to reflect some very, very old Hindu Tamil ideas. Perhaps this is because the paṭṭi poṅkal takes place in the cow pen itself. This is not just another term for māṭu or 'cow Pongal,' a more inclusive word used to describe the day set aside for the celebration of cows. In the paṭṭi poṅkal, as we will see, a living cow is asked to cross a pool of water watched over by seven young, virgin goddesses plus pass by a high tripod made of sugarcane. These various features, and more, mark the farm-based paṭṭi poṅkal as a somewhat unique event. In January 2020, a visit made to the Kongu area by this author allowed her to observe three different versions of the winter solstice paṭṭi poṅkal celebration. The variations seen, as well as several core similarities observed, proved very interesting. One version of this rite was held on the

campus of Coimbatore's major agricultural university. This was clearly the most "orthodox," Brahminical version of the three variants observed. The second was a very modest ritual performed by a middle class "suburban" farmer who owned just a few cows. His family lands were positioned right at the edge of Coimbatore city, within earshot of loud festival music and significant traffic noise. The third event was celebrated by a wealthy, sophisticated, substantial farmer whose cattle and extensive lands were situated in a truly rural and peaceful area. Although not deeply familiar with the traditional rituals involved, the family that sponsored this third event had thoroughly researched what would be needed. They proceeded to perform all of the expected rites by following the detailed, verbal instructions they had managed to obtain. Finally, the author managed to study photographs of additional paṭṭi poṅkal celebrations, and to talk with a variety of other friends and associates about this unique tradition.

The Tamil poṅkal celebration is a multiday event. It is always begun on January 14th but it can stretch through to the 16th and sometimes even the 17th of the month.[1] According to Abbé Dubois, who completed his well-known work on local customs sometime around 1818, the first day of Pongal in Tamilnadu was called Bhoghi-Pongal (the Pongal of Joy) at the time (Dubois, 1906: 572-3). It was a day for carrying out a series of exchange visits between relatives and friends. The second day, called Surya-Pongal, was dedicated to the sun. On that day people would boil rice and milk mixed together in an earthen pot heated over an open-air fire lit between three stones. As the milk began to simmer, family members would call out Pongal! Pongal! Their exclamation was meant to accompany this key moment: the instant when the milk actually boiled over the rim of its' pot. Some of the rice gruel cooked in this way was first offered to the sun, and then to the god Ganesh and the family cows. The remainder was then consumed by the family themselves. The third day was reserved for Māṭṭu Pongal or Pongal for the Cows. That was the day family cattle were thoroughly bathed, decorated and ritually honored. The Pongal celebration period in Tamilnadu remains similar today, still roughly matching the description Dubois provided roughly two centuries back. While Māṭṭu Pongal, the third day of festivities, describes the general honoring of cows everywhere, this essay will focus on a study of what happens in an actual farm setting. More specifically, it will detail what occurs inside the family's cattle pen. When this special ritual space is employed, the ceremony is called a paṭṭi poṅkal, or 'the pongal in the cattle pen.'[2]

[1] Technically, the winter solstice occurs on December 21st, the 'shortest' day of the year everywhere in the northern hemisphere. However, due to various calendrical adjustments made to numerous Indian calendars in centuries past, an issue too complex to discuss here, the official celebration of this event in India occurs in mid-January. It roughly aligns with the period of the sugarcane harvest, not only in Tamil Nadu but all over India. This key festival is also explicitly linked to the entry of the sun into the constellation Capricorn and hence is appropriately called the Makara (Capricorn or sea goat) Sankranti (passage of the sun from one sign of the zodiac to another). The start date does not vary by more than a day or two, year to year.

[2] Hence forth I use the Tamil spelling for this term: paṭṭi poṅkal.

In the middle of the diagram above the reader will notice that there is an all-important and especially constructed square pool that contains water. It is called the teppa kulam or 'pool used for floating.' I have never seen this central symbol employed anywhere except in this farm-based ceremony except as the name for a permanent large tank attached to a prominent temple. But how to construct a large pool in a small, limited area an individual family might have access to, is not the issue. That can be done. The second paṭṭi poṅkal ceremony I observed in January of 2020 included a tiny little teppa kulam that was just one-foot square. It could have been built anywhere. Instead, I think it is the paṭṭi or cattle pen itself that provides the all-important backdrop for this ritual. However, Dubois does describe a substitute for the teppa kulam in a 'real' cattle pen, something he observed two centuries back:

> On this day they put into a big vessel filled with water, some saffron powder, some seeds of the tree called *parati,* and some leaves of the margosa tree. After mixing the ingredients well together, they sprinkle the cows and the oxen with the liquid, walking round them three times. All the men of the house (for the women are excluded from this ceremony) then turn successively towards the four points of the compass and perform the sashtangal or prostration, four times, before the animals (Dubois, 1906: 573).

To perform a sashtangal (Tamil cāstaṅkal) a person must lie flat, face down on the ground with his arms extended beyond his head. His six vital body parts: feet, knees, stomach chest, forehead and arms must all touch the earth during this prostration that expresses humble respect. Normally this ritual gesture is executed before gurus or before the god Aiyanar. Aiyanar, it must be noted, is a deity associated with cattle herding and he is specifically recognized as a deity worshiped only by men.[3] I have not seen the cāstaṅkal done at a paṭṭi poṅkal but I have included Dubois's description here for two reasons: (1) It expresses its' performer's deep reverence for cattle and for the divine shepherd (or guru) who cares for those bovines, and (2) The cāstaṅkal gesture clearly references the four directions of space. However, even more interesting is Dubois's comment that the big water pot used has had seeds and leaves deliberately placed in it. I suggest that this pot and its seeds, serve as a substitute for a teppa kulam and that the householder's ritual prostration towards each of the four directions references the guardians of those four cardinal points. Together these gestures provide a householder who may not have a cattle pen of his own, a way to worship cattle that might not even belong to him.

Figure 2 highlights the ritual layout prepared for a paṭṭi poṅkal in an actual 2020 farm setting. The most important feature of this event is its' location: inside the cattle pen or cattle yard. This is the place where a farmer's cattle habitually rest, are fed and are milked. The cattle involved, cows, calves and (in earlier days

[3] This is controversial now, but in the past Aiyanar was specifically honored by men.

oxen), all chew their cud. In this Kongu area they are invariably of the Indian cattle species (*bos indica*) and this subfamily of cattle are absolutely central to the rituals about to be discussed. Adult bulls can be really dangerous, especially if they have not been castrated. Thus oxen were favored by most farmers. However, this essential role of male cattle as draught animals has now been almost entirely replaced by tractors. A few wealthy families own a stud bull, but nowadays most males of the species are sent for slaughter. This means a cow is used in most local poṅkal rituals today, while bulls or oxen are generally absent.

There are several quite unique aspects of this paṭṭi poṅkal ceremony which I now list. After this, I will discuss each of these ritual features separately:

Eight Unique Ritual Dimensions of the Paṭṭi Poṅkal Event

1. The entire ritual should be executed inside a cattle pen, or if this is not practical, then inside a space that serves as a symbolic substitute.
2. A square (or sometimes rectangular) pond is constructed especially for this event. It must be filled with at least a few inches of water and be decorated with flowers. Women and young children should be involved in its preparation. A handful of seeds, combining nine different types is thrown into that pond by a key patron or family member, often a woman.
3. A sugarcane tripod is made by tying three sugarcane stalks together near their leafy top ends. This tripod is then made to stand tall near the pond, or (more rarely) directly over it.
4. A set of seven sister deities, known locally as the Kannimār, are installed along (or just behind) the western edge of the pond in question.[4] There they will overlook and symbolically protect the proceedings from intrusion or other possible harm. No further deities, local or pan-Indian, are installed or represented at this unique ritual site, except a small turmeric or cow dung lump used to represent Ganesh.
5. The ritual should take place at dawn and involves boiling milk mixed with pulses or grains, and sugar. A pot of poṅkal gruel (milk mixed with sugar and rice or other grains), is boiled. It is not removed from the heat until its content has boiled over the pot lip. A handful of that sweet mush should then first be offered to the rising sun by a woman, and then to the Kannimār. Afterwards, the remainder of the pot's content may be served out to other family members and any on-lookers who are present.
6. A king and queen are identified as patrons of the event proceedings and they are honored with offerings, after the importance of the sun and the Kannimār have first been acknowledged.

[4] The Eastern edge can be used if that pool is very small. This was the case for the 2nd of the three paṭṭi poṅkals observed.

Figure -3 The brown cow that first crossed the teppa kulam wore two white (male) cloths on her back. Two white males followed her, both wearing royal red capes.

7. A cow is asked to step into the teppa pond and then to cross it. Often additional cattle are encouraged to follow suit, but at least one cow is expected to perform at this point. Generally, this crossing requires these animals to move from the pond's south to north side, but in cases where some unrelated physical barrier happens to be in the way (such as a compound wall) an east-to-west pond crossing may be done instead. That crossing ends the proceedings, serving as the highlight of the entire event.
8. Dancing, a tug of war, bull wrestling, bullock cart racing, and/or the freeing (and frightening) of the cattle present is undertaken. They are encouraged to run about freely and enjoy destroying all the festive decorations in sight. A variety of joyful games may be organized at the end of the proceedings, but only after the main, early morning ceremony (above), has been completed.

Dressing the Cows as 'Human' Beings

In the ensuing paragraphs I will attempt to broaden out and explore the possible symbolic underpinnings of the entire paṭṭi poṅkal event. It is hoped that a deep look into the background myths and associations this unique set of rituals encompasses will serve to broaden the reader's appreciation of some very ancient Hindu beliefs. I will focus, in particular, on related stories and symbols that point to the central, iconic importance of cows. In earlier visits to the Kongu area I had largely overlooked the significance of cattle in Hindu thinking. But I am now thoroughly convinced that an appreciation of the role cows play in popular Hindu thought is important and worthy of in-depth study. To begin, it may help to step back from the specifics of the paṭṭi poṅkal ritual to consider this animal's role in literature and poetry. In particular, I will discuss the idea that humans, at their core, are believed to strongly resemble bulls and cows. This equivalence was nicely symbolized during a very specific moment of the first paṭṭi poṅkal event I witnessed in 2020. At one point, it was very clear that cows and bulls (also oxen)

were symbolically being dressed in human clothing! That happened just before these animals were asked to cross the teppa kulam. It was as if they were taking human form for this passage, or at least that they were being asked to carry a symbol of their human masters with them. Figure 3 shows a cow and two bulls dressed or decorated by placing human clothing on their backs. Oddly, the cow has been given specific cloths that all locals know are normally reserved for human males. One is a conventional man's wrap that hangs from his waist and stretches down to his ankles. The second cloth is a male towel meant to be worn on the shoulder. The cow featured here could easily have 'worn' a folded sari cloth on her back instead, a more appropriate garb for a human female. Why a set of male cloths was chosen for her "to wear" was never explained to me. However, it may symbolize the idea that this cow, by stepping into the teppa kulam, was about to travel upwards (metaphorically speaking) into the sky to meet her astral "husband" for a climactic moment of re-insemination. By stepping into that pond, this unique choice of clothing may reference the idea that she is soon to be metaphorically re-impregnated by the stars that define the bull constellation Taurus or Nandi, the great bull-of-heaven that floats high above in the night sky.

After a mythical, near-instantaneous round trip, this same cow is returned to her normal spot in the farmer's wider cattle pen. Except for a brief time when she may be untied and chased about, she is expected to begin another year of calf-bearing and, of course, milk production. Like a human being, a cow does not give milk for long when she does not have a nursing calf at her side. The metaphorical hint of astral impregnation seen here fits, I argue, with one of the paṭṭi poṅkal's broader themes: the attempt to mirror on earth, key events believed to first occur inside a cosmic-sized cattle-pen in the sky. Whereas a watery expanse in the heavens is where all life originates, the farmer's cattle pen down below is what locals depend on for their livelihood, including field labour (traditionally provided by oxen), milk, butter-oil and also a copious supply of additional by-products that humans find useful such as cow dung and cow urine. It is also useful to mention, in this regard, what was done to 'dress' the males of the species for their all-important teppa kulam crossing. The males were given more gender-neutral cloths, but with a special difference highlighted both in the color chosen and by the texture. In Figure 3 there is a fine red cloak (not very visible in a black and white photo) draped over the back of a large bull. His apparel was bright, definitely eye catching, and it had a silky look. The obvious suggestion is that this bull is, in fact, a king. This second ritual crossing actually involved two animals, likely both oxen which would suggest that they were being honored as a set of twin kings[5] roped together to form a team for their teppa kulam crossing. This is how two oxen would traditionally have been paired in preparation for the hard work of pulling a plow or heavily laden bullock cart. In Figure 4 we see those two

[5] See Beck, 2021a and 2021b for a more extensive discussion of the important theme of twins.

oxen crossing that watery sea together. They were identically dressed, much as if they were ruled together as joint monarchs. Later a human pair, a "king and queen" of the cattle pen, were also honored while finishing off this entire central ceremonial sequence. Note how gender, paired roles and power were all involved

Figure - 4 The same cow, now starting to cross the teppa pond and two oxen followed, crossing the pond just moments after she did.

in defining the key symbolic dimensions of this paṭṭi poṅkal event. Furthermore, location was an important factor. The cattle-pen where the rituals took place was the palace-cum-home of all the cattle involved, just as the farmer's own home, normally located not far from the cattle pen, served as an equivalent "resting pen" for their human counterparts. An even more intimate connection is expressed in the fact that the cattle pen was, in past times, often the actual locus of fertility for both humans and their bovine counterparts.[6]

The Farmer's Cows Arrive on Earth - The Teppa Kulam's Mythological Frame

The Rg Veda, Hindu India's oldest body of literature, appears useful in helping us further unpack the meaning of this unique paṭṭi poṅkal ritual. In some very early poetic lines we find an intense interweaving of images related to cattle, water, milk, planted seeds, a king, and the rising sun. All the above themes operate as central components of the paṭṭi poṅkal ritual. I start this exploration of parallels by citing one particular poem:

HYMN 1.32 (Addressed to) Indra[7]

1. I WILL declare the manly deeds of Indra, the first that he achieved, the Thunder-wielder. He slew the Dragon, then disclosed the waters, and cleft the waters: he split open the bellies of mountains. He killed the dragon and pierced an opening for the channels of the mountain torrents.

[6] Farm women, in the past, often went to the family cow pen to give birth.

[7] Griffith, segments of Hymn 1.32, dedicated to Indra.

2. He slew the Dragon lying on the mountain: his heavenly bolt
of thunder Tvastar fashioned.
Like lowing kine in rapid flow descending the waters glided to the sea.
Like lowing cows, the flowing waters rushed straight downward to the ocean.

3. Impetuous as a bull, he chose the Soma and in three sacred
beakers drank the juices.
Maghavan grasped the thunder for his weapon, and smote
to death this firstborn of the dragons.

4. When, Indra, thou hadst slain the dragon's firstborn,
and overcome the charms of the enchanters,
Then, giving life to Sun and Dawn and Heaven, thou foundest
At that very moment you brought forth the sun, the sky, and dawn.
And not one foe to stand against thee.
Since then you have found no enemy to conquer you.

….
11. Guarded by Ahi stood the thralls of Dasas,
the waters stayed like Kine held by the robber.
But he, when he had smitten Vṛtra, opened the cave wherein
the floods had been imprisoned.

12. A horse's tail wast thou when he, O Indra, smote on thy
bolt; thou, God without a second,
Thou hast won back the kine, hast won the Soma;
thou hast let loose to flow the Seven Rivers.

…
15. Indra is King of all that moves and moves not,
of creatures tame and horned, the Thunder-wielder.
Indra who wields the thunderbolt in his hand, is the king of that
which moves and that which rests, of the tame and of the horned.
Over all living men he rules as Sovran, containing all as spokes
within the felly.

The segments of the important poem just quoted outline a story: a great dragon in the sky (possibly represented by what we in the West call the milky way) once held back a huge pool of life-giving water with its serpentine body. This would be much like a farmer's dam is used to hold back the waters of a large irrigation tank today. Indeed, when we combine the many variant forms of this story[8] we learn that a great sky-dam once imprisoned many vital human resources including cattle, the sun, and a marvellous life-giving elixir known as Soma. Furthermore, before the dam broke, the sky and the earth were joined as one. When that huge dragon who held back the waters was slain by Indra, it allowed that vital cosmic liquid to burst forth, changing everything. In fact, in another similar description, this primordial creation moment includes Indra not only slaying that dragon but also his cutting off its limbs so as to convert that demon into an armless, legless serpent.

[8] I refer to numerous references in the Rg Veda to Indra's slaying Vṛtra, thereby allowing the release of the water in rivers and also freeing pent up cows. The reference to a dragon-like creature with a long and powerful tail in this break-open-the-dam story suggests the possible cross-reference with a crocodile-based mythology, thus pointing to possible Indus Valley imagery and story parallels. The Indus Valley seal corpus suggests that the crocodile was a key creature in that early culture as well.

This was also the moment that the sky and earth became separated. The sky was pushed up at this key moment while the earth took form below. At the same time a hierarchy was created between the two halves of what once was singular and whole. We can surmise that this constitutes a rank ordering between the two because water instantly began to flow down from the upper to the lower realm in the form of multiple, life-generating rivers.[9] The piercing of that original dragon-dam not only allowed for a great rush of water, it also freed the primordial cattle herd which lay concealed behind that barrier. The moment Indra killed the great demon, whose name was Vṛtra, those cattle exited their dark restraining cage. It was a moment of freedom, especially the freedom to move, which brought joy to that mythical herd of kine. To summarize, these poetic verses suggest that several key dimensions of human life, mythologically speaking, all appear at the same instant: cows, the sun and the many vital rivers of earth all take form together in a joint birthing event.

Additional Consequences of Splitting Open the Primeval Cave

In another Rg Veda poem, likely composed earlier but also dedicated to Indra,[10] the above bundle of associations is further described. Here it is said that Indra split open a cave where the cows had been held captive by a band of thieves. Once confined in darkness, Indra's act cracked opened what was, metaphorically, a primordial cosmic egg. His violent attack resulted in the birth of the sun, a shining orb that (in its own way) succeeded in piercing the primordial darkness and thus brightened up the sky with daylight. Important too, is the idea that the sun now began to move across a middle ground located between sky and earth. Referencing the same metaphor, the sun was like yolk that exited from a great cosmic egg. And this same second poem further associates the newly released cows with the birth of sacred speech. It also mentions that the first seeds were created at this time. Along with them came the rain they needed to grow. But more important yet, that all-important primordial womb is depicted as lying inside a mountain. The hero who pierced that mountain and opened up its 'womb' was a 'great bull,' becoming the source of fertility behind all life as we now know it. That hero was Indra and elsewhere it is made clear that his weapon was a huge thunderbolt.

[9] The upper world is also referred to as having been a mountain, something huge that towered above what was now defined as the human world below.

[10] Rg Veda 3.31, a poem which both Griffith and Doniger have translated. I prefer Doniger here as her choice of words is a little clearer and she also provides a helpful commentary 1981:151-156). My analysis rests on a careful reading of this poem, as well as of her footnotes.

Thunder and lightning can also be understood as a metaphoric image for Indra's cosmic-sized phallus, as well as a variant of his related tool of war known in India as a gada or blunt mace. Indra used his gada to pierce the great, dark, cosmic womb, violently breaking open its shell. That same womb, metaphorically, the golden egg, had a mountain as its outer shell.[11] This important poem also links Indra's release of the cows and the waters that carried them to earth to aiding in the conquest of drought. And it describes the first appearance of light as a set of rosy fingered rays similar to what is often seen at dawn. In this same brief period, the Maruts (thought to be embodied in rain clouds) were also born, as was Agni, the god of fire. Agni emerged from darkness and the vast cosmic waters to become a humanlike being whose flames were his arms and hands.[12] The same poem, at a more abstract level still, further speaks about the first appearance of motion: the cows and waters, before their breakout, were static and unseen. This lack of palpable sensation, another kind of darkness, was suddenly unlocked, set-in motion by Indra's great mace, and thus stasis was given life.

And there is more. The great laws of Manu which are believed to rule all of humankind, were brought to earth and set forth by him at this same creative instant. Manu, the great ancestor, progenitor of all mankind, somehow appeared at the very same moment as the great flood that issued from that pierced mountain. The cows led the way, but the human race, represented by its progenitor Manu, accompanied by seven venerated sages, also appear for the first time at this critical juncture.[13] In sum, according to this key piece of Vedic poetry, the first cows and the first humans came to earth together. Because of all the gushing water, Manu and the sages (but not the cows) now needed a boat. However, at least in one artist's mind, (see Figure 5), that 'first vehicle' did not require oars or paddles, only a rudder. That means that it had no independent means of movement. According to that painter, its' propulsion was provided by a great primordial fish, while the boat itself assumed the form of a goose. For propulsion, the neck of that goose was tied to a primordial "fish."[14] That fish was

[11] For further comments on the importance of metaphor in poetic human thinking see Beck, 1978.
[12] Agni is strongly associated with the Vedic fire alter and his 'father' Prajapati is equated with the calendar year, the seasons and the four directions (Parpola, 2015: 266).
[13] I take this from Rg Veda 1.32, verse 8, as discussed by Doniger in her footnote #4 (p. 151) where she suggests that the text may refer to the fact that Manu was saved from the great flood when the cave was pierced. This idea is reinforced by an image of this event found on the internet, depicting Manu rescued in a boat along with the seven sages during the great flood that emptied the cave (see Fig. 5).
[14] In the Mahābharata the seven sages are explicitly connected to the great flood (3.185.1 -54). The image shown is from Ramanarayanadatta Sastri, n.d., *Mahābharata* Vol 2, p. 500, Gorakhpur Geeta Press, Gorakhpur, UP. Wikipedia (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manu(Hinduism) notes that this particular work of art is in the public domain. The artist and date are unknown. Parpola, 2015: 197, connects this idea of an original arc that helped Manu and the seven sages survive

Vishnu's first avatar, Matsya or Vishnu in fish form. It would seem that Matsya propelled Manu's boat and helped it to navigate through that first huge gush of water.

In one local Kongu temple the seven sisters appear side-by-side with the goddess Sarasvati, usually portrayed seated on her own "boat-goose." These seven women are her helpers or assistants. In a photograph taken inside that shrine (Figure 6), these seven women have been aligned stiffly against a bright blue wall. That color is appropriate because they are frequently described as crossing water to reach earth for their visit, at least in this region's local poetry, and their

Figure -5 Manu and the seven sages in a boat during the great flood.

Figure -6 The seven Kannimār (right) and their mentor, Sarasvati (labeled Veḷḷaiyamman) around the left

shrines are often located on the edge of a pond or other body of water.[15] Just to their right, around the corner and against the darker wall in the same photo we see Sarasvati, even though she is only half visible in this particular image. Sarasvati is not seated on a goose in this instance, but she is still easily identifiable by her label in Tamil which reads Veḷḷaiyamman or the "white woman," a common name for Sarasvati because of her purity and her trademark white sari. Here Sarasvati is seen emptying a pot of liquid that she holds between her two hands. That "overflowing" vessel is an additional possible reference to the pierced womb-of-the-cave which brought forth the flood, the primal cow herd, plus Manu himself. His descendants are deemed responsible for all the human life seen on earth today. Sarasvati was the mother of that flood, as well as the source of all of India's great rivers. Her Kannimār helpers are the Pleiades, seven trademark stars that form a bright oval, a set of shining dots, in the sky. Significantly, those seven stars encompass a very a dark spot noticeable in their

the flood with the constellation Ursa Major and the fact that this particular asterism, located near the celestial pole, never slips below the horizon.

[15] Many of the shrines dedicated to the seven sisters or Kannimār are situated at the edge of a temple pond or an irrigation tank. They can also be found in shrines located along the seashore near Chennai. The photo in Fig. 6 was taken by the author in 2018.

midst. As will be discussed further below, that is the great sky-womb that they jointly guard.

As background, it is important to mention that these seven women, the Pleiades, are said by many (if not all) sources to have once been married to the seven sages. Some myths state that these seven women resided with them in the far north, near the pole star, where they were associated with the constellation known as Ursa Major. Those same stories go on to say that these seven sisters (or seven mothers) later became separated from their husbands and now live alone, in the East, where they constitute the constellation Pleiades, also known as the Krittika. Although various myths circulate about why this separation happened, it could have occurred very early mythically speaking, perhaps even at the moment when the seven sages got flushed out of their cave on the flood waters and then rode down to earth alongside Manu. Perhaps their 'wives,' who were technically virgins all along, because they had married ascetics, remained in place as a part of that original cosmic mountain or first egg. Perhaps they never really 'lived' in Ursa Major at all. When the great mountain was split open they could have been left behind, forming a part of the cosmic "egg shell." This could be how they acquired their role as the Pleiades, guardians of a very specific place that retains its role as a primordial and ever-fertile sky-womb to this day. This alternative story fits much better with the local Tamil poems about these

Figure-7 The epic heroine Tangal walking through the forest in search of her dead brothers.

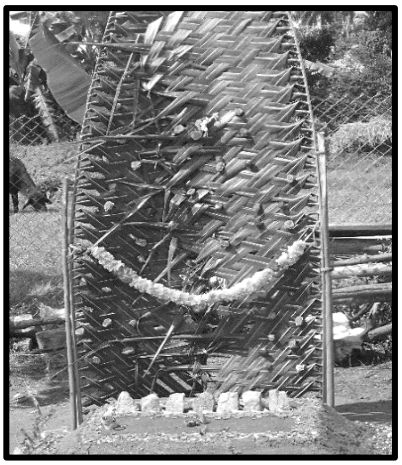

Figure -8 A shrine erected at the paṭṭi poṅkal ceremony, Fig. one, where we see that the Kannimār have been given a woven vegetal backdrop that functions like a great cobra hood.

women, where they have no husbands, and the seven sages are never mentioned. However, these all-important seven women do come down to earth for visits. Their appearance is highly anticipated and the winter solstice poṅkal festivities represent the conventional moment in the year when they appear. In Figure 6, above, a five-headed cobra with an expanded hood looms over the seven Kannimār maidens. Remember that in the myth just recounted, Vṛtra

severed the arms and legs of the original dragon-demon who held all life captive. His body lay prone after having been so badly stricken. As is so many other Hindu folk myths, when a male is defeated by a righteous opponent, he does not just die or disappear. Instead, he is transformed, his temper cooled, and his basic purpose in life altered. That male, once a monster, now becomes a guardian helper.[16] An important local epic that glorifies the Kongu region has a similar sub-theme. One of the seven Pleiades mentioned there is sent to earth by Shiva in order to become the guardian of the twin heroes of this story. She is the youngest of the seven Kannimār and she becomes those twins' younger sister Tangal. In Figure 7, taken from an animated version of that epic legend, we see an armless cobra. Perhaps he is a revamped version of that stricken Vṛtra dragon-serpent? That cobra now protects his sky-born sister as she wanders through the forest in search of her brothers, two heroes who have just died. She will resurrect them both, proving that she holds, within herself, a cosmic power intimately related to her role as protector of the cosmic womb. She holds within her body, a reviving energy that can regenerate life from death itself.

Clearly, the seven Kannimār goddesses "belong" at the teppa kulam celebration. They oversee the whole delicate process of cow fertilization. Perhaps they also have a role in the process of rebirthing the sun itself, at the moment of the winter solstice? Both actions are wrapped up with the idea that, by crossing the teppa kulam, a cow is making a symbolic trip up to the sky and back, that it gets re-fertilized while there and that the Pleiades will protect her as this happens. It is no accident that the Kannimār, who represent that famous Pleiades cluster, are located right above the shoulder hump of Taurus, the constellation which depicts the great bull of heaven. Taurus, who is also Nandi, is likely the source of that mythical seed needed for this re-fertilization process. In the paṭṭi poṅkal ceremony as earlier illustrated in Figure 1, one may note that the seven goddesses have been given a visual backdrop (see the upper right corner) which, with a little imagination, looks like a huge cobra spreading its' hood benignly and lovingly, over those seven tiny stones.[17] The idea that a great primordial serpent was slayed and de-limbed by Indra is consistent with what we see in this temple and in the epic story beloved by people of the Kongu area. That original demon did not disappear. Instead he was converted into a helpmate. Similarly, the

[16] See Beck, 1981, for a further discussion of this theme.

[17] Shulman speaks of the cobra as a primal symbol of rebirth because of its ability to shed its skin and hence become a "new" version of its former self. Serpents are also said to embody the power of cosmic forces that reside underground, (2016: 90-92). It is significant, in this regard, that the heroine pictured in Figure 7 is on her way to find her own two brothers who both lie dead in a forest setting. Forests, just like floods, can represent chaos. This young sister will soon use her special personal powers to find her way through a deep forest to find and then resurrect her twin siblings, in her effort to reestablish a former social order that has now crumbled around her.

Pleiades were considered 'helpers' by the Greeks, something repeatedly mentioned by Hesiod.[18] And they constitute a very ancient constellation, a cluster of stars that has always been considered to be a sailor's best friend and guide.

The Nine Planets and the Four Cardinal Directions

There are conventionally nine planets in any Hindu temple layout, five visible to the naked eye (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn) plus the Sun, the Moon and two lunar nodes, named Raku and Ketu (Figure 9).[19] A lunar node is a spot in the sky where lunar eclipses occur. They are named after what are believed to be two key eclipse demons. Raku is the more northern and Ketu the more southern of these dual cosmic entities. They are associated with eclipses of sun (caused by Raku) and of the moon (by Ketu). It is said that these two are cosmic serpents that sometimes cast their shadow on one of these shining orbs, even briefly swallowing it. At the Coimbatore Agricultural University 2020 paṭṭi poṅkal, the grand teppa kulam was divided into nine spaces just a shrine dedicated to the nine planets is laid out in a temple setting. I was told that each of the nine sub-squares

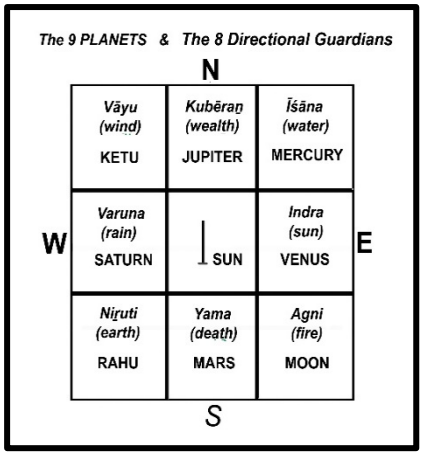

Figure -9 The layout of a shine dedicated to the nine planets found inside all local Shiva

[18] Lattimore, 1991: 63,65,91-2.

[19] This diagram and the deities identified on it comes from a drawing found in my own fieldnotes. However, it nicely matches a traditional metal plate made in Thanjavur and discussed by Parpola, 1994: 200. He says that it exactly depicts the prescriptions of the late Vedic texts (Baudhāyana-Gṛhya-Pariśeṣa-Sūtra 1,16,12-15 and Jaiminīya-Gṛhyasūtra 2,09). The idea that a sun stands on a post in the middle of the sky is also ancient but is not a theme directly referenced on that metal plate. The photo Parpola presents on the page 199, furthermore, shows a group of people in South Arcot worshipping the nine planets in a temple setting on January 10, 1985. This was likely part of a ritual performed there asking for planetary benevolence and blessings from Saturn just in advance of the yearly poṅkal ceremonies that were about to begin. All these details suggest that the bright stars and moving planets in the sky are an ancient and key part of the winter solstice ritual surround. The previous month is inauspicious and religious ascetics go door to door during this period asking people to be careful. Propitiating Saturn, in particular, is believed to help avoid potentially disastrous astrological impacts of planetary influences that can manipulate a family during this period (Dubois, 1906: 572). When portrayed in temples, in a single array along with the other planets, Saturn always appears at the very end when reading that sculpted array from left to right (Mevissen, 2000: 1269-72). No wonder poṅkal is a joyful time, as it comes just as this inauspicious period ends. Parpola, 2013, p. 29, argues that it makes sense to suggest the involvement of the planets in calendrical thinking derives from Harappan tradition. He notes that the planets are not mentioned at all in the Rg Veda and that it is extremely difficult to find references to them even in later Vedic texts.

represented one of those nine planets.[20] Not seen in the layout, but symbolically linked to it, is the fact that this neatly subdivided teppa kulam pond had been built under a pandal. In a Shiva temple one finds the same exact presentation, except there one sees a sculpted version of the nine planets similarly arrayed. In both cases they rest sheltered under a pandal or square roof of some kind that is held up by a leg or pillar at each corner. That 'roof' makes the flat square seen in Figure 9 into a three-dimensional space. A pandal reaches towards the sky using four legs, while a sugarcane tripod does the same using just three. Both function as a raised, mountain-like forms that stretch upwards towards the sun. Indeed, both are versions of a huge cosmic prop that symbolizes the heavens' center point while also helping to hold the sky and the earth apart. Both satisfy the need for a third dimension, a desire to foster communication between these two spheres and to facilitate movement, both up and down. Just as the hood of the cobra protects the Kannimār, so the pandal and the tripod protect the teppa kulam and the planets associated with it.

Rg Veda 3.31 describes how the sky and earth were split asunder as the great cave-of-the-mountain opened. However, the two halves of this re-created whole do not easily stand apart, necessitating a prop to keep them separated. A great

Figure -10 Paṭṭi poṅkal in a farmer's sheep pen, 1965, showing the teppa kulam with a shrine for the seven Kannimār and a sugarcane tripod (white lines) on the pond's far edge.

Figure -11 The permanent teppa kulam of the Madurai Meenakshi temple showing the high pillar permanently installed at its' center.

Figure -12 A decorated pandal canopy located directly over the teppa kulam at the Coimbatore Agricultural University paṭṭi poṅkal celebrations, 2020.

pillar was thus raised to help hold the sky up.[21] The sun, furthermore, which is so important in the original story, is also important in the paṭṭi poṅkal ritual. Though this cosmic pillar is not identified with a great tree in Rg Veda 3.31, the basic idea referenced by a central post or prop that reaches up into the sky is

[20] Eight of the nine sub-pools had their water "enhanced" with a specific auspicious addition. The substances added were: NW=cow urine, N=kumkum, NE=turmeric powder, E=a mix of nine types of grain, SE=rose water, S=curd, SW=milk and W=rice gruel. However, the center square contained only 'plain' water.

[21] Griffith, Rg Veda 3.31.12 plus Doniger, 1981: 153 and related footnote #21 on p. 156, which discusses this particular segment of that poem.

certainly familiar. The concept of a central pilar also links easily to a widespread Hindu belief that the cosmos is centred around a great tree. While that tree grows upward, it is also said, in some cases, to grow downwards such that its many roots hang visibly in the air. I refer, of course, to the famous fiscus religiosa or banyan fig which is honored and worshipped throughout India. It is possible to see the paṭṭi poṅkal sugarcane tripod as representing an upside-down or 'nighttime' version of that cosmic tree. Note that the leaves attached to each stalk's summit hang down and look rather like roots (Figure 1), while the three "legs", each represented by one sugarcane stalk, can equally be imagined to be this tree's "upside-down" branches. Perhaps that ambiguity is actually helpful, since the patti ponkal takes place at dawn and involves the re-birth of the winter solstice sun. One can imagine that the Kannimār, who face East for this event, can actually "see" the first rays of that new-born sun reflected (briefly) in the teppa kulam's waters that are situated straight in front of them. The Kannimār (who are guardians of the night and of dangerous transitions in general) likely watch for signs of this morphing of night into day, as reflected in that watery pool very carefully.[22]

Elsewhere, in other Vedic poems, the sun is frequently identified with a huge eagle-like bird. If a post or a tree is conveniently located, birds are likely to perch on it. No teppa kulam in the paṭṭi poṅkal celebrations I witnessed had anything physically distinctive placed in the middle of its ritual pond. However, the famous Meenakshi temple in Madurai, not very far south of Kongu region, supplies exactly the example we are looking for. It has a famous and lovely teppa kulam where a large pillar rises precisely in the middle of this 'float pool.' That body of water is a key part of this temple's larger layout. It is specifically featured during the festival season when images of the key goddess and god, both resident at this shrine, are floated around it using a raft. Although their 'float' trip may not seem like an up-down kind of movement,[23] I think it is safe to say that the broader

[22] The winter solstice is also, of course, the transition point, in Hindu thinking, from the dark to the 'bright' half of each year. The dark period ends with the sun's entry into the constellation Capricorn. The six dark months have many interesting associations including a link to serpents, wild boars, buffaloes, and crocodiles, all of which are black skinned creatures having a strong affinity with water. The winter solstice is called Makara Sankranti in Tamil. The makara is normally considered to be a sea-goat but in Tamil this term can also refer to a crocodile or an alligator. However, none of these intriguing creatures are directly referenced in the paṭṭi poṅkal rituals I witnessed. So, I have decided to set aside this suggestive set of themes for deeper discussion in a future essay.

[23] It is significant that Madurai's 'float festival' was initiated by a famous king of this city in the seventh century named Thirumalai Nayak. He wanted to celebrate his birthday and commissioned the building of a grand lake with a fine palace at its center for this purpose. That birthday festival is now celebrated on the first full moon day following the Pongal festival (namely the first full moon that occurs during the month of Thai). A tourist brochure emphasizes the reflection of light on the temple's great pond that can be seen on this moonlit night. The sugarcane tripod, similarly, may "reflect" the idea of a great cosmic tree, reflected in the teppa kulam "upside down" at the

idea is that this pool of water functions as an earthly counterpart of the sky (frequently called a "sea" in Tamil poetry).[24] Entering that pool is like entering a liminal space that symbolically carries various forms of life or energy (gods, humans, or cows) back and forth between these two domains. And the idea of 'floating' on it resembles the belief that there was once an original, cosmic boat. In sum, the key here is vertical movement and the fact that the human domain down below serves to reflect the light seen in the sky above. The use of a teppa kulam during a winter solstice paṭṭi poṅkal ritual suggests that an otherwise earth-bound cow or cows will make a symbolic journey up into the sky and back at this time, renewing their link to a primordial creation event. Furthermore, the teppa kulam provides a mirror for what the sun itself does during its' own yearly cycle, moving gradually northward (upwards towards the Himalayas during the bright half of the year ending with the summer solstice, and then back southward during the opposite period, the darkening half of the same annual cycle). Figures 10, 11 and 12 make these cross-associations clear.

In Figure 12 one can clearly see how a permanent canopy structure sheltered the central teppa kulam that was then built directly under it.[25] This canopy had been highly decorated for this winter solstice event. It was now completely covered with lush vegetal and agricultural motifs. The watery pool underneath, furthermore, was clearly divided into nine sub-parts. The Kannimār were present and formed a part of this layout, but their representation was truly tiny, each goddess being just a small lump of cow dung measuring about one inch high.

Those seven lumps of cow dung, decorated with turmeric, red kumkum powder and flowers, were dwarfed both by a huge and elaborately subdivided teppa kulam and by the pandal itself. These goddesses were located off to one side, in the far (NW) corner. I never even noticed them until I happened to ask if they were there. In the farmer's version of the paṭṭi poṅkal, by contrast (see Figures 1, 8 and 10), these seven goddesses were given considerable prominence. There, a fine raised platform was built just for them, so they could properly watch each cow and bull as it crossed the ritual pond (See Figure 8). These seven girls are definitely folk divinities in the Kongu area. However, they are not given much

darkest moment of the year, the moment of the winter solstice. This is the moment when a "reversal" in the sun's direction of movement predictably occurs. Of course, the actual reversal in the sun's direction of movement takes a number of days to become palpable. The poṅkal moment helps to pinpoint the broader idea and may link to Varuna as great god of the waters, possibly part of the teppa kulam symbolism. The same perspective also suggests reading the sugarcane tripod as a symbol of a great 'upside down' tree that sends precious life from its roots above, down to all life living amongst its branches below (Witzel, 2012: 133 and ff 275 on 487. Also see Kuiper, 1983; Rg Veda 1.24.7, Griffith translation, and Parpola, 2014: 111).

[24] For example, in Natrinai, poem 231 (Herbert, 2013: 343).

[25] See Figure 20 for a much closer view of this teppa kulam, excluding its 'roof' but providing a much better view of the layout of its nine subdivisions.

attention by Brahman priests, either at this University-sponsored ceremony or elsewhere.[26] In the farmer-owned cattle pens where I was able to observe this same ritual event, by contrast, no special person of high ritual status was employed to conduct their worship. In this context locals gave these seven goddesses their penultimate respect.

Figure 1 presented a sketch of one key moment of the farmer's celebration I was able to witness. This was when the first cow began its' crossing of the teppa kulam.[27] Figure 13 consists of a single still frame extracted from a video taken of the broader time period during which that instant occurred. Here the cow can be seen making an unexpectedly high jump. As she did this the attending crowd cheered loudly. Some used the Tamil equivalents of "marvellous" or "fantastic." The outburst was memorable because it made it very clear that her spectacular jump marked the high point of this entire event. Her symbolic lift off impressed everyone. Of course, the sugarcane tripod had to be set out of the way, but its legs can still be seen in the foreground of that same video frame. It was only here that I saw the Kannimār and their association with a sugarcane tripod truly given true prominence.

Figure -13 The lead cow jumps upward while crossing the teppa kulam. in a farmer's cattle pen, 2020.

Figure -14 The calf that tried to follow its mother splashes through the same teppa kulam, 2020.

[26] See Beck, 2020 for a much fuller discussion of these seven goddesses and why use the term 'folk' to describe their status. The essay cited examines a large cache of Kongu temple layouts Beck carefully recorded in the mid sixties. She reports on how the Kannimār goddess-cluster mediated between various local and pan-Indian deities inside the specific shrine compounds studied, helping to define what it meant to be a 'folk' deity in that context. In the present paper we see these same goddesses now mediating between night and day and between moonset and sunrise, bridging the gap between when the sun dies and when it is then reborn at this winter solstice event.

[27] Figure 13 presents a single still frame extracted from a video taken of this event. My videographer was clearly not expecting the cow to jump with so much enthusiasm, and hence he did not manage to capture the full height of her sudden leap.

In Figure 14, a second video frame, shows the aftermath of that cow's jump. Her calf had stood beside her, but its legs were not strong enough to accomplish such a high leap. Instead, her calf had to splash its' way through the deep pond water, doing its' best to follow her. I find this moment quite symbolic. One can imagine that this huge gush resembled a great river in flood, the waters rushing down towards earth at full speed from the skies above.

In Figure 13 an innocent calf found itself in very deep water unexpectedly, possibly echoing the water's sudden exit from a dark primordial cave. When the dam broke, the ensuing flood carried Manu with it and also all seven sages. These men are considered to be ancestors. Their role was to generate, mystically and through their asceticism, all life known on earth today. In sum, every example discussed so far features both upward and a downward movement between earth and sky, each iteration being responsible for new life, albeit in a variety of different ways.[28]

Figure -15 Village girls dance around a pile of harvest basket in the settlement's public center space, 1965.

The Seven Kannimār Goddesses and the Pleiades Star Cluster They Represent

It is now time to transition to an examination of one additional key dimension of this interesting ceremony. Clearly, the entire period allocated for Tamil poṅkal celebrations has been explicitly timed to emphasize its link to the winter solstice. In preparation, for example, fasting is observed for several weeks, especially by young women. Their self-restraint during this period is said to demonstrate their

[28] David Shulman, (2016: 55, 63 and 74-5) has written that "Tamil tradition has long been famous for an origin myth based on the idea of a destructive flood. Many of the poems that celebrate the Vaigai river in the famous Sangam text *Paripādal*, also feature a primordial river, the one associated with the Madurai Meekakshi temple. It has a summer flood period that is a time of creative chaos associated with behavior that lies "outside the normal rules" including raucous stunts and sudden bursts of love making.

concern to attract a good future husband and then to conceive offspring while lying on a fertile marriage bed. On the poṅkal day, at least in Kongu villages, young girls dance around overturned farmers' produce baskets, symbolizing this idea as well as linking it to the wider concept of agricultural abundance. Their energy can easily be likened to a village version of the Pleiades maidens who are also thought to jump, dance, and play with bouncing balls when they descend to earth to play with humans during this period. Local poetry says as much and welcomes these seven Kannimār virgins to join in for the special day. One can even see a reference to the prominent Pleiades star cluster by noticing the printed patterns that adorn the skirt-blouse outfits these girls wore for this dance! The Kannimār are protectors, as well as being youthful girls. In the sky they form a cluster that is quite bright, and that forms a hollow, not quite round, ring. The dark, 'empty' spot in their midst is the sky womb that they guard, the central point where new creation occurs. We have seen, above, that during the paṭṭi poṅkal the Kannimār guard over the re-birth of the sun each year. One can compare the visit of these sky-girls to earth on this special day to the splash-down of a flying bird that lands on a pond. The Kannimār, as visiting "birds," will hopefully leave behind their blessings for the new year just as a bird might leave a fresh egg that symbolizes harvest wealth to come. That egg will germinate in the waters of the cattle pen.[29]

Conclusion

Each of the many themes discussed in this essay, when considered as an interwoven cluster, together serve to define a consistent, structured and evocative set of symbolic meanings. These many dimensions of the Kannimār or Krittika goddesses all link to the idea of there being a core winter-solstice-renewal moment and all find expression in the contemporary paṭṭi poṅkal rituals studied above. In sum, the stories, ceremonies and related symbols explored here function to interrelate the Kannimār, caves, eggs, fire, water, a pillar, and a likely representation of an upside-down tree to the winter solstice. That is the moment when the sun turns around, reversing its course so as to then retrace its own just-established path along the horizon. It will now rise further North each day

[29] The great goddess of Madurai, Meenakshi, is herself strongly associated with water. She is the daughter of a fisherman. She has carp-like eyes. Her husband, the Pandiya king, carries a banner dominated by a fish symbol, and like all goddesses, she is likened to a river. Meanwhile, the territory she symbolizes and protects is surrounded by a moat filled with water. Her husband receives obeisance from serpents, creatures also strongly linked to water. See Parthasarathy, 1993: 228 and Hudson, 2008: 125-6. Yes, Meenakshi is also likened to fire, but she is fire that has progressed upward from the mud at the bottom of the waters, as does the red lotus. She is also like the sun that rises in the east out of the ocean at dawn. She can be likened to the primordial goddess Sarasvati or to Vac, while the Kannimār can be likened to Meenakshi's daughters, seven young sisters who act as assistants who serve a great, primordial goddess.

for a full six months. All this, and more, finds embodiment in the renewal rituals celebrated in the cattle pens of Kongu farmers in mid-January each year. The interpretations suggested focus on the interlocking of several ancient myths depicting the sun, a cluster of cows in a cattle pen and, equally important, the seven Pleiades who guard life's shared sky-womb-origin-spot.

The multiple beliefs, symbols and stories discussed also honor a still-broader concept, that of an annual, sky-fostered renewal of the sun, a moment understood to mark the re-fertilization of life at large. This great act of renewal is believed to be accomplished by a great sky-bull, a beast whose striking image can still be seen amongst the stars, at least by those who look carefully and wish to see him. However, it seems that the same act of re-insemination is also fostered, at an even higher level of abstraction, by a universal female energy source, a cosmic-scale creatrix. Her presence is expressed via the belief that a universe-wide equivalent of an earth-bound cattle pen defines the sky above. That vast 'enclosure,' overseen and nurtured by female forces, accepts and nourishes each new embryo for a limited time, but will then drop (or in some other way send) that new embryo down to earth. Only after that, in the reflected, parallel universe here below, humans will get the opportunity to foster that new life, creating a highly respected and protected space for it (a home or cattle pen) where it will then be further nourished and allowed to grow to maturity.

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Nidān, Volume 5, No. 2, December 2020, pp. 51-82
ISSN 2414-8636
doi.org/10.36886/nidan.2020.5.2.4

The Citizen Amendment Act of 2019 and its Lack of Impact on Shvetambara Jains in Mumbai: Cautious Debates on Religious Freedom and Minority Rights in a Gated Community [1]

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Abstract

Often described as the world's largest democracy, India has a secular constitution designed for a multi-religious people, which provides a framework for a wide range of political debates, as well as sociological and anthropological discourses. These are, however, mainly focused on relations between the largest religious minority of India, the Muslims, and the Hindu majority. My paper takes a different direction as it focuses on a very small section of the Indian population, seeking to explore what religious freedom and minority rights mean for contemporary Jains in India, a community which highly appreciates the supreme value of non-violence. Jains have not claimed their minority rights with the support of armed violence, much in contrast to Hindutva activists, Muslims motivated by Islamism, and militant pro-Khalistan Sikhs. Instead, Jains rest their claim for religious freedom and religious minority status on authoritative, scriptural knowledge which is equated with legislative texts (of various colonial/post-independence inner Indian state and/or supranational/ international authorities, such as UN charters). Describing the main features of Jainism and Jain community in post-independent India, this paper draws on the controversial practice of initiating children into the strict ascetic lifestyle of Jain *sadhus* and Jain *sadhvis* to analyse how orthodox Jains were able to successfully defend their idea of religious freedom from a historical, and contemporary perspective. This strategy to maintain religious freedom is deeply connected with longstanding Jain endeavours for gaining national religious minority status, granted in 2014. Against this background, crucial questions emerge about the fundamental

[1] An earlier (pre CAA-) version of the paper has been presented at the Annual Conference of the European Association for the Study of Religions at the University of Groningen on May 12, 2014. Many thanks to John Cort, Deepra Dandekar, Malvika Shah and Roland Hardenberg for their helpful critique and supportive comments on earlier versions of this paper and for sharing their ideas on the general subject of CAA. Please note that I am not using diacritics as most of the interview partners are polyglot and use different languages in a code switching mode, so it makes little sense to stick to a sanskritised spelling.

interrogation of secular ideas underlying the CAA debate and how this affects the local Shvetambara communities of western India. This paper highlights the unique position of the Jain community in urban western India, in relation to both, the rigid BJP policy towards minorities in general, but also towards the larger Muslim minority.

Keywords: Jains, western India, minority politics, religious identity, heterogenous categories

Two events with a capital C have kept India in suspense since the beginning of 2020: The Citizen Amendment Act (CAA) and the Coronavirus curfew. Both are challenges for the Indian state, often described in terms of the world's largest democracy.[2] India's secular constitution was designed for a multi-religious population and therefore, the constitution is the subject of wide ranging political, sociological, and anthropological discourses, mainly focused on the relation of the largest religious minority of India, the Muslims, to the Hindu majority.[3]
My paper takes a somewhat different direction, as it focuses on a very small section of the Indian population, viz. the Jains. On the one hand, while I discuss the Jain self-positioning towards the CAA, I also seek to explore what religious freedom and minority rights mean for Jains in contemporary India, a community that puts emphasis on the supreme value of non-violence. Unlike other religious communities, one does not encounter militant Jain groups in society, claiming religious privileges with the help of armed violence, much in contrast to Hindutva activists, Muslims motivated by Islamism, and combative pro-Khalistan Sikhs. Instead, as I will demonstrate, Jain activism for religious freedom, and to gain minority status has mainly rested on claims that balance doctrinal with juridical arguments. I argue that all too often, such subtle strategies, as those of the Jains, are lost in the heated public discourse on minority politics, such as the recent one on CAA, carried out both on political and scholarly levels. In order to have insight into these intricacies and thus also to identify alternative perspectives to the polarisation of Hindus and Muslims cultural anthropological scholarship on Jains should deal with questions such as: What does the CAA mean to Jains, a community that always advocated alternatives to violence? What are the implications of statements made by Jains, following the adoption of the CAA in the Indian Parliament in December 2019, its subsequent discussions in the media, and the violent crushing of anti-CAA protests?

In the first part of this paper, I will introduce the main features of Jainism and the Jain community in post-independent India. In the second part, while drawing from the controversial example of initiating children into the ascetic life style, I will proceed with describing how orthodox Jains successfully defended their ideas

[2] See for instance Guha, 2008 and for more recent considerations Jaffrelot, 2012, Corbridge & Harriss, 2013: 22, 26, 201, Schmidt, 2014 and Bose, 2013.
[3] While many authors refer to the historical development of this situation, the most convincing is an account by Ganguly, 2003: 12-14.

about religious freedom, a discourse that finally resulted in them acquiring national minority status in 2014. Yet the Jains' self-positioning regarding minority engrossing Hindutva politics remains ambivalent, mainly based on an even wider social distance towards Muslims, the largest minority in India. In the third part, I will link the overarching issues of minority rights and religious freedom to the Jains' view of the CAA, based on statements made by my Jain interlocutors during fieldwork in Mumbai in February and March 2020, shortly before the global Coronavirus pandemic crisis has abruptly stopped the heated protests against the CAA in India. In my conclusion, I will link these arguments to the larger discussion about CAA and communal issues as part of an ethically motivated scholarship on India.

A Brief Introduction to Jains in Contemporary India

Jainism is often times described as one of the world's oldest religions, historically dating back at least to the first millennium BC.[4] The main tenets of Jainism are characterised by its core values of non-violence (*ahimsa*), put into practice by the strict discipline of Jain ascetic orders. Non-violence is the first tenet of the five great vows, further connected to no-stealing, no-possession, no-lying, and celibacy (Cort, 1991, Dundas, 1992). In general Jains themselves distinguish between two branches of Jainism, whereas Shvetambaras are more dominant than Digmabaras, both in numbers as well as participation in public life. The Shvetambaras, in fact, had established their traditional stronghold in Western India since the 10th century,[5] their ascetics dressing in white robes as a matter of distinction. About 12,000 men and women of the Jain tradition[6] live as migratory ascetics, wandering for eight months in a year, and only taking shelter with Jain lay communities and households for the four monsoon months (*caturmasa/ comasu*) from approx. July to November. Yet, the rigid rules of Jain ascetics of both sexes (*sadhus* and *sadhvis*) are observed by their lay followers, the *shravaks* and *shravikas*, only in a mitigated form, with the ritual and social minimum requirement of observing strict vegetarianism. Moreover, the frugal self-discipline of Jain ascetics is often contrasted with the affluence, and economic success of the lay Jain urban middle class, having maximum recourse to the best vocational and educational training. An above-average number of Jains enjoy a prominent position in the cosmopolitan and elite business class – some are even among the prominent-most income billionaires of India, and

[4] See, for instance, Dundas, 2020 and Balcerowicz, 2020. However, many Jains themselves believe that their religion is much older and goes back to the Indus Valley Civilisation, which would imply that Jainism was about 5000 years old, if there were historical evidence.

[5] Cf. Luithle-Hardenberg, Cort & Orr, 2020 and Yagnik & Sheth, 2005:111 for further discussions.

[6] These figures refer to the year 2018, when the exact number of Jain ascetics (12.465) was provided by the Ahmedabad based Shvetambara trust Anandji Kalyanji Pedhi (AKP). This trust regularly distributes printed tables showing the number of ascetics by order. For earlier statistics see Flügel, 2006: 361.

referred to as *crorepatis*[7]. Thus they are considered exemplary for economic success within their communities. However, this article focuses more on the lay community of a medium income range, comfortably settled between the two extremes, characterised by upper middle-class entrepreneurs, academics, and high-profile professionals (such as doctors, bankers or lawyers).

Often the wealth of Jains is based on family and community joint ventures. Besides, the majority of Jains considers an unpretentious lifestyle and achievements in education, spirituality and public charitable activities very important in terms of social prestige. Thus, the position of local Jain communities as religious minorities in Hindu society is rather 'exposed' and socially perceivable, despite their small numbers of about 0,4 % of the Indian population. According to census data there are currently between five and seven million Jains in India (predominantly in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi).[8] However, the exposed economic and social status of Jains has not always proved helpful with regard to their claims of religious minority status. Even though Jains qualify as a *numerical* minority, the understanding of 'minority' in contemporary India is rooted in lacking agency, income and power, features that do not apply to Jains in general. As an urban, mercantile community with very high rates of literacy and even higher education, one would be hard-pressed to present a convincing case of Jain marginalisation. Since Jains cannot easily be characterised as suffering from diverse socio-political, or material disabilities due to their status as religious minorities (Sethi, 2009: 610-611, Makkar, 2014), understanding their ambivalent location contributes to larger political discussions about the limited definition of religious minorities in contemporary India.

We will come back to the socially framed aspects of Jain identity further below when we consider the Jains' estimation of the CAA. First, we will look at the issue of identity from a religious perspective. In fact, the strict discipline of Jain ascetics has produced some peculiarities within the broad spectrum of Indian religious traditions. Within the last two decades in particular two practices became crucial for the public self-presentation of Jains and their need to claim religious freedom

[7] Among them are some of billionaires mentioned by the Forbes Asia magazine, for example, Gautam Adani, Dilip Sanghvi, Sudhir and Samir Mehta, Mangal Prabhat Lodha, Ajit Gulabchand, Motilal Oswal.

[8] For a detailed discussion of regional Jain strongholds in urban western India (in particular Ahmedabad and Jaipur) see Cort, 2020. In general one has to state that in contrast to the Sikh community in Punjab, Jains are not represented in any of the Indian states in numbers large enough to dominate the rest of the population. At the same time, the Census (and the widely applied ambiguous legal categories Hindu by religion/Hindu by law) is generally mistrusted by many Jains, as they are occasionally counted as Hindus too, a suspicion that is not entirely unjustified. While speculative attempts have often been made to spike the demography of Jains (occasionally even up to 20 million), it is difficult to estimate whether these attempts are really justified. However, the discussions about numbers reflect a general discomfort among Jains of potentially being counted as "Hindus" depending on the context (Dundas, 1992: 4, Sangave, 2001: 32, Sethi, 2009: 160, Jain, 2011: X, Bhagat, 2001).

and national minority status: ritually fasting to death (*sallekhana*, *santhara*[9]) and initiating children (*bal diksha*) into the ascetic order of the Shvetambara tradition. In particular, the latter subject is of great interest to Shvetambara Jain communities, as it is directly related to the continuation of their ascetic orders.[10] Child ascetics and the veneration of spiritually gifted children enjoy a long tradition among Shvetambara Jains.[11] About 20% of Shvetambara ascetics are initiated as minors (*bal munis*), with former child ascetics holding high ascetic offices by the time they achieve adulthood.[12] Most of the future Acaryas have to enter the order as young minors,[13] to master the scriptural knowledge, oratory skills, and acquire enough spiritual charisma – thus to become eligible as an ascetic leader (Balbir, 2001, Luithle-Hardenberg, 2014). So the ritual of initiating children is highly illustrative for characterising the Jain's distinct religious self-perception.

However, the same practice of initiating children is also an example of the Jain's opposition to the mainstream religious policy in India. Historically, child initiations were also subject to a ritualised dispute within Jain communities as parental protest was considered an integral part of testing young candidates (Balbir, 2001, Luithle-Hardenberg, 2014). This has changed in the post-Independence period, with these practices coming under repeated injunction from outsiders (mostly Hindus, internationally operating Christian or secular child protection organisations and NRI Jains), especially after the UN Charter of the Rights of the Child was legally implemented in India, in 2000.[14] In the course of events, the initiation of minors into the Jain ascetic orders suddenly became legally controversial from the perspective of outsiders of the Jain community, too. Child protection organisations increasingly interfered with *bal diksha* rituals framing their ideas through (accordingly) *universal* ideas of child rearing, education, individual freedom of choice and child rights.[15] Despite successful and convincing initiatives of child ascetics themselves the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*

[9] Cf. Braun, 2008, Laidlaw, 2005, Vallely, 2018 and Sethi, 2019 for further discussions.
[10] For a more detailed analysis, cf. Luithle-Hardenberg, 2014.
[11] In contrast, *ashramas*, or the life stages of twice-born Hindus, wherein *samnyas*, or renunciation, is traditionally relegated to the last two stages of a householder's life, minors hardly ever qualify to become full-fledged ascetics, the *bal yogis* of Nepal being a rare exception (Michaels, 1988 and 1998:108).
[12] Cf. Balbir, 2001: 173-175, Vyas & Nair, 2009, and Vasudev, 2004 for historical developments congruent with current trends, also recently recognised by *Times of India* (Shah & Jain, 2015) and *BBC News* India (Anonymous Correspondent 2019).
[13] Cf. Vallely, 2002: 187, 200, 280, Balbir, 2001: 173-174, and Cort, 1991: 653 for more discussions.
[14] India signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as early as 1992, but only implemented it in legal practice after ratifying the Juvenile & Justice (Care & Protection) Act, 2000. Since then, this new law has been designed to ensure that every person under the age of 18, in need of protection, is entitled to protection by the state (Roy, 2013: 2).
[15]These initiatives culminated in at least three private lawsuits between 2004 and 2009, aimed at preventing the initiation of children based on the *Juvenile Justice Act* of 2000. Cf. Vyas, 2011, Nair, 2009, Vyas & Nair 2008, and 2009, Vasudev, 2004, Choksi, 2009, Deewania, 2008, Anonymous Correspondent 2009.

(CRC), was brought in conflict with another fundamental right, *Freedom of thought, conscience and religion* (a right which is implied in the almost globally accepted *Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations* and *the Constitution of India*). Interestingly both the fundamental human rights, are considered the pinnacle of secular-liberal democracy (Mahmood, 2006, 2011a/ 2011b). In contrast to the efforts to stigmatise an age-old religious ritual advocates of child initiation argue that Article 25 of the Indian Constitution (declaring Freedom of Religion), must also be applicable to children, as Jain doctrine considers spiritual vocation to be independent of physical maturity (Balbir, 2001, Luithle-Hardenberg, 2014). Following this argumentation, it is highly significant that within the last 20 years the rate of initiations has greatly increased,[16] initiates have become celebrities for lay followers, and among them quite a number of minors.[17] In April 2009, the Government of India – responding to the ongoing initiatives of many influential Jains – issued a memorandum that initiation of Jain children ages 8 and above is legally permissible.[18]

This brief digression to the subject of child initiations should help us to understand how important the Jains' legal status as a religious minority is for their distinct religious identity and ritual practice, and not so much for their social status. However, a glance into historical events shows how difficult it was for Jains to gain minority status, because they were all too often perceived as Hindus.

The Jains as a Religious Minority in India

Jains have been acknowledged as a distinct demographic unit since the 1873 census (Patil, 2006, Sethi, 2009: 155), and they were also clearly recognised as an independent 'religion' by the German Indologist Herman Jacobi in 1879.[19] Nevertheless, neither in British India, nor in independent India was their legal status as a religious *minority* ever granted until January 2014. The underlying reasons for this are manifold and can be identified as being rooted in the Hindu dominated, multi-religious environment of India, but also in the Jain community itself. Jains hesitated giving British administrators access to their sacred knowledge – due to the threat of ritual pollution of these sacred objects (Cort, 2020). As a result, in the second half of the 19th century when Hindu law was codified, British administrators did not have access to Jain writings. 'Jain law', hence became relegated to a 'deviation' of standard 'Hindu law', instead of being recognised and legitimised as an independent religion with its own legal code

[16] This trend is a recurrent theme in the Jain Community, also confirmed by the AKP figures, see footnote 6. See also newspaper articles such as Mahurkar, 2002, Choksi & Chapia, 2008, Jain, 2018, Anonymous Correspondent of *BBC News India*, 2019.

[17] More research needs to be conducted on the extent to which this corresponds with the need of distinguishing the 'white' robes of Shvetambara ascetics from Hindu ascetics in 'saffron' robes.

[18] This decision was celebrated by Jain communities all over India in spontaneous feasts (Vyas & Nair, 2009, Vyas, 2010 and 2011).

[19] Cf. Flügel, 2005; see also Luithle-Hardenberg & Cort & Orr, 2020: 16-18 for further details on the fact that Jainism as an ancient and independent religion was already being recognised by orientalists, missionaries and colonial officials in the early nineteenth century.

(Flügel, 2007: 6, Hardenberg & Cort & Orr, 2020: 67-68). It was only in 1910 that Jain activists formed the first Jain Law Committee, contesting their inclusion in the common (Hindu) legal code, claiming separate rights and privileges for 'the Jain community as a whole' in the Legislative Assembly.[20] Following the Montague Declaration of 1917, the Jain Political Association, established by the same circle of Jain intellectuals, politically represented Jains in an initiative that led to increased awareness about Jains as a specific community with its own family law (Flügel, 2007: 8-9). In 1926 Champat Rai Jain published a compilation of *Jaina Law* that is still used today for legal transactions.[21] The legal minority status of the Jain community, however, remained disputed until independence, after which India's constitution became a new bone of contention for Jain activists, who did not find convincing representation for Jains as a religious minority that was distinct from Hindus. As early as the beginning of 1950, before the enactment of the Constitution, a Jain delegation met the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and other high-ranking cabinet ministers to submit a petition that challenged the semantics of Article 25, but this petition was rejected (Jain&Jain 2014: 17, Sethi 2009: 155). Thus, to this day, the Constitution of India states in Article 25, relating to the fundamental right of religious freedom (in Explanation II), "…the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina or Buddhist religion, and the reference to Hindu religious institutions shall be construed accordingly." [22]

In other words, though Jainism was recognised as a (separate) religion by the Indian Constitution – in much the same way Buddhism and Sikhism was –Jains were broadly classified as 'Hindu' in legal terms. [23] This enormous category of 'Hindu' has since then been used to regulate common and personal law, with Jain personal law being regulated by the Hindu Marriage Act, Hindu Succession Act, Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, and Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act. The presence of a separate Jain law was only discretely and indirectly acknowledged by the legal system, as constituting residual Jain 'customs', to be legally treated on a case by case basis (Flügel, 2007: 1).[24] This situation remained

[20] Taken from Flügel (2007: 8), originally included in barrister Jagmander Lal Jaini's (1881-1927) landmark translation of the Jain law code *Bhadrabāhu Saṃhitā* (1916). However, one should take into account that the efforts to establish a "Jain law" was almost exclusively driven by north Indian Digambar barristers. There is no evidence of Shvetambara interest in the issue during the early 20th century (see Cort, 2020), even though contemporary Shvetambara lawyers are very active in finding juridical arguments for the separating Jain practices from Hindu practices in order to defend the independence of Jainism from Hinduism, see below.

[21] In the 1930s, several lawsuits were won by childless Jain widows who were granted the right to designate a family heir, without asking the permission of their in-laws (Sethi, 2009: 155-157, Jain & Jain, 2014: 15).

[22] Cf. *The Constitution of India* (see below, "Websites").

[23] Cf. Sethi 2009: 156. To be precise, in response to the objections of the Jain interest groups (which was supported by Sikh interest groups) the Legislative Assembly incorporated the shared definition of 'Hindu', which distinguishes between the definition of 'Hindu by faith' and 'Hindu by personal law' into the Personal Laws (see below).

[24] The broad legal category of 'Hindu' was thereafter, artificially contrasted with Islam and Christianity, which in turn, was administered by their own religious, personal laws. Consequently, the sharp distinction between so-called 'Indic religious groups' (Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and

unresolved for more than 50 years – and is in many ways is still undecided as it is not a matter of concern among many Jains (see below).

The main reason for the Jains' ambiguous situation might be, that there was never and still is not a unanimous agreement within the Jain community itself about the implications of a separately conferred constitutional status. The more pragmatic and perhaps widespread view of this internal discourse accepts that there is no specific disadvantage of being categorised as 'Hindu' in terms of personal law, as the constitution clearly recognises Jainism as an independent religion. Moreover, since the Hindutva movement gained traction from the early 1990s, supported by a large number of middleclass Hindus (Hansen, 1999: 178, Fernandes, 2000 and Fernandes & Heller, 2006), Jains often times miss(ed) their chance to clarify their relationship with Hinduism in general and Hindutva in particular (see below and Sethi, 2009: 162) - and the very fact that some Jains enjoy leadership positions in leading Hindutva organisations (like the BJP and the VHP) contributes considerably to the confusion and "dynamics" of Jain identity.[25] Thus it was and is still possible for the Hindutva movement to attract a portion of the Jain community, especially in regard to their agitation against Muslims, with whom the Jains have less in common than with Hindus (see below).[26] In fact, Jains and Vaishnava Hindus in western India partially share philosophy, mythology and ritual discourse, and despite a number of controversies (see below) caused by these intersections (Sharma, 2002: 10), both community's members are professionally united as part of the same regional trading castes (*vaniya/bania*), which moreover, follow similarly strict vegetarian dietary regimen and may even intermarry (Bayly, 1988, Cort, 2004, Tambs-Lyche, 2011, Yagnik & Sheth 2005: 21, and Sethi, 2009: 155). Also, Jains are often times resentful of Muslims – an aspect also shared in particular with Vaishnava Hindus – mainly because they despise the importance of animal sacrifice in Islam, which is seen very much in contrast to the core value of Jain doctrine, *ahimsa* or non-violence. Moreover, the stereotype of 'Muslim aggression' is often emphasized by reference to a historical discourse dealing with the destruction of Jain temples by Muslim

Jains) and 'non-Indic religions' (Muslims and Christians) was deliberately constructed as mutually antagonistic (Sethi, 2009: 158, 2016: 61).

[25] As ironically stated by Sethi (2009: 162): "That Jains should identify with an organisation called the "World Hindu Council" [*Vishva Hindu Parishad*], calls for a greater investigation into the dynamics of Jain identity."

[26] From the point of view of those who included Jains as "Hindus by Law" it must be stated that the positioning of Hindu reform movements towards Jainism underwent different stages. While the first stage is characterised by the Arya Samaj and its founder Dayanand Sarasvati (1824-1883) launching systematic attacks on Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Christians, and Buddhists (for the controversy between Dayanand and Jain scholars see Cort, 2012), Savarkar's (1883-1966) strategy was in sharp contrast to this. Savarkar's Hindutva was originally aimed at constructing a collective 'Hindu-unity' political identity (*Hindu Sanghatan*) that avoided too narrow a definition of *Hinduism*, excluding influential groups such as Jains or Sikhs from the Hindu-category. Instead, Savarkar urged the conference of Hindu nationality to all the followers of the four religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. (Sharma, 2002: 22-23, Wolf, 2010: 12).

invaders,[27] even if some of my interlocutors hasten to add that since such attacks took place in the past, they should be forgiven. It is also important for these Jains with a moderate attitude regarding their perspective towards communal conflicts to instead put more attention on how ascetic leaders and Jain pilgrimage sites were integrated and supported by the Mughal emperor Akbar.[28] Equivocal sentiments and similar statements were also profoundly felt and expressed by many of my Jain friends and interlocutors to whom I am going to refer below.

In contrast to these Jains, who hesitate to become politically active for claiming minority status there is also a substantial number of Jains, who are more critical and who remain doubtful about whether this ambiguity and / or common 'customs' with (Vaishnava) Hindus fosters enough resilience to retain and preserve the autonomy of Jain tradition (Sethi, 2009: 155). Consequently, during the decades after Independence, their suspicion was expressed in the demand for a nationally acknowledged minority status for Jains based on various arguments (Jain & Jain, 2014: 9, Sethi, 2009: 156, Ramanan, 2014), grounded in the authoritative knowledge of ascetic leaders, who are allowed to study and interpret the sacred texts, whereas Hindu scriptures and rituals of worship are rejected.[29] Yet it took quite some time before their demands were taken into account.[30] Only in 1999 did the Central Government consider the explicit recommendations made by the Minorities Commission, to provide Jains with national minority status, resulting in the formation of the Jain Minority Status Committee.[31] At least the Jains won partial victories when in the course of the following years they were declared a minority in 12 states (out of 28).[32] In 2005

[27] Cf. Dundas, 1999, Sharma, 2002: 6 -7 for evidence of likewise, emotionally charged references to Mahmud of Ghazni's attack on the Somnath temple in 1025. For similar instances in Jain history, see the legends of the Shatrunjaya Temples in Gujarat by Luithle-Hardenberg (2011: 122ff).

[28] For historical details see Roy, 1984: 140; Yagnik & Sheth 2005: 52, 297; Jain, 2012 a and b, 2015, 2017, Truschke 2015)

[29] For a detailed account of the Jain perspective, including a number of references to sacred texts, see: Sagaranandsuri, 1932, Mody, 1967, Humphrey/Laidlaw, 1994, Babb, 1996, Cort, 2001 and 2002, Yagnik / Sheth, 2005: 29, Patil, 2006 and 2010, *Sanmārg,* 2008, Haq, 2014 and Jinpragnashriji, 2015. However, these arguments did not help to prevent the Supreme Court from confirming that Hindu law is to be applied to Jains in 1971, with the result, that the demand of recognising Jains as a religious minority largely disappeared from the public sphere. The reasons for this are described best by Sethi, 2016.

[30] At first community leaders did not manage to make a convincing case for being included into the central list of national minorities announced by the Indian Government in October 1993. According to Sethi (2009: 155-156), this failure resulted in "hectic lobbying with the National Minority Commission" that finally led to recommendation that recognised Jains as a distinct religious minority. Neither this recommendation nor its renewal in 1996 however, led to the declaration of Jains as a minority.

[31] Its first measure was to file a writ at the Bombay High Court, urging for an early settlement on the issue. This petition is generally known among Jains as the *Bal Patil versus Union of India case*, as it was forwarded by the social activist Bal Patil (Patil, 2006 and 2010, Sethi, 2009: 156, Ali, 2013). Bal Patil did not live long enough to celebrate the final decision of this case in 2014 as he died in 2011.

[32] Some demographic details: 1. Maharashtra (which has the largest population of Jains in India). 2. Karnataka, 3. Madhya Pradesh, 4. Uttar Pradesh 5. Jharkhand 6. Delhi 7. Uttarakhand 8. West Bengal 9. Andhra Pradesh 10. Haryana 11. Punjab 12. Assam (Cf. Jain & Jain, 2014: 17).

Bal Patil (in his office as Secretary-General of All India Jain Minority Forum) urged to take up the petition for national minority status again by filing another court case against the Union of India (Ali, 2013). Rejecting the complaint, the court pointed out that the partition-related bloodshed led to considerable fear among minorities, particularly Muslims, which needed to be allayed. The bench also observed that Jainism was not an independent religion and was merely a reform movement within Hinduism (Ramanan, 2014), resulting in a widespread outrage of many Jains.[33]

After some back and forth the Hindutva usurpation of Jainism became apparent in 2006, when Jains suffered a setback, ironically in their stronghold region of Gujarat, with the BJP passing the 'Freedom of Religion Bill',[34] again classifying Jains as Hindus.[35] Since then and despite a large number of Jains largely accepting the Hindutva-axiom of embracing and absorbing Jainism into their ranks, thus also diluting it, the advocates of Jain minority status have increased their efforts considerably (Patil, 2006, Sethi, 2009: 161), arguing that the minority status is crucial for enabling Jains to operate their own schools, other educational institutions, and foundations, independent of state supervision and interference.[36]

For this reason, it is far more than a formality that the national minority status was finally granted to Jains of India on January 20, 2014.[37] In accordance with

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[33] In an online-pamphlet about the same court case Patil (2006) expressed his suspicion and that of other Jain activists by quoting Cossman & Kapur (1996): "Supreme Court has failed to understand the assault on religious minorities that is a constituent element of the concept of Hindutva. From its roots in the writing of Savarkar to its contemporary deployment by the likes of Bal Thackeray, Manohar Joshi, Sadhvi Ritambara and LK Advani, Hindutva has been based on the idea of Indian society fractured by the conflict between Hindus and Muslims, wherein the majority of Hindus have been and continue to be oppressed at the hands of the Muslim minority. Hindutva is a call to unite against these religious minorities; at best it is a call to assimilate these minorities into the ostensibly more tolerant fabric of Hinduism, and at its more modest assimilationist mode and in its more extreme and violent mode, Hindutva is an attack on the rights, indeed, on the very legitimacy of religious minorities." Thus, by juxtaposing the interests of all religious minorities in India with Hindutva interests, he considerably relativises the often made assumption that Jains necessarily take the side of the Hindutva.

[34] Critics point out that, this was in fact, an anti-conversion bill (Patil, 2006, Sethi, 2009: 162).

[35] Cf. Patil, 2006, Sethi, 2009: 162 on how serious this situation was. This is also reflected in Flügel's pessimistic statement (Flügel, 2007:10); "The process in modern Indian legal history of narrowing the semantic range of the modern term 'Jaina law' from 'Jain scriptures' down to 'Jain personal law' and finally 'Jain custom' may thus culminate not only in the official obliteration of Jaina legal culture, which continues to thrive outside the formal legal system in monastic law, ethics and custom, but also of Jaina 'religion".

[36] Cf. Sethi, 2009: 156: Their campaign for minority status was focused largely on Article 30 of the Constitution which declares, '*All minorities, whether based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice*.'

[37] As per the Cabinet note, Jains will be included as a minority under Section 2(c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act (NCM), 1992. As per the Cabinet note, Jains will be included as a minority under Section 2(c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act (NCM), 1992 (Jagganathan, 2014, Special Correspondent 2014a and b). Among many Jains it was a very widespread conception that the granting of minority status to the Jains, just 3-4 months before the April-May general election was a desperate attempt of Vice-President Rahul Gandhi to collect

the Jain demand of institutional independence from governmental supervision, most newspaper articles of the time claimed that this would initiate government reservations within educational institutions for Jain students from economically weaker or rural sections of society, like Digambara communities from South India.[38] Others, refuting the stress on reservations, un-specifically stated that the Jain minority status would only be used for preserving religious identity, culture and heritage.[39] For instance, Jain activist A.K. Jain, founder of the Mumbai-based Ahimsa Foundation, stated, "*One should not confuse the issue of minority status with that of reservation in jobs and education institutes.*" Instead he and other Jains welcomed the freedom to propagate Jain religion and to manage religious affairs independently from governmental instructions, in particular with regard to temples and their wealthy trusts (Makkar, 2014, Haq, 2014). *The Times of India* also quoted Jain *sadhu* Naypadmasagarji,[40] "[...] *it is now up to us to come together and understand how we can protect and propound our religion, save our manuscripts, which are constantly getting stolen, and shield our places of pilgrimage from coming under attack*." Rather than alluding to historically distant Muslim attacks, the quoted Jain *sadhu* referred to contemporary conflicts between Jains and Hindus over pilgrimage centres such as Girnar in Gujarat and Tirumala Tirupati, which are sacred to both religious communities and whose origins are claimed by Jains, but are presently administered by Hindu trusts.[41]

However, the subsequent victory of the BJP in the national elections of 2014, followed by their re-election,[42] resulted in the drying up of Jain arguments, despite its historically and legally grounded sophistry. Apart from that many external categorisations (including academic reflections) hasten to equate Jains with Hindutva politics due to their common concern for vegetarianism and cow protection (Evans, 2013, Gittinger, 2017) and a 'policy of disgust' for meat-eating Muslims (see also below).[43] In the same way Jains too, have made little efforts to publicly distinguish or distance themselves from Hindutva in the last six years. While it is certainly not enough to be perceived in the outside world as just 'other than Hindus'[44], with Jains already being a very heterogeneous group, most Jains

votes among the successful Jain business elite for the general elections in favour of the Indian Congress instead of BJP (Makkar, 2014).

[38] Educational institutions managed by Jains will be henceforth recognised as minority institutions where up to 50% seats are reserved for community members. (Srivatsa, 2014, Jagganathan, 2014, Special Correspondent 2014 a and b).

[39] See footnote 57.

[40] Anonymous Correspondent of *The Times of India* 2014.

[41] Mahurkar, 2006, Bukhari 2008, Goel, 2014, Raman, 2014, and several Jain websites, for instance: *Tirumala Tirupati. Jain Temple claim: Truth, Thirumalai Tirupati Balaji* (see below, "Websites and Internet Sources without Authors").

[42] Election Commission of India (2019) (see "Websites and Internet Sources without Authors").

[43] Cf. Ghassem-Fachandi, 2009b, 2010, and 2012, Bajželj & Bothra, 2016, Bruckert, 2019 for more discussions on the subject.

[44] Of course, it is a truism that the category "Hindu" is in itself is extremely heterogenous. Stietencron (1989) provides a useful, non-monolithic definition of the term 'Hindu' from the point of view of religious studies, before Hindutva ideology began to gain momentum in the course of globalisation, thereby also dominating scholarship on India of the last 30 years with the idea of a monolithic definition of Hindu(tva). Moreover, we must of course remember that in contrast to

are quite content to '*feel'* different from Hindus in general and Hindutva activists in particular, therefore defending themselves only slightly, when faced with polemical rhetoric. However, it is one thing for Jains to politically disengage themselves from general categories like 'Hindus' *in public*, especially since outsiders frequently classify them with Hindus and hence, automatically assign them to Hindutva, but it is another matter when scholars use imprecise categories to define political affiliations of Jains in general. For example, according to Banaji (2018: 342): "The narrative of Hindu superiority and innocence, of India as a (democratic) Hindu nation, and of Muslims as dirty, lascivious, foreign aggressors, guilty of terrorism and of trying to kidnap Hindu girls through 'love jihad,' has achieved hegemonic status. In accepting this narrative—which has been propagated and circulated through hundreds of thousands of RSS shakhas (branches) at home and World Hindu Organisations groups abroad, through Hindutva newspapers, tapes, videos, CDs, films, television serials, online websites, WhatsApp groups, pamphlets, brochures and songs—many Hindus and Jains have effectively adopted a 'nazi conscience' (Koonz 2003)." While Jains are mentioned very randomly in this journal article, the quotation is exemplary of the scant attention paid to the specificities of the Jain community and religion, and their own efforts towards gaining recognition and legitimacy for their own minority rights.[45] The Jain's inclusion into the broad category of the Hindu majority is often accepted without question, by the same scholars working on the rights of other religious minorities in India, which perhaps unwittingly, re-enforces constructionist antagonisms between Jains and Muslims as competitive minorities, promoted by Hindutva ideologies to control minorities by first dividing them. A first step towards a constructive and helpful understanding of what is broadly understood as communal problems in India, would be to start with a scholarly approach, that moves away from the polarisation of Hindus and Muslims [46] and to look more closely at examples such as the Jains, that make categories like Hindus and Muslim appear inherently heterogeneous.

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the rather multifaceted ambivalent term 'Hindu' the concept of 'Hindutva' was coined as a neologism by Savarkar in Maharashtra and Mumbai, where the RSS used the concept as part of their agitation against Muslims right from the beginning (cf. Sharma, 2002).

[45] In spite of careful investigation, it is also not clear how Banaji (2018), without providing detailed arguments, relies on a book on Nazi ideology in Germany during the Hitler regime (Koonz, 2003), that has only one single random reference to India (on page 65, referring to Christian missionaries when discussing Jewish-Christian relations), but lacks any connection whatsoever to categories like 'Hindu' or 'Jain'. On the other hand, it is indeed true that Hitler's autobiography ("*Mein Kampf*") is very popular throughout contemporary India and is read quite uncritically in particular by younger readers (Gupta, 2015, Banerjee, 2020). To my knowledge, however, there is not yet a single research-based link between 'Nazi ideology', and its forced dissemination by Jains and/or correspondence with the Jain doctrine respectively – a research question which must seem all the more far-fetched if one studies Jainism and Jain community carefully.

[46] In the same way the polarisation of Hindu-Muslim conflict takes little interest in the actual religious diversity of Indian Muslims, a situation that was already reported more than 20 years ago by Fazalbhoy (1997). Surprisingly, the situation has changed little since the peak of cultural anthropological discussions about Muslim's internal diversity in India, going back to the 1980s, when Islam was framed in terms of 'Muslim castes' and 'folk Islam versus Islamic law schools' (Robinson, 1983 and 1986, Das, 1984, Minault, 1984). Although there are meanwhile many

What, then, does striving for diversity on an academic level imply for the assessment of the CAA related statements by my Jain interlocutors?

The Jains and the CAA – a Case Study

Despite or perhaps even because of their own rather ambivalent minority strategies, the CAA and other political issues with a communal theme were vibrant subjects of discussion in many urban Jain households during my field study in Mumbai in spring 2020 (February-March). The actual objective of my field study concerned a one-week long *diksha* festival of three lay people (two adults and a child), who became initiated into the Jain ascetic order, an event which attracted several thousands of Mumbai based Jains. However, the subject of conversation shifted rather casually, but regularly from ritual details to the top priority subject of all Indian media at that time: the Citizen Amendment Act.

It is quite illustrative where these casual interviews took place, as the location can be seen as exemplary for the general situation of many urban Jain communities. The interview cohort of my case study in Lower Parel consisted of Shvetambara-Jain families living in a Jain dominated apartment complex with upscale facilities. Much in contrast to sacred centres and Jain pilgrimage sites located in rural areas,[47] strict ascetic discipline plays a subordinate role in the every-day urban context of these lay Jain communities – unless accommodating groups of wandering, ascetics, especially during the monsoon ritual seasons (between June / July – October / November), or unless – as in our case – celebrating a festival under the ascetics' benevolent supervision. During this festival period of *diksha* (initiation into the ascetic fold), which coincided with the investigation of the 'Delhi Riots' of February 24,[48] Jains created an enclave of

impressive works on Muslim diversity including the detailed history of local Muslim communities, their ritual and/or social distinctions and their specific interactions with diverse local Hindu groups and other religious communities these valuable insights are rarely incorporated into the abstract political discourse on 'communalism', which continues to be about 'the Muslims' versus 'the Hindus', even though social practice is much more complicated and differentiated. (Cf. Bigelow (2010) on Muslims in North India, Green (2011) and Dandekar (2016a and b, 2017, 2018,) on Bombay Islam and Konkani Sufis respectively, Tschacher (2016 and 2018) on Tamil Muslims, Alam (2008 and 2011) on madrasas and *maslak* (creed), Dandekar & Tschacher (2016) on Sufism, Jones (2012) on Shia, Zaman (2007) and Singh (2012) on Deobandis, Khan (2011) on Barelvi , Horstmann (2007) on transnationalism of Tablighi Jama'at and Kuiper (2017) on globally organized *da'awa* (mission) in India.) Further recent studies focus on rather political categories such as Muslim feminism (Schneider, 2009, Vatuk, 2008, Dandekar, 2020) and 'moderate and militant' groups (Jairath, 2013, Hasan, 2008), thus pointing out that within the large category of 'Muslims' we can find completely different strategies of positioning with regard to debates about minority issues in India.

[47] The most important pilgrimage places of Jains are exclusively situated in rural areas: Shatrunjaya, Sammetshikhar, Girnar, Abu, Pavapuri, and Shravanabelagola. For details, see Luithle-Hardenberg, 2011.

[48] The term "Delhi Riots" of 24 February 24, 2020, was initially coined for violent riots aimed at Muslim neighbourhoods in the capital, which was mainly seen as a reaction to previously held anti-CAA protests. For national and international media coverage see, for instance *Hindustan Times* (Srivastava, 2020), *India Today* (Pandey, 2020), Indian Express (Saxena & Sinha, 2020),

ascetic activities in Lower Parel that more or less occluded the outside world, creating a scenario reminiscent of sacred, rural pilgrimage sites - despite their close proximity of the venue to skyscrapers, visible from far as highlights of the immense Mumbai skyline. While the ground floor of the apartment block offered accommodation to ascetics in a 'multi-purpose' open hall (turned into a so called *upashraya*), the adjoining spacious area of the gated community harboured a Jain temple (*derasar*) next to a well-kept park that included a swimming pool (which was filled with water, but not in use, out of respect for the sacred activities). Despite the impressive staging of a sacred and festive atmosphere, casual small talk ran parallel to the festivities, with some attending Jains quite happy to converse with a curious foreign guest on different subjects during waiting periods. These discussions were often initiated by reports on the CAA broadcast on TV or contained in various news magazines like *India Today* or *Outlook*, scattered around living rooms, even though they were mostly unread during the busy festival time. This was shortly before the global Corona pandemic crisis overtook the media, when the media almost exclusively covered the CAA debates, with an emphasis on topics related to "The Muslims" (*Outlook*, February 17, 2020). While there were confident students from renowned Indian or US universities among my interlocutors, I also interviewed housewives, some of whom were spiritually inclined, and other who were busy attending to young/ teenage children. Besides these, there were university professors, and also retired senior citizens with a lot of free time to talk about their myriad life experiences (among them former lawyers and businessmen) – and of course, ascetics (both, women and men, and all age groups).

At first, the views regarding the CAA expressed by my various interlocuters seemed undifferentiated, as all agreed that the newly passed but controversial law did not concern the Jains at all, despite their explicit mention in the legal text of the Act as a religious community particularly eligible for protection.[49] But paradoxically, not a single Jain was personally affected by the implications of the Act, since there were/ are no Jain fugitives from Pakistan,[50] Afghanistan or Bangladesh, currently seeking asylum in India.[51]

This lack of urgency of CAA implications for the Jain community might be one of the reasons why all of my Jain informants and interlocutors, close friends by now, expressed their opinion in a polite and distanced way. This detached manner also corresponded to a 'typical' discussion culture among Jains in general that I have noted very often in my two earlier decades of anthropological experience, to forefront logic while discussing problems, treating political issues as an

BBC News Asia (Anonymous Correspondent 2020, *The New York Times* (Gettleman, 2020); *Time* (Ayyub, 2020).

[49] Citizen (Amendment) Bill (2019) (see below "Websites and Internet Sources").

[50] There was an estimated number of 15000 Jains living in what is present-day Pakistan, shortly before the Partition of British India (according to the 1941 census, also see Flügel & Ahmad, 2018).

[51] See Staff reporter of *The Telegraph India* (2019) and Acharya (2019).

intellectual challenge, rather than dealing with them in a heated controversy.[52] Hence the CAA was considered and discussed by my interlocutors at an abstract level, which can be summarised as follows: They agreed that 'the government' had introduced the Act to avert a 'humanitarian disaster' (this word was frequently used), that was particularly acute due to the influx of large numbers of immigrants in the northern and eastern regions of India. (Who these immigrants were, and whence they arrived, was a matter largely kept open, at least partly due to a lack of information caused by ruling authorities.) However, opinions differed with regard to details about the implementation of the law. Although the majority of my interlocutors agreed with the arguments propagated by the BJP, emphasizing that 'Muslims with Indian citizenship had nothing to fear', some of the more critical student interlocutors, and/ or seniors with explicit Congress Party sympathies, were concerned about the CAA for its general legal prohibition on Muslim refugees applying for Indian citizenship. For them, this regulation violated the basic principles of secularism, firmly anchored in the preamble as a primary virtue of the Indian Constitution that they sought to uphold within discussions. What seemed remarkable was, that almost all of my interlocutors (irrespective of their opinion on matters of secular values) took the special treatment of Muslims in the CAA as an opportunity to reflect on the situation of Muslims in India in general (Indian citizens and others). This gave rise to two parallel and fundamental arguments: While all interlocutors distanced themselves from rioting and violence, they continued speculating about the general effects of the Muslim's estrangement brought about by the Act, and on the transformation of Jain-Muslim relations of the last 20 years in particular. Moreover, while reflecting on Jain-Muslim relations in the middle of communal conflicts, it became all the more obvious (as already pointed out above) that the attitude of many Jains (including my interlocutors) to the BJP and to Hindutva politics was ambivalent and by no means as clearly sympathetic as it is often claimed. In fact, most of my interlocutors did initially express their sympathies with the BJP. In the same way, most of my interlocutors were praising Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, the rhetoric was typically uniform and the longer I listened to the accolades the more rehearsed they sounded to me: Modi was first praised for his economic policies and 'disciplined lifestyle' (vegetarianism, celibacy, and regular yoga),[53] but only before criticising the violent suppression of anti-CAA protests in Delhi and elsewhere by 'extreme Hindutva *sevakas'*, mainly targeting Muslim neighbourhoods and protesting students. Other respondents, particularly ascetics, went a step further in criticising Hindutva, and the BJP's policy towards religious minorities. While they agreed that the propagation of vegetarianism and cow protection by the Hindutva movement was a noble cause and overlapping with the Jain doctrine to some

[52] This attitude is by Jains themselves occasionally attributed to *anekanta* or *anekantavada*, the Jain theory of "multiple facets of reality and truth", central to Jain metaphysics, logic and epistemology. It includes both, respect for discussion partners who think differently, along with a feeling of superiority over other discussion cultures. Cf. Cort, 2000 and Jain, 2008.

[53] For the image and "body politics" of Narendra Modi, see Jaffrelot, 2015, Srivastava, 2015, Kanjilal, 2018.

extent, they simultaneously stressed that Hindutva's cow protection and vegetarianism vigilantism was different from the Jain's theological concepts of non-violence as it was lacking any 'karmic consequences'. As one *sadhu* expressed: "It is all well and good to build even more *gau shalas* [cow shelters], but it is nonsense to make people believe that there are a several thousand gods living in each cow.[…] Besides, what is the point in building cow shelters when the very next day you go out to burn the house of your neighbour?"

With regard to the unfortunate situation faced by Muslims, who can no longer be accepted in India as refugees because of the CAA, two opinions were commonly expressed by my Jain interlocutors. First, the vast majority of Jains did not have any social interaction with the most affected among illegal Muslim immigrants, concentrated mainly in eastern India, and the Delhi region, working as daily labourers and living in slums. Even though Asia's largest slum, Dharavi, was only fifteen minutes away from the Jain neighbourhood in Lower Parel, my group of interviewees (as most of contemporary urban Jains) lived in a secluded, gated community and hardly met Muslims, apart from contexts defined as 'public and secular', such as schools, universities, and workplaces. In some cases, my Jain interlocutors knew individual Muslims who worked as watchmen or as servants that serviced their gated communities, even though Hindus (of service castes) or Sikhs were preferred for these jobs. One could easily argue that lack of contact between Jains and Muslims produced these two as separate worlds, which again led to a strong stereotyping of Muslims by Jains. However, this distance (and the stereotyping as well) is primarily socially and economically rooted, and less religiously – and certainly not limited to the (missing) encounters between Jains and Muslims, but rather applies to many other (religiously and otherwise defined) communities of the Indian upper middle or upper class towards Muslim neighbourhoods. With the exception of a handful of intellectuals (journalists, professors), most upper and middle-class city dwellers among the urban Jains thus do not have access to more differentiated information, based on their daily life. Independently of the actual reason for stereotyping it implies a certain set of ascribed general features of 'Muslims' which concluded in blending Muslims of the Middle East with Muslim immigrants and 'Muslim countries' (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh) and Muslim communities that had lived for centuries in India into one category. From the point of view of my Jain interlocutors all three groups, viz. Muslim immigrants, legal Muslim inhabitants of India, and Muslims from (other) 'Muslim countries' (but India, viz. Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh) are sharing the feature that their way of living is completely different from the Jain lifestyle.

The only interlocutors who reported having friendly relations with Muslims were above the age of 40, and therefore perhaps a product of socialisation that was typical of the Nehru-Gandhi era. They identified their friendly relations with Muslims with a particular Muslim friend in their past or youth (at school/ university, workplace, or within networks of acquaintanceship), with whom they had meanwhile lost contact. These older interlocutors displayed significant self-reflexivity, while pondering changing relationships between Jains and Muslims, caused by the public perception of Muslims. As one elderly gentleman recalled,

until two decades ago, Muslim landmarks were incorporated into the pilgrimage route to the sacred mountain, Shatrunjaya near Palitana in Gujarat, one of the most prominent pilgrimages of Shvetambara Jains. In fact, until the beginning of the new millennium, pilgrim processions would stop playing music as they approached the city's central mosque and greet the mullah before proceeding (Luithle-Hardenberg, 2011 and 2018). On their arrival atop the sacred mountain, the Sufi saint, Angarsha Pir was first honoured as the patron saint of pilgrims, and in return, Muslims of Palitana refrained from slaughtering animals during the most important of Jain festivals, as a mark of respect and commemoration of the 'good old days'. However, these efforts at mutual respect abruptly ended after several weeks of communal unrest that broke out after the Godhra riots of February 2002, in which approximately a thousand people, mostly Muslim, lost their lives.[54] According to one of my elderly interlocutors, this "rattled the Muslims and radicalised them", evident from the terrorist attack on the Taj Hotel in November 2008,[55] that in turn, made Jains feel insecure. He ended by saying "we always had little to do with each other. Now we have nothing at all to do with each other. We're different".

However different 'meat-eating Muslims' appeared to Jains, they nevertheless, also did not identify with the marauding rioters of Delhi in February 2020, an attitude they perhaps shared with other economically privileged, educated sections of the Indian population.[56] Pushed by a visiting cultural anthropologist to opt for one of two political stances (pro Hindutva or pro secularism and Muslim minority rights), my Jain interlocutors assumed a surprisingly neutral position towards the heated communal conflict as the answer provided by my Jain interviewees unanimously: "We are on neither of these two stances!". In fact, it required consistent and patient listening on my behalf, to identify these voices within discussions that were in general involved with ongoing discussions, and overshadowed by only two dominant, political discourses (viz. Hindutva versus secular values). Thus, on the one hand, my fieldwork data in connection to the CAA indicates examples of minority politics among Jains, including legal cases and distinct religious activities that 'orthodox' Jains pursue such as the Jain temple rituals, institutionalised asceticism, the fasting to death (*sallekhana*, *santhara*) [57] and the initiation of children under 16 into the ascetic orders. On the other hand, it illustrates clearly how many of my Jain interlocutors preferred staying out of fervent and impassioned communal debates, since for them the CAA is of very limited relevance. As a conclusion they neither identified with Hindutva activists nor with their Muslims counterparts. In short, Jains maintain a Jain view on the communal issue of CAA (see above and particularly footnote 52).

[54] Cf. Engineer, 2002 and 2003, Varadarajan, 2002, Nussbaum, 2009, Brass, 2011, and Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012 for more discussions on the topic.
[55] For further scholarly reflections see: Kolas 2010, Williams 2010, Zafar 2010.
[56] See also Jasani, 2014 for the relativisation of Hindutva support, as a response to Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012.
[57] See footnote 9.

Conclusion

This article discussed two separate but related strands of analysis. The first part examined the Jains as a religious minority with an independent historical formation and a religious practice and doctrine that differs in crucial respects from Hindu religions, which in turn formed the basis for their successful efforts to establish their legal status as a religious minority in India. The second part analysed the effects of this self-perception on the positioning of the Jains within communal debates, in particular with regard to their ambivalent attitude towards Hindutva politics and towards the largest religious minorities in India, the Muslims, whose special situation was reflected from many sides in the course of 2020 as a result of the debates on the Citizen Amendment Act newly introduced in December 2019.

Although there is generally a strong pro-BJP stance among a substantial number of Jains, it is clearly relativised by the rejection of violent Hindutva activists - without, however, taking the side of 'the Muslims', towards whom Jains often feel even more alienated than towards their Hindu neighbours, for a number of various social, cultural and ritual reasons. This results in an ambivalent intermediate position of the Jains in western India, for which my case study in Mumbai is an example, showing that the Jains in their self-positioning vis-à-vis the CAA want to avoid polarisations of blanket categories.. In fact, the media and as well the academic treatment of communal issues seem to leave the Jains no choice but push them into a clear but false positioning where there is actually none. Thus my fieldwork data indicate that the treatment of the issue all too often downplays the heterogeneity of the various religious communities and reduces Indian communalism to the juxtaposition of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', ignoring the fact that these huge categories have their own locally formed, mutually independent historical relationships, to which, especially in western India, the Jains also belong.

Looking at Jains from outside their community, without paying attention to the subtleties of differences towards Hindus, they are much too often clearly associated with the Hindutva movement than most Jains would agree with, even if outspoken protest of Jains, who are active in minority politics, and of ascetic leaders might rather be considered as exceptions. The hasty emphasis on the link between the Jain community and the policies of the BJP, as undertaken by scholars and media, as well as the relative and stereotypical similarity of Jains and Vaishnava Hindus ultimately leads to the Jains facing Muslims as competing religious minorities, which is a clear exaggeration to describe a relationship that can be better characterised by mutual ignorance and distance.

Moreover, this misinterpretation strikes a theological blow to some of the core tenets of Jainism – *ahimsa* (non-violence), and *anekantavada* – and at the same time it poses a contradiction against a culturally unique ascetic piety, which is cultivated in the interest of the continuation and preservation of the Jain community for posterity. In the face of focussing on these internal values and aims the generally important question of how the situation of Indian Muslims

should be dealt with remains an unsolved conundrum for many Jains – and its solution is in fact not particularly high on their own agenda.

The crucial question is, how a cultural anthropologist and/or historian treats this insight. Some of us may wish that Jains would have more sympathy for Muslims and would use their wealth and social and political influence to advocate for them. But would that really be an academic goal? Should we not rather be committed to the value of neutrality and thus taking the chance to understand Jains' very special position within the communal confusion? Should we not rather try to accept that Jains in general prefer not to ally with the largest religious minority in India, but without falsely blaming them to be hate speakers of the Hindutva?

Beyond accepting complex differentiations, we can also try to understand, out of academic interest, where separate but interconnected journeys of Jains and Muslims have taken place behind the scenes of the great themes of the last centuries and which both religious minorities, pitted into an unfair competition that mutually separates them, rather tragically, as antagonistic rivals without either community so-desiring this.

But we should not expect that a mutual curiosity is necessarily shared by Jains or Muslims. We should accept that many Jains are retreating into a segregated community, because it is the only recourse that allows Jains, as an autonomous religious minority, to seek retreat from Hindutva and communal conflict without violating their own tenets.[58] This passive attitude certainly does not necessarily lead to public statements that a politically engaged observer would find easier to accept. But it is necessary to endure this particular position if we intend to maintain the diversity of discourses and we want to hear and include subtle tones into the larger discussions. For the Jains, on the other hand, it is more important to be coherent in their own value system than to make it easy for outsiders to understand their position.

Thus, the most important question for the researcher remains how we analyse the Jains' point of view without making hasty politically motivated correct assessments from the point of view of a self-righteous ethical-moral academic *culture*. In other words, I would like to use the example of the Jains at this point to show that we must take the historically developed Jain 'culture' (in the sense of Robbins, 2013) into account in a fair way when assessing its position within the communal conflict, which is mainly taking place between Hindus and Muslims. What Robbins (2013: 448) identifies as "the cultural point and the critical potential of the notion of difference" should give us a clearer view of diversity in India beyond our legitimate need to pay attention to and support the "suffering subject" (*passim*, in our context: 'the Muslims'). Many people (including academics) have a need to understand the communal conflict in order to

[58] In fact the Jains in the rather new urban residential complexes (such as the one in Lower Parel) or in similar ones in suburbs are part of the broader phenomenon in India (and, for that matter, many other parts of the world), in which people move into gated communities that are defined on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity, class, or other identity defining factors.

eliminate the resulting injustices (in particular against the Muslim minority). The data I am presenting here are not really suitable for this purpose. To put it in more specific terms: Jains feel as alien towards 'meat-eating' Muslims as they do towards 'marauding' Hindutva activists. However, what do we learn from this without being too disappointed that Jains can neither be clearly sided with the Hindutva (thus are easily identified as evildoers) nor with the deprived Muslims, and thus escape an unambiguous classification?

If we temporarily adopt such an in-between perspective as that of the Jains, we can see how the communal conflict and its description is stuck in stereotypes. The first thing we have to conclude from this is that it is necessary to look behind the masks to see the labels "Hindu" and "Muslim" behind which there are much more complex combinations of identities and affiliations than the terms themselves imply. Therefore, we have to push historical and cultural anthropological research that takes the diversity behind these masks seriously.

The polarisation, which is quite comfortable for everyone politically involved, is of course based on the trauma of the partition of India, which is kept alive by both parties of the conflict. As non-Muslims, Jains, too, have had to give up homes in present-day Pakistan, but they are no longer really important to them today (Flügel, 2018), at least they did not find a single mention in the interviews I conducted. Why is that so? Answering this question might help us to look at the whole conflict from a different perspective, and also to understand why BJP policies can, nevertheless, instrumentalise the trauma of India's division in order to mobilise certain groups of Indian society in their favour.

Finally, as a minority, Jains also have the morally justified right to have their views correctly presented and to be perceived in their particularity, even if they are not primarily 'suffering subjects' (Robbins, 2013). Ultimately, this also serves an ethical purpose of not creating more misunderstandings that bear a potential for even more conflicts. To equate Jains with fascists in general, because they engage in animal protection and are vegetarians, is as baseless as, for example, the statement that all Muslims are potential terrorists due to the concept of *jihad* (a stereotype that we unfortunately encounter very often, not only in India).[59] This kind of polemic does not help to solve the conflict, but only confirms unwanted polarisations. If you ever meet politically active Jains in Mumbai politically active in the true sense, not Jain… (whether young or old), they declare themselves committed to sustainability and environmental protection - issues that are perfectly compatible with the Jain doctrine at first sight. However, here, too, we will find considerable deviations in superficially familiar discourses of academic culture (and here again it is important to listen to details).[60] As a conclusion, my fieldwork data on Jains in contemporary Mumbai and their opinions about CAA presented in this paper is interwoven with the history of the Jains as religious minority in India, in order to contextualise what the Jain's self-proclaimed political

[59] Cf. Jalal (2009) and Hiro (2012) for scholarship on the particularity of *jihadi* groups in South Asia and Doval (2007) on political strategies against Islamic terrorism in India.
[60] Cf. Chapple, 2006.

neutrality about the CAA should really imply for a scholar concerned with communal conflicts in India – apart from a bland exercise in political correctitude.

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Nidān, Volume 5, No. 2, December, 2020, pp. 83-86
ISSN 2414-8636
doi.org/10.36886/nidan.2020.5.2.5

Book Review

Francis X. Clooney, S.J. *Western Jesuit Scholars in India: Tracing Their Paths, Reassessing Their Goals*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020. Pp. viii+288. ISBN 978-90-04-42473-9 (hardback).

Western Jesuit Scholars in India is a remarkable collection of fifteen articles written over a span of three decades. The volume demonstrates authorial interest in Jesuits missionaries, and the history of Catholic theological interaction with Hinduism in Tamil Nadu between the 16th and 19th century. It is also a critical reading of Jesuit polemics produced in a context emphasizing conversion so deeply, that it disallowed missionaries from appreciating the nuances of Hinduism. Complete with a detailed introduction, this volume constitutes an intellectual corpus of Jesuit knowledge production in Tamil Nadu. Clooney clarifies his own authorial academic position as a Jesuit, and as Indologist interested in Catholic theology—a position strongly reflecting the early Jesuit intellectuals of India, missionaries like Robert de Nobili (1577-1656) himself. Clooney summarizes the core argument of his volume as (p. 5): "a study of the Jesuit missionary scholars in India, their texts, and deeds; the perspective of the Indologist with twentieth- and twenty-first century standards regarding the proper knowledge of Indian religious traditions; attention the missionaries' theology, its problems but also its continuing relevance in a Catholic Church that even now has not disowned the goal of conversion; and the self-reflective attitude of the Jesuit, attentive to and ambivalent about his own tradition, unwilling to disown it, and determined to contribute."

While the first eight articles of the volume analyse Robert de Nobili's missionary writings, the other articles broaden this scope, by investigating the writings of some prominent missionaries among de Nobili's Jesuit successors. Constituting a corpus of Jesuit knowledge, variously pitted against Hinduism, undergirded by missionary interest in conversion, the articles of this volume also demonstrate how this corpus stands evidence to an unparalleled tradition of interculturalism between Catholics and Hindus in India. Clooney demonstrates how Catholicism in India was equally transformed in a process of adaptation to Tamil culture—an adaptation that included an acceptance of caste hierarchy. While the author asks whether Jesuit missionaries would have written differently about Hinduism had they known more about it, he concludes that it was perhaps their very entry point as Jesuits and Catholic theologians in India, interested in conversion that sowed seeds of their own future destruction by constricting their learning of and from

Hinduism. This background is also part of an intellectual challenge Clooney identifies for current-day Jesuits, Indologists, and Catholic theologians in India, who may no longer be impeded by obstacles faced by Western missionaries in 16th and 17th century India, but are nevertheless pressured anew by a political environment that questions their belonging.

While Clooney's primary focus in this volume is on de Nobili's re-imagination of Christianity in an Indian and Tamil context, despite remaining unsympathetic and judgemental of Hinduism, this scope is significantly widened in the later chapters that explore de Nobili's intellectual genealogy and legacy, evidenced in subsequent Jesuit Catholic missionary writings. Clooney begins with examining de Nobili's stress on the importance of Christ as a wise *guru* that brings Christianity closer to Tamil Saiva traditions (1988), also exploring the adaptations inherently encompassed in de Nobili's Christian message (1990). This message, Clooney argues, heralded inculturation, a process that allowed converts to maintain their cultural but not religious everyday, while depending on universal axioms like reason, communicated across language and culture (de Nobili accepted the presence of many classical cultures), and the incarnation of Christ as *guru*, a pedagogical aspect separated from Sri Vaishnavism. Without romanticizing de Nobili, Clooney enters into an exploration of de Nobili's polemical enterprises (1993), investigating the latter's criticism of the irrationalities of Hinduism: the false nature of Hindu gods, idolatry, and the false worship of evil, imaginary beings (1999)—a sum total of polemics that disallowed any Hindu god from ever being considered the true God. At the same time, Clooney remains fair to de Nobili (1995), citing the latter's determination to search for true God within Hinduism through a reading of Upanishadic texts as praiseworthy, and for creating a uniquely inventive vernacular space for theological discourse. Looking beyond de Nobili (2006), Clooney explores the missionary writings of Jean Venance Bouchet in India (1655-1732), a successor of de Nobili, who not just drew parallels and comparisons between biblical and Indian beliefs, but also compared Hinduism with Greek philosophy, expanding the larger intellectual framework of Asia that had Jesuit scholars address both Hindu and Buddhist doctrines of rebirth (2016), albeit in a polemical sense that fed back into the criticism of Hindu ideas about rebirth in India. Defending de Nobili's toleration of caste within precolonial Tamil Catholicism (2007), Clooney returns to questions of caste in his examination of the writings of Fr. Joseph Bertrand's (1801-1884), where he identifies the French Jesuit tolerance of caste as contextualized in the urgency for Catholic institutional stability in colonial 19th century India (2009).

Topping this with two fascinating essays on Ignatian spirituality (both in 2016), Clooney highlights his own sensitivity about respect for Hinduism, seeking a reflection for his personal beliefs within Ignatian spirituality (Ignatius of Loyola, 1491-1556) that deeply intertwined with Hindu beliefs and culture through the key principle of "discernment". Describing this "discernment" as (p. 14) "At this

deeper level, there is a consonance of traditions that can be an important resource in Jesuit life in India, or any Christian and Hindu context today", Clooney henceforth cites it as a key Ignatian spiritual principle that mirrors his own position on Hinduism in the Tamil country. Clooney describes this explicitly (in 2016 again) as (p. 14): "Starting with the famed Ignatian conviction that God can be found in all things, I turned to the Sri Vaishnava Hindu tradition of south India, finding there similar visionary realizations of God in all things, insights developed in practice and defended theologically." Importantly, despite this background for imbibing Ignatian spirituality as personal, Clooney remains critical of Jesuit missionary scholarship, especially polemic scholarship, often stating that while Jesuit missionaries learned a lot in India, they failed to appreciate the finer nuances of Hinduism (2007), their immunity to its myriad philosophical sophistications leading to blind spots that ultimately caused their downfall (2017). Identifying Indology as part of Jesuit missionary tradition (2009), Clooney's analysis of de Nobili's *Dispelling of Ignorance* (1640) demonstrates the separation between missionary interests and the emerging field of religiously neutral but hegemonic Indology—a separation that gave birth to Indology as a sister discipline of the Catholic mission. Clooney describes this birthing process as (p. 10): "from conversations and arguments among Hindus and Christians, to European conversations about India and its religions." Dedicating his recent-most essay, included in this volume to the exploration of twentieth century Anglican missionary-turned Jesuit Catholic scholar, William Wallace (1863-1922), Clooney characterizes Wallace's scepticism positively; a scepticism that identified imperial constructions of Hinduism to be products of colonial and missionary interest, rather than any realistic evaluation (2018).

This volume is remarkable and unique due to the intellectual continuum it establishes between pioneering stalwarts like de Nobili and the scholarship of Clooney himself, as Western Jesuits, and Catholic theologians with an interest in Indology, writing and discussing Hinduism in the Tamil country. While Clooney is critical of Jesuit polemics, he appreciates their adaptation of the Christian message to Tamil vernacular culture. The transformative Catholic theology that Clooney remains invested in that is located both within his personal and academic engagements, is the question of conversion. Conversion attains salience here, as a debate primarily differentiating Clooney from the Jesuit missionaries of yore. Since Clooney identifies the urgency of effecting conversion as centrally problematic in that it gave rise to Jesuit polemics—a missionary agenda with a constricted aperture, he takes a vital step forward from this conversion agenda, apologizing for and doing away with it, to build a cooperative and almost consensual relationship of "discernment" with Hindu theology. Ending his exposition in this case with a positive evaluation of Wallace and finally Ignatius Loyola's embrace and acceptance of Hinduism, the contentiousness of effecting conversion undergoes a transformational shift in Clooney's writing that becomes part of a longer journey of Jesuit Catholic religious tolerance. This journey

towards tolerance is the central driving force of Clooney's academic-personal journey, encompassed in this volume that spans not just three decades, but as an insider to the genealogy of Jesuit Catholic theology in India, spans a trajectory of many centuries. Transforming the conversion question, however, also transforms the nature of Christianity and its usefulness for Hindus in India, which though assumes a tolerant and resilient face for Hindu-Catholic relations in the 20th and 21st century, also produces suffering and weakness for Dalits, Adivasis, and other downtrodden groups that challenge Hindu theology, complicit with caste hierarchies to articulate the catastrophic consequences of Hinduism on their human rights. Protestant missions exploited this exact aspect, and the crying need for "dissent" among the downtrodden to its very fullest, by recognizing the urgent necessity of addressing caste oppression, and rejecting Hinduism as fundamentally un-religious, and un-Christian.

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Nidān, Volume 5, No. 2, December, 2020, pp. 87-89
ISSN 2414-8636
doi.org/10.36886/nidan.2020.5.2.6

Book Review

Narasingha P. Sil, *Ramakrishna Miscellany: A Comparative Study*, Studia Orientalia Monographica, Vol. 7. Bratislavia: Slovak Academic Press, 2017. Pp. xxx + 85. [ISBN: 978-80-89607-59-4]

This slender, but substantial volume brings together four of Sil's published essays (revised here into a single monograph) on the life of the famed Bengali mystic Śrī Ramakrishna Paramahaṃsa, born Gadadhar, or, Gadai Chattopadhyay in rural Bengal in 1836. Despite a life cut short due to throat cancer at the age of fifty, Ramakrishna achieved a fair degree of fame during his lifetime, winning a number of Bengal's elite urban intellectuals among his core devotees. However, the celebrity he achieved during his lifetime pales in comparison to his after-death legacy. This legacy, which was initially brought on to the world stage by his chief acolyte Swami Vivekananda (arguably India's most famous public intellectual/religious thinker of his day), remains such that today—150 years after Ramakrishna's death—it includes over two hundred Ramakrishna religious centers, a near-constant stream of reprints of his collected sayings, publications about him that include numerous biographies and hundreds of critical essays, and an enduring group of devotees numbering in the thousands (though the sect does have its unique strains, devotees of Ramakrishna view themselves as part of the larger Hindu tradition). Amidst all this, Sil, who is an academic historian, brings a unique perspective to the figure of Ramakrishna. On the one hand, as he notes in this work, as a native Bengali, Sil is something of an "insider"; yet, he is neither a follower of Ramakrishna, nor a specialist in South Asian religion (8). And, despite having published several dozen studies (books, articles, etc.) focused on 19th-century Bengali intellectual history, Sil's primary academic training is in the history of Tudor England. While all this may seem somewhat incongruous, Sil uses it to great effect in his work on Ramakrishna, in which he combines an insider's understanding of Bengali Hinduism with the dispassionate eye of a broadly trained academic historian.

Sil's *Ramakrishna Miscellany* consists of four main essays with a succinct concluding section. The first essay gives a brief biography of Ramakrishna, detailing his simple life in rural Bengal, and blends seamlessly into the second essay, which takes on Ramakrishna's "historiography," that is, the manner in which his life story emerged at the hands of his followers. Sil takes care to balance the extreme claims made about Ramakrishna—such as his characterization as an

avatāra, or, incarnation of God—with the base elements of his life. Ramakrishna was quite aware of his fundamental human nature: as Sil quotes Ramakrishna himself on his deathbed: "Just fancy; God Almighty dying of cancer in the throat" (10). Throughout this chapter, Sil takes a clear-eyed stance regarding claims by his followers regarding Ramakrishna's great erudition, noting that Ramakrishna himself admitted he had little use for the intricacies of the Hindu religio-philosophical tradition, and seems to have held it in disdain. At the other extreme, Sil examines the recent scholarly tendency to locate Ramakrishna's spirituality within a strangely-constructed world of repressed homo-eroticism (discussing, in particular, the works of Kripal and Kakar). Sil does not shy away from reporting the unorthodox sexual undertones that manifested themselves in Ramakrishna's life, but what of them? As Sil shows, Ramakrishna did not hide them in his interactions with his disciples, nor did he deny the importance of sexualized tantric elements in his spiritual development. Following a detailed criticism of this recent trend in Ramakrishna scholarship, Sil observes, to become mired in "an imaginary land of symbolism and shadows" is to fail to see "the concrete world and culture of colonial Bengal" (18), which, in the end, was the locus of Radhakrishna's life as a village priest, albeit an inspired one.

In chapter 3, Sil presents a lengthy comparison between the lives and religious experiences of the 16th century German monastic and theologian, Martin Luther, and Śrī Ramakrishna. Sil does not pause overlong on the reasoning behind making this comparison; as he notes, between the two figures there are any number of similarities (their agrarian backgrounds, the budding humanism of their historical contexts) and differences (Ramakrishna was largely unlettered, while Luther was among the great academic theologians of his day). Sil carries the comparison through several categories, from their experiences and understanding of evil, to their spiritual experiences and encounters with the divine, to their lives as married men and their shared fixation with body functions (Sil does not shy from the lewd language used by these figures, though his presentation is clinical rather than salacious). Comparing these figures does not, in the end, reveal some grand scheme, and I would suggest that finding such a pattern is not Sil's intention; indeed, as he notes, engaging in comparison is often a risky proposition, by its nature inviting prejudicial treatment (22). On the other hand, placing these two figures side by side—despite their differences in time and in place—does reveal a great deal about what it means to live a life, with all the foibles and weaknesses of being men, caught in the extraordinary world of extreme piety and mysticism.

Whereas in chapter 1, Sil debunks some of the more extreme claims about Ramakrishna's religious identity, chapter 4 concerns itself with the deep connections between Ramakrishna's religiosity and the world of Hindu devotionalism. Here, Sil presents lucid explanations of the many relgio-philosophical (and ritual) streams that existed in 19th century Bengali Hinduism,

and Ramakrishna's often sophisticated absorption of them (despite his lack of education). In the end, a portrait of Ramakrishna emerges that does show a deeply spiritual as well as a highly charismatic individual—he was, in Sil's words, "enchantingly personal and informal, in fact quite intimate, in his relationship with the divine" (73-4).

Sil's *Ramakrishna Miscellany: A Comparative Study* contains a wealth of information about the life and historical context of Bengal's great mystic, Śrī Ramakrishna. Although accessible for its clear writing and relative brevity, the monograph also contains a significant scholarly apparatus (extensive discursive notes, lists of sources, and original translations of Bengali texts). In addition, Sil's views stand as an important counter to those put forth in contemporary scholarship that narrowly focus on Ramakrishna's psycho-sexual life. In Sil's work we see the person Ramakrishna, a mystically inclined, rural priest, whose charm, charisma, and near-preternatural ability to absorb abstruse elements of the Hindu devotional tradition significantly affected the course of late 19th century Bengali intellectual history.

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Nidān, Volume 5, No. 2, December, 2020, pp. 90-97
ISSN 2414-8636
doi.org/10.36886/nidan.2020.5.2.7

Book Review

Mala Renganathan and Arnab Bhattacharya, eds. *Rabindranath Tagore's Drama in the Perspective of Indian Theatre*. London: Anthem Press, 2020. Pp. viii + 188. 13:978-1-78527-394-0. Price: $120.00 (H/b).

Reviewing academic books is a dicey business. A seasoned practitioner of this noble and maieutic undertaking observed perspicaciously in his review of a biography of the Anglo-American journalist that the latter despite his many achievements, "perdition—wrote book reviews" (Howard Schneider in *Wall Street Journal*, November 27, 2020, p. A13). Reviewers must remain circumspect about their judgment on their authors' works especially when, as in the anthology under review, majority of the authors possess impressive credentials individually. Yet, it is the reviewers' responsibility to point out the flaws, errors, and infelicities in the texts reviewed. Review is not just re-view but also recommendation for recovery and rectification.

This book, divided into two parts with twelve chapters plus an Introduction, is a mixed bag, some providing no new critique of Tagore's dramas or dance dramas (including their ideological, philosophical, or spiritual core) while some others displaying scholarly analyses in elegant prose though admittedly, a few betray their authors' shortcomings with respect to scholarly research and writing.

The author of Chapter 1 discusses how Tagore's two dance dramas, *Raktakarabī* [Red Oleanders] and *Tāser Deś* [Land of Cards], illustrate his ideas on nationalism. The latter is a well-furrowed topic to which numerous scholars including this reviewer have contributed. However, it claims a larger space while the discussion of Tagore's dramas receives short shrift. The author comes up with such familiar vignettes as Tagore's idiosyncratic idea about India as "a country of No-Nation" (18); "The Santiniketan-Sriniketan community…would have served as a capsule of his [Tagore's] vision of the Indian community, his *swadeshi samaj"* (19); or his understanding of Tagore's preference for *yātrā* as ideologically inspired (overlooking the obvious fact all the zamindar families of Bengal in the nineteenth century were familiar with *yātrā* as the only dramatic performance in their homes) (22); and a host of such others. He misses out on Tagore's "Red Oleanders: An Interpretation" (*The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, IV: 335-41). He also provides no critical analysis of Tagore's views of what nation and nationalism mean. But he echoes (perhaps inadvertently, without proper

professional attribution) the distinction between Tagore's *jātīyatāvād* and *deśaprem* and cites from the works of Anuradha Roy, Ferdinand Tönnies, Anthony Smith, and Niharranjan Ray discussed for the first time by this reviewer in chapter 8 (the author's own contribution appears in chapter 9) of Mohammad Quayum's edited volume *The Poet and His World* (2011). The very first chapter of this collection of studies on Tagore's drama thus begins with an entry of well-written but uncritical and stereotyped adulatory account of Tagore's brand of nationalism and drama and theater. The author's contention in respect of Tagore 's *Tāser Deś* is that the poet's anti-nation idea (*Svadeśī Samāj*) "dovetails together [his]…attempts to imagine a nation" (23)—an interesting *tour de force*—needed to be interrogated rather than highlighting such quaint conclusion that this *Āṣāḍe Galpa* [Cock-and-Bull Story] is a symbolic tale of decolonization (27). On the other hand, this fantasy tale mocks at continuing devotion to the so-called *sanātana* mores and morals of the house of stasis [*acalāyatan*], as it were, that ought to be done away with a view to ushering in true freedom, in other words, an allegorical account of modernization.

Chapter 2 deals with Tagore's stylized dance. While the content of this chapter shows no remarkable research flaw, the author should practice more compositions in English so as to avoid making and writing weak statements or sentences without a coherent or clear meaning. Admission of "limited scholarship in this area (based on the initial readings during M.Phil. research) and personal experience of learning performing this dance" (34) may be a commendable sign of honesty and sincerity but it is also self-defeating. Then, what is the import of the observation that "Tagore always placed stress on the creation of the larger picture rather than on any overt detailed artistry (40)? The author's idea about the so-called *nautch* (an anglicized corruption of *nāc* in Bengali as well as in Hindi), a respectable court dancer's art popular with the factors and other officials of the East India Company in the eighteenth century. It was not to be confused with the folk dances such as *Khyamtā*, *Chhau*, *Tusu*, *Sāṛitāl* and the like. Not all these dance forms are primarily sexually pleasurable or provocative, and hence "immoral." Tagore's dances are, as the author, a trained dancer, knows it well, most visibly inspired by the *Maṇipurī* style for its simplicity and grace. Its adoption may parallel Tagore's adoption of open-air *Yātrā* for dramatic performance. Puzzlingly, the author overlooked the contributions of Udayshankar, Amalashankar, and notably Mamatashankar as well as of Manjushree and Ranjabati Chaki to Tagorean dance. Finally, a collegial suggestion: please read the works of Dr. Prarthana Purkayastha of Royal Holloway, University of London, Professor of Dance. Her works are available in the website of academia.edu/

Chapter 3 discusses Tagore's use of "various places and spaces as tools for his radical and often subversive ideas" (45). In this scholarly chapter the author judiciously contextualizes the unique concepts of "place" and "space" by a historical discussion of the cultural conflict and confusion that played out a search for cultural identity. The author correctly identifies the fundamental characteristic of Tagore's plays and his lyricism (48-49), though it was anticipated in Amiya Chakravarty's excellent collection of the poet's various works (*Tagore: A Reader*, Beacon, 1966: 123). However, it appears from his prose plays that he had been familiar with the indigenous *Yātrā* that called for acting accompanied by music and dance and no *mise en scène*. By the same token his figures of *Ṭhākurda'*, *Bairāgī*, *Bāul*, or *pāgal* (49) who appear as the symbolic Conscience [*Bibek*] or a *Cassandra* during a crisis being enacted as a part of the Yātrā play. Admittedly the author has internalized Tagore's concept of man [human being], of freedom, of "*ātmaśaktī*" and the like wholesale without pausing to reflect, as does the magisterial critique by Professor Arabinda Poddar (*Rabīndra Mānas*, 1969: 39-98): how much did the Poet Laureate of the World actually accomplish by way of suggesting ways and means to alter the odyssey of the suffering humanity despite some of his magnificent verses extoling those who labor in town and country [*Orā kāj kare, nagare prāntare*]? Then, a single and avoidable reference to but listing seven unused works by Michel Foucault should have been excised as they merely inflate the References to no use for the readers and to no credit to the author.

The author of Chapter 4 unabashedly refers to Tagore, the author of the short story *Dākghar* [*The Post Office*] as Gurudev (quite unusual in a scholarly essay), who is "a gifted dramatic genius" whose "imagination and poetic instincts were disparate from the Western thought and principle followed by the Greek dramatists like Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides" and who "did not use the Aristotelian lens to view a tragedy, because Indian ethos looked upon life as an integrated whole wherein pity and fear form a segment only" (whatever the words crowded in the four or five lines above are trying to make a sensible sense mean) (67). Tagore's *Post Office* which is about the death of the terminally ill little Amal [the Stainless], confined indoors and awaiting the advent of the king of the never-never land to take him out, could have been compared profitably with the novel *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (1886) authored by the Russian savant Count Leo Tolstoy thereby examining our author's contention of Eastern and Western *Weltanschauung*. While the author's complex theological-metaphysical hermeneutic converts the ailing boy's passing into "a celebration of the ultimate achievement of the Infinite or the Absolute and the end of the spiritual bondage of the soul," (74) it by the same token subverts the melancholy pathos of the story, or better, its sheer serene musicality, as if a simple flute's sweet melody has been forcefully fabricated as an erudite drumbeat of *gravitas*.

Chapter 5 is a useful narrative possessing handy paraphrases of some major sources of Hindu dramaturgy instead of the fashionable postmodernist phraseology and controversial paradigms on the cultural psychological or sociological dimensions of the satire, farce, and other literature of the laugh [*hāsyarasa*, *byaṅgarasa*, *kautuk*, or *naks*ā]. Unfortunately, the author's discussion of the *rasa* missed out on some classical literatures such as the works of Ānandavardhana (820-890), Abhinavagupta (*c*. 950-1020), Viśvanātha Kavirāja (*fl*.1378-1434), or Paramānanda Sen (Kavikarṇapura, 1527-*c*. 1577). Paul Hine's helpful online essay "Rasa Theory" is a must for a start. Similarly, the author overlooked discussing several satirists of nineteenth-century Bengal like Bhabanicharan Bandyopadhyay (1787-1848), Pearychand Mitra (1814-1883), Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894), (Kaliprasanna Singha (1840-1870), or Amritalal Basu (1853-1929), among others. Moreover, the role of the *Baṭṭalā* literature needed to be discussed. The author is further advised to practice some economy of expression as concise meaningful sentences could have enhanced readability of his narrative.

Chapter 6 on the theme of Tagore's comedies provides virtually nothing new or provocative. The author makes the point that *a la* Tagore's Foreword to his *Riddle Play* [*Hāsya Koutuk*] that a "human mind cannot attain health without fun and humour in life" (98) and that a character of his *Cirakumār Sabhā* [The Bachelors' Club] the sexagenarian bachelor Rasik [connoisseur of *erotica*] was saved by his humorous praxis from getting old, cold, bored, and weary. The author writes of "Tagore's profound knowledge of world literature as well as of Indian mythologies" and thus his allusion to "Hanuman's tail on fire" and of "likening the young widow Shailabala in disguise to young Adonais, are all incidents intended to produce comic relief" (103). The problem here is the author's confusing Adonis, the son of the Cyprian king Cinyras and his daughter and incestuous mistress Myrrha, with *Adonais*, a pastoral elegy written by Percy B. Shelley (1792-1822) on the death of his friend John Keats (1795-1821). The author also overlooked Tagore's subtle and conceited portrayal of the young widow oblivious of her odyssey albeit safe from being torched as a *satī* but destined to remain a castrated female devoid of any erotic charm and behavior with a view to conforming to (and without confronting) the traditional injunctions against a widow and by the same token without appearing as a diehard conservative publicly. The author failed to provide a wider context for the purpose of examining Tagore's achievements as a humorist by a survey of the *oeuvres* of the great satirists of the period of the Bengal Renaissance by such modern scholarly studies as Chittaranjan Laha's *Bāṁlā Sāhitye Parody* (1385 BE/1978) and Ajitkumar Ghosh's *Baṅgasāhitye Hāsyaraser Dhārā* (1989).

One of the most precise and incisive interpretations of Tagore's drama is provided by the author of Chapter 7 who persuasively problematizes the poet's views on his preferred open-air theater (*a la* Shakespeare) which appears to be a euphemism for the traditional *Yātrā*. However, the author's deft discussion of Shambhu Mitra's tweaking on stage is refreshingly useful. Our author's unstated but implied thesis is that Tagore's outlook on the theater was, like his ideas on East-West cultural encounter, a quasi-Hegelian synthesis, the co-existence of the indoor proscenium and the open-air *Yātrā* as demonstrated by Mitra's staging of *Raktakarabī.* As he concludes, "it is time that we start considering…[Tagore] as an open-air theatre playwright" (119). Tagore's greatest contribution to the performing arts was his incorporation of lyrics in his prose plays and, not to emphasize more, in his signature dance drama. The reviewer, however, disagrees with the author's *ex cathedra* pronouncement in respect of the so-called "Tagore Dance" (109) and adds that Tagore's prose writings, especially some novels and dance dramas, are enriched due to "Tagore songs" and poems. Just to give some examples, a drab play such as *Cirakumār Sabhā* or the story of a narcissus Amitray, titled *Śeṣer Kabitā* were elevated to the level of endearing, watchable, and readable classics because of their lyrics and poems respectively.

Chapter 8 seeks to transform Tagore into a talented all-rounder who happens to be a "cult figure," who was at the same time "deeply skeptical, self-critical, tormented by conflicts in his 'inner life'" and yet was "aware of the historical significance of his time" and "someone who built on the heritage of the nineteenth century renaissance in India and became one of the makers of the modern Indian mind" (121). It is incomprehensible why such a talented individual should be reduced to the stature of a cult figure! An example of the author's circuitous or diffused supra metaphorical expression is: "Tagore's dramaturgy flew out of the same spring that lighted up his educational, political and personal philosophy" (127). Then the author brings in innumerable quotes without the relevant contexts to make Tagore an anticolonial *bāul*, a profound educationist who appreciates Western wisdom and opposes the idea of Indians reviving the antiquated mores and morals and yet at the same time seeks to install in his Shantiniketan the antiquated *tapovan* model of learning of Kālidasa's Bhāratvarsa. Most important, the dance drama *Muktadhārā* is elevated to an epic proportion as his *magnum opus*—a *tour de force* with a punch!

Chapter 9 purveys a densely contrived *problématique* of Tagore's dance drama *Citrāṅgadā*, a romantic story of the epic *Mahābhārata* by comparing a snippet of the dance drama being staged in a domestic environment from Tarun Majumdar's *Dādār Kīrti* (1980) with Rituparno Ghosh's *Citrāṅgadā: The Crowning Wish* (2013). The author considers the 1980 snippet of Tagore's dance drama and the 2013 adaption of the same as radically different, the former "a crucial device to

apparently narrativize the classic boy-meets-girl sequence" and "the latter is a nuanced, yet profoundly troubled reading of Tagore's source text by a transsexual performer who is seeking a feminine identity" (135-136). But *de rigueur* under the spell of the fashionable postmodernist critical study and transgender conundrum, the author ventured a theoretical exercise that highlighted a perverse distortion of the theme of *Citrāṅgadā* based on the personal problematic odyssey of a modern day *avant garde* film director. Tagore did not intend to consider the mythical Manipur princess an LGBT being but most certainly depicted her as an innocent tomboy (see Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 1988; Michelle Ann Abate, *Tomboys: A Literary and Cultural History*, 2008), who despite her masculine arms, armor, and outfit, was psychically feminine enough to fall for the Pāṇḍava warrior. Our author neither considers this simple sensible explanation nor discusses the aesthetic and technical aspects of this dance drama relevant to the theme of the anthology.

Writing on the temporal historical context for Tagore's *Visarjan* [The Sacrifice] (1890), the author of Chapter 10 describes a violent near anarchic situation of "enormous contemporary significance":

"Contemporary India is marked with the fight between the orthodoxy and the progressive voices in society. Even the state, which is considered as modern institution, is either being encroached upon or being made helpless by the orthodox interpretations. There are several examples of the growing clout of religious fanaticism in society, be it in the murder of rationalists for their views, killing of people over their food habits, dishonour killings, communal polarization and the like" (147. No reference provided).

The dismal historical background for Tagore's verse play quoted above finds no support in a standard survey of modern Indian history such as Stanley Wolpert's *New History of India*, Chapters 17 and 18.

A couple of paragraphs later, the author writes:

"The period during which Tagore penned down this play is momentous in contributing to its profundity and appeal. It has been a few years since he published his magnum opus on religion *The Religion of Man*. It is to the ideas expressed in this work that he returns while writing the play. Therefore, we should further see *Visarjan* as a stage performance on *The Religion of Man"* (148).

Two comments are in order. First, the author has no competence in comprehending social, political, and cultural history of Tagore's India nor any understanding of *Visarjan*. Second, the author is astonishingly innocent of Tagore's work and makes his Hibbert Lecture in Oxford University 1930,

converted into the monograph *The Religion of Man* in 1931, antecedent to his *Visarjan* published in 1890 (148)! On the latter, the subject of the author's essay, we read an enigmatic sentence: But above all, *Visarjan* is deeply rooted in the concept of ritual healing and its performance on the stage. It is Tagore's supreme theatrical achievement" (151). Another vignette: "Tagore spills blood on stage to stop the very act of bleeding of any kind…In a broad manner, Tagore, by staging a ritual performance, goes back to the genesis of theatre and touches upon its very essence" (152). To show the essay's relevance to the theme of the anthology, Tagore's "drama," the author concludes with a parting shot: "Tagore uses the stage brilliantly to narrate the concept of ritual sacrifice both in form and content. *Visarjan* is a complete success in making it entertaining to the medium" (153).

The author of Chapter 11 is clueless about the theme or structure of Tagore's verse play *Vālmikī Pratibhā* [The Genius of Vālmikī]: Music? Fusion of foreign (Irish) and Indian melody? Performance? The author misleadingly writes Tagore "was performer par excellence himself," though he really was a "poet" *par excellence*)? Afterlife of the text? Following the play performed by the prisoners of West Bengal under the direction of Kolkata's "celebrated danseuse" Alakananda Roy in which the State's Hindi-speaking Inspector General of Correctional Homes sang all the songs of the drama and confessed "that he himself had been transformed from a Ratnakar into a Valmiki" (162-63). The author, who had been an invited guest to the function, hailed the occasion as the start of a profound social reform movement—the half-literate and illiterate felons and a high-ranking police officer together were participating in staging Tagore's play about a notorious mythical robber's rebirth as the glorious legendary poet of Hindu India. This uniquely sentimental critique of the "half-playful creation of a 20-year-old phenomenal genius" (165) by the affectionate and awestruck scholar requires no further comment and must be let alone to bask in its own sunlight.

The author of Chapter 12 has all kinds of projects about Tagore's dance drama *Taser Deś* (1933), one of the poet's most unusual, that is untypical, plays. The author of course does not care to use the original work of Tagore but a reworked and deconstructed film version by an enigmatic self-styled postmodern *avant garde* demolition man known as Q (Qaushiq Mukherjee). The author seeks to explore the ethical dimensions of this filmmaker's (famous for his postmodern classic of the gutter *Gāṇḍu*) "unusually experimental tools and devices …[used] to revive Tagore's timeless classic" (167) and "to interrogate the cinematic performance of Tagore's drama that unfolds the nuances of a cross-generic and transhistorical cultural exchange" (whatever this sentence [?] means) (168). Despite numerous slips in language (too many to list here) the redeeming feature of this chapter is the author's balanced view of Q as a producer director of *Tāser*

Deś. Thus, the author writes: "My interpretation of Q's postmodern reworking will take into account some of the prominent features that emerge out of the interface of two radically different performance traditions" (170). Eventually, the author sensibly admonishes the "loose cannon" of the ready-made iconoclast's deliberate insertion of homoerotism in Tagore's text a "subtly unsettling feature of the film" (175). Most important, the author's final Judgment on the postmodern version of Tagore's drama is as spot on as it is eloquent: "The foregrounding of sexuality can be treated as a perverse attempt on the part of the director obsessed with sex" (178). In the end, this reviewer, an avid admirer of Rabindranath, yet finds the Biśvakabi's *Tāser Deś* less enjoyable as a comic piece than Satyajit Ray's *Hīrak Rājār Deśe* (apparently inspired by the Tagore's work) for being both a deliciously entertaining comedy and a didactic political commentary.

This reviewer finds this anthology a flawed production, victim of gross editorial indifference and negligence in getting it vetted by professional proof-readers. There has been virtually no attempt at correcting grammatical, rhetorical, or syntactical lapses that abound in merry abandon in several chapters. While the referencing styles are well-managed, the lack of diacritics for Bengali and *tatsama* terms has created an avoidable chaos in their meaningful use. Especially the negligence in marking the difference between the long "ā" and short "a", the *bargīya* "ja" and *antahsva* "ya," the *dantya* "na" and *mūrdhanya* "ṇ", or the *dantya* "sa", *tālabya* "ś" and *mūrdhanya* "ṣ" is unconscionable, to say the least.

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