

However, dharmic conduct, as our author persuasively argues, cannot be always axiological since there may arise situations when available prescriptions are far from clear. There is, then, something pragmatic and contingent about dharma: it is a concept that has to keep flowing like a perennial river, regardless of the intrinsic difficulties over moral choices to be made (p. 25).

Happily, the maze of contrariness and contradictions that Hildebeitel's detailed and richly textured narrative leads us to is at least partly cleared by the insightful comments that he also produces alongside. Two of these that appealed to me in particular were first, how it was easier to frame prescriptive rules for wives than for mothers and second, to understand the hardening orthodoxy in Manu as a reaction to the emergence of the independent religiously unorthodox women: the Buddhist nun (pp. 337, 340). Also insightful and instructive is the observation on the perceptive differences that Manu and the Gita adopt over the concept of *Karmayoga*. Manu, as it would appear from Hildebeitel's analysis, is (at least initially) the greater realist, more reluctant to be drawn to the conclusion that actions may be quite easily performed without tying these to human desire. Hence, whereas the Gita advocates selflessness (*nishkama*) for all work, Manu recommends this only with respect to Vedic ritual performances (pp. 536–38).

If the ways of dharma are so muddled and complex so is Hilltebeitel's narrative at places. What compounds matters occasionally is the author's tendency to digress somewhat wantonly into dense textual histories (see pages 203–05), into confounding lists of who said what and when and his recurring differences with members of the western academia (as for instance with Doniger and Bierdeau on pages 15–16). However, as he himself concedes (p. 20) scholarly orthodoxies centred on the understanding of dharma are more difficult to shake off than differences of opinion in classical India itself, which in retrospect, appear more flexible.

For a book of this proportion, it might have been useful to include an epilogue where mutations occurring within the concept of dharma over a longer period could have been handled, however, briefly. For an author who pays much attention to history, handling the transition from *dharmasutra* literature to *dharmasastras* would have been additionally rewarding. In the present work, we are sufficiently apprised of Yudhishtira as the embodiment of dharma but what of Yama himself? As a reviewer whose knowledge of early India is far from adequate, I have also pondered over the question of whether or not dharma as an active paradigm entered contemporary Jain literature.

I would be greatly remiss if in passing I failed to mention the excellent quality of production even if the price would seem to be somewhat prohibitive. The copy editor has done a commendable job—even in a book of this size I could locate only two typos (p. 10, line 12 from above, p. 570, last line of the main text). This is a book from which the author may justly draw personal happiness and professional satisfaction. It is also a book that will endure, inviting and actively inspiring interested scholars and readers for some years to come.

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*Book News*

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*After Timur Left: Culture and Circulation in Fifteenth-Century North India*, edited by Francesca Orsini and Samira Sheikh, provides a wide coverage and discusses all socio-cultural aspects of 15th century north India: evolution of modern north Indian languages, religious vocabularies (including Bhakti), and political formations (including linguistic regions).

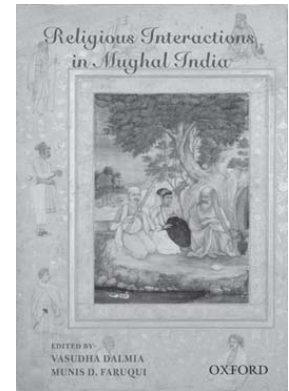
Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 500, Rs. 1350.00

## The World of Prannath

Manan Ahmed Asif

### RELIGIOUS INTERACTIONS IN MUGHAL INDIA

Edited by Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui  
Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2014, pp. 391, ₹1095.00



In 1674, Mahamat Prannath (1618–1694 CE) and his followers sought to find an audience with the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (1619–1707) in the imperial capital of Delhi. Mahamat Prannath had recently split from other disciples of his *sampradaya* of Guru Devchandra

over the question of succession and the audience with the Mughal *badshah* was meant to resolve this difference, as was customary in such cases, in those times. Leaving Gujarat must have been hard for Prannath. He was born in Jamnagar and he had spent his adulthood living and travelling in Junagadh, Ahmadabad, Diu, Thatta, Muscat, Aden. The regions of Sind, Gujarat and Aden shared networks of traders, merchants, mendicants and scholars living in port-cities and capitals. The religious orders present—Nizari Ismailis, Catholics, Jains, Vaishnavite and Krishnavite *sants*, Sufis or Sunnis—were just as diverse as political power in this intimate circuit with the Mughal, the Portuguese, the Gujarati and Sindhi Rajas.

This world of Mahamat Prannath is laid out in concise yet sensitive detail in Brendan LaRocque's essay 'Mahamat Prannath and the Pranami Movement: Hinduism and Islam in a Seventeenth-Century Mercantile Sect' contained in *Religious Interactions in Mughal India* edited by Vasudha Dalmia and Munis D. Faruqui (2014). Reading this excellent, timely and important volume is an odd sensation when, in India there are the 're-conversions' (*ghar-wapsi*) and the 're-naming' (of Aurangzeb Road in Delhi); in Pakistan, there are the targeted killings of Christians and Shi'a. Our contemporary understanding of religious interactions is dominated by exquisitely drawn boundaries over rituals, sensibilities and texts with exclusive claims to truth. Faruqui and Dalmia have produced a compendium of the most current and sophisticated scholarship from the US, UK and EU that, in broad terms, helps us articulate what we do not remember and, hence, cannot understand.

The essays are divided under the themes 'Of Intersections' and 'Of Proximity and Distance'. The opening essay by Eva Orthman locates the efforts of Humâyûn as the individual who creates a Mughal ecumene where the yogic and sufic texts offer equal opportunities to imagine a divinely sanctioned, astrally visible polity. There are two critical essays engaging with the high politics of the Mughal court—focusing on the intellectual practices of the Mughal Prince Dara Shikoh. Munis Faruqui examines Dara Shukoh's *Sirr-i Akbar* (1657) and the influences from Vedantic philosophy to argue for a gnostic reading of the Qur'an that would reveal both the perfect polity and (sub rosa) the perfect human to lead that polity. Supriya Gandhi looks at the translations of *Yogavâsi basâra* under Akbar and Dara and the role of the dialogues of Dara Shikoh with Bâbâ La'l. Taken together, both essays detail an intellectually and theologically intimate world where discussions of faith, power and the self occupied the time of a significant number of elite in the seventeenth century.

Christopher Minkowski broadens the lens to show the presence of learned brahmins working within the Mughal bureaucracies and

intellectual spaces. Minkowski details members of *jyoti as* families from Benares who worked for Jahangir, Shah Jahan and even Aurangzeb and produced both poetic and scientific works. Ramya Sreenivasan focuses on Rajasthan and examines conversion narratives in Persian, Brajhasha, and Marwari to show how efforts for elite mobility and alliances were negotiated differently in the different sources. The essays of Francesca Orsini and Stefano Pellò focus on poetic traditions in Lucknow and Awadh in text and in performances intermixing Persian and Sanskrit literary cultures. Monica Horstmann and Heidi Pauwels individually focus on bhakti poets, Sundardās and Kabir, and their infusion of *sant* and sufi ontologies.

Shandip Saha takes hagiographic literature (*vārtā*) of the Vallabha sampradāya to detail the depiction of Muslims—where Akbar's favour to the non-Muslims could be explained via his previous birth as a brahmin 'who unwittingly swallowed a piece of cow hair while drinking milk' causing him to be 'reborn as a righteous but still *mleccha* emperor' (p. 335). The development and self-memory of the Pushti Marg (Vallabha sampradāya) is also the subject of the essay by Vasudha Dalmia—with the rare explication of how gender is a critical category of difference in the Vallabha responses to other Krishna devotees Chaitanya and Mira bai (p. 278–282). Each of the essays, in effect, brim with intertwined agencies, textual interpellations, ritual and blood interminglings. They cover vast swathes of geography and explicate the Mughal state in ways that remain occluded in contemporary scholarship.

Prannath or his followers were having a difficult time finding the Emperor. The streets of Delhi were filled with hundreds of thousands of protestors who had gathered to plead the case against a tax on non-Muslims by Aurangzeb. Prannath had had a revelation on the way to Delhi, after reading an esoteric Persian sufi commentary on the Qur'an *Tafsir-i Hashmi*. Prannath realized that the messages of Krishna, of Devchandra, of Muhammad, of Imam Mahdi were all congruent and the Vedas, the Vedantas and the Qur'an could all be used to 'reveal the essence of love veiled by external rituals'. This essence, if properly understood by the Mughal Emperor, would allow him to set an equitable and just policy for all of his subjects. Prannath or his followers did not manage to have an audience with the Emperor and they soon left Delhi for Udaipur, Ujjain, Burhanpur, and ended up in Bundelkhand where Chhatrasal (1649–1731) listened to Prannath and became his disciple. Prannath composed a number of texts—bhakti poetry, commentaries—dedicating his *Sananadh* to Hindustan's Muslims. As LaRoque writes, 'Prannath's religious claims were able to account for observable, worldly differences, yet at the same time could deny that these differences existed in a more meaningful, ultimate reality'—one could transcend 'the boundaries of religious difference' through justice (p. 375). His disciples, and the order grew to great strength, and continues to this day, were able to draw upon these differences as sources of strength and Prannath is now remembered as one of the last great *sants*. His contemporary iconography has him sitting on a throne with his hand raised, five fingers up, palm exposed—akin to the Ismaili *panja*.

Yet to recognize this connected past we need LaRoque's essay; and similarly the other essays in this volume which explicate the shared history of making, and recognizing difference. This is the critical role of scholarship for our particular imperilled times (reading this volume will acquaint anyone that perils are not unique to us). The work of historians, philologists, literary and religious scholars represented in this volume is a contribution not only to our scholarly body but to our civic body. My regret is that this volume is expensive, does not contain any maps, basic glossary or chronology, and does not have a unified transliteration schema which would help it reach a wide and diverse audience.

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## Presenting A New Synthesis

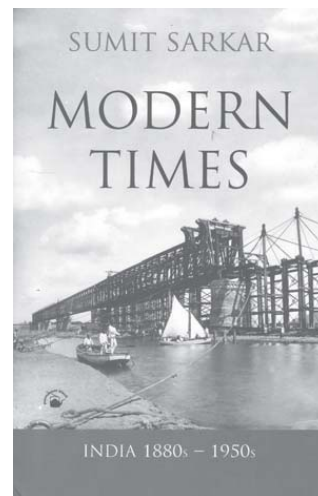
Vernon Hewitt

**MODERN TIMES 1880s–1950s: ENVIRONMENT, ECONOMY AND CULTURE**

By Sumit Sarkar

Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, pp. i–ivi + 435, ₹806.00

**M**odern Times is the first of a promised two part work in which Professor Sarkar sets out to review the current state of 19th and 20th century Indian historiography, and to add to his own already remarkable oeuvre. The work does not disappoint, and while there is much here that is already familiar to the student of Indian history, especially concerning debates about the impact of colonialism, modernity and capitalism, there is also originality and extraordinary breadth. What is presented is not a revised version of his own classic *Modern India*,



but in effect a new synthesis of Sarkar's earlier ideas, structured around new archival materials and recent methodological innovations.

The arguments are set out chronologically and thematically. Sarkar begins with a succinct summary of the epistemological changes that have characterized Indian history since the late 1970s, the shifts away from empirical, 'top down' accounts of imperialism; simplified accounts of nationalist awakening and liberation using historical 'stages', and structural Marxist and class based accounts of the colonial state. In the post-Saidian, Foucauldian world not only has the focus of history shifted downwards towards the production and reproduction of cultural artifacts, but also to the specific contexts in which these operated and gave form to particular and contingent economic and political participation. This localism, inspired in part by subaltern studies but pressed on by most poststructural and post-modern scholars (of various hues), stresses both the complexity of the colonial encounter, but also the often unpredictable and ambiguous dynamics generated by the deepening of British colonial administration which Sarkar takes as the hallmark of the late 19th century.

Sarkar maps and analyses these dynamics across an impressive array of data and sub-fields of Indian history; political and institutional reform, colonial law and missionary activity, and land reform with particular attention to recent work on the environmental impact of the Raj. In the final section, headed Society and Culture, there is an impressive discussion of the construction of urban spaces and a summary of recent work on the rise of popular culture, entertainment and sport. All of these activities created new forms of interaction within the growing metropolises of late 19th century India, or reconfigured existing recreation for different participants. In each section of this densely worked book, Sarkar examines the impact of the colonial encounter by stressing not so much a Saidian imposition of the western imagination, but the constant imbrication of confrontation and co-optation of colonial governmentality by a bewildering variety of Indian and imperial actors. Gone are the old homogenous and uniformed actors of both the imperial and nationalist narratives, gone too is the irritating chronological focus that