

A Review of Chapter 20 of Wendy Doniger’s “The Hindus, an Alternative History”

Chapter Title:- “Hinduism under the Mughals 1500-1700 CE”

General Comments on the Chapter

Practically all of Doniger’s bibliographic references are several degrees removed from the original sources (whether historical chronicles or religious writings of that period). The chapter is full of exaggerations, crediting the Mughal rulers for the survival or efflorescence of some forms of Hinduism from 1500-1700 CE. No counter theses are considered, and the choice of Saints is also highly idiosyncratic. In fact, most of the Saints discussed in this chapter were beyond the sphere of influence of Mughals. In effect, she has torn these Saints from the larger canvas of the Bhakti movement, and has projected them as having been under some kind of tutelage under the Mughals. As with many other chapters, this one too wastes several pages on horses and on Muslim ladies in royal harems. Her students (Rajeev Kinra and Manan Ahmed) whom she mentions for helping her with this chapter have not been able to correct the errors of their teacher’s work. The review below gives a few examples of the flaws in this chapter:

#	Page #	Paragraph # on the page	Error	Comments
1	550	Title	Chapter Title – “Hinduism under the Mughals 1500-1700 CE”	The periodization of 1500-1700 as the ‘Mughal Rule’ is somewhat problematic. The Mughal rule started in India in 1526 and was restricted to parts of northern India during the reigns of Babar and Humayun (who did not even rule India from 1540-1556, having fled towards Iran). It was the third Mughal Emperor Akbar (1556-1605) during whose reign the Mughal rule extended over most of non-Peninsular India. Even granting some latitude to Doniger, the inclusion of most of the Saints in this chapter under the ‘Mughal Rule’ is questionable, as discussed below.
2	550	N/A	1486-1533 Chaitanya lives	Chaitanya’s life overlaps with Mughal rule for just the last 7 years (1526-1533) and during this entire period, Bengal, where the saint

				<p>was born, was not under the Mughal political rule. In fact, Chaitanya lived much of his active life in Orissa, which remained a Hindu kingdom in his times, outside the control of the Muslim Sultans ruling Bengal. In other words, he was completely out of the Mughal sphere of influence and lived mainly in Orissa under the patronage of Gajapati Hindu dynasty ruler Prataparudra Deva.</p>
3	550	N/A	1498-1597 Meerabai lives	Wrong dates. On page 568, Doniger dates Mirabai between 1450 – 1525 CE! In fact, the latter too is wrong. The commonly accepted dates for her lifetime are 1498-1547 C.E.
4	550	N/A	“1622-1673 Kshetravaya lives”	Aurangzeb (1658-1707) captured the coastal Telugu region (the home of Kshetravaya) towards the last decades of his reign CE. Therefore, Kshetravaya lived outside of the Moghul sphere of influence his entire life. It is therefore inaccurate to include this Saint under the Moghul rule. Doniger has herself stated in the chapter that the Saint lived under the Hindu Nayaka rulers.
5	550	N/A	<p>Wendy opens the chapter with the following quote – “It is a simple fact that contemporary Hinduism as a living practice would not be what it is if it were not for the devotional practices initiated under the Mughal rule. Amitava Ghosh (1956 -)”</p>	<p>Doniger quote these words of Amitav Ghosh (an English fiction writer) from an introduction that Salman Rushdie (another English fiction writer) wrote to an English translation of Babar’s autobiography published recently.¹ Rushdie’s so called introduction is nothing but a political sermon discussing 9-11, Afghanistan, Babri Masjid etc.</p> <p>The fact that Doniger has to rely on a second hand quote of an English fiction writer by another English fiction writer to suggest that Hinduism flourished under the Mughals and that the Mughals somehow contributed to the development of Hinduism is not just poor scholarship, but sad, mischievous and agenda driven. In fact,</p>

¹ Wheeler M. Thackstron, *The Baburnama- Memoirs of Babur*, The Modern Library (2002)

				<p>Amitav Ghosh's views are found online (at http://www.littlemag.com/2000/amitav2.htm) in the leftist magazine "<i>The Little Magazine</i>" and we reproduce them in extenso and critique them in Appendix 1.</p> <p>The Hindus constituted an overwhelming majority of the population of the Mughal Empire,² and it would be an insult to their intelligence to even suggest that Hinduism could not undergo any natural, internal developments (despite hindrances) during the period of 200 years from 1500-1700 CE. Moreover, Doniger's suggestion also overlooks the fact that the developments in the Hindu society during this period were largely a continuation of the Bhakti traditions that originated in Hindu peninsular India even before Islamic armies invaded India.</p> <p>In many cases, Hindu saints or their families from areas outside (or nominally under) the Mughal rule had migrated to north Indian Hindu pilgrim centers out of religious piety and gave a fresh lease of life to Hinduism there. Examples include Vallabhacharya, Ramananda, Namadeva, Chaitanya etc. who originally hailed from peninsular India or Bengal (outside the Moghul rule).</p>
6	550	1	<p>"Hinduism of various kinds flourished under the Mughals. The production and preservation of a large number of digests, as well as literary and religious texts, during this period suggests that this was one another of those periods – we have encountered several – when the presence of foreign cultures in India led</p>	<p>Contrary to what Doniger implies, the production of digests in fact shows that Hindus genuinely saw a real threat to their heritage and culture from Islamic aggression and were forced to compile these secondary works.</p> <p>In fact, as another scholar Sheldon Pollock notes,³ the decline of Sanskrit literature at least coincides temporally and spatially with the advance of Islamic rule in various parts of India. Pollock of</p>

² Even Emperor Jehangir (1605-1627) notes that 5/6 of his subjects were Hindus. Note that his empire included just the northern half of India (with the exception of the kingdom of Ahmadnagar), practically the whole of Pakistan, much of Afghanistan and western half of Bangladesh. The last 3 now have 88 - 100% Muslim majority today.

³ Sheldon Pollock, "The Death of Sanskrit", pp. 392- 426 in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 43, issue 2

			<p>many Hindu intellectuals to take pains to preserve their cultural heritage.”</p>	<p>course dismisses any correlation between the march of Islam and extinction of creativity in the field of Sanskrit literature (and he of course brands those who hold such opinions as ‘Hindu Nationalists’) but this is the most parsimonious explanation of the ‘death of Sanskrit’.</p> <p>In fact, in an earlier publication, Pollock has himself seen the correlation between the production of non-original Dharmanibandhas and the advance of Muslim –</p> <p>“...for the first time since the development of the dharmasastras that way of life confronted, in the Central Asian Turks, something radically different, a resolutely un-assimilating social and religious formation? The fact that the production of dharmanibandha discourse, ..., almost perfectly follows the path of advance of the Sultanate from the Doab to Devagiri to the Deccan suggests, on the one hand, that totalizing conceptions of society became possible only by juxtaposition with alternative lifeworlds, and on the other, that they became necessary only at the ‘moment when the total form of the society was for the first time believed, by the privileged theorists of society, to be threatened.”⁴</p> <p>Likewise, the growth in the literary activity in various regional languages of India did not have much to do directly with Mughal Emperors. Their own official languages were largely non-Indian languages like Persian.</p> <p>Only Persian poets were patronized by Akbar. Badauni puts their number at 168. Akbar was also the first Indo-Islamic king of north India to formally declare Persian as the sole language of</p>
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⁴ Sheldon Pollock (“Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj”, in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer eds., *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993)

				<p>administration (in 1582). Ghulam Husain Tabatabai records,</p> <p>“Earlier in India, the government accounts were written in Hindi according to the Hindu rule. Raja Todar Mal acquired new regulations (zawabit) from the clerks (nawisindagan) of Iran, and the government offices then were reorganized as they were there in Wilayat.”</p> <p>Iranian clerks were recruited in large numbers and remained in “noticeable control” of accounts in the Mughal Empire. Akbar modified the prevailing curriculum in the madarsas with a view to popularizing Persian language and culture among the Hindus. In his reign a large number of Hindus availed of madarsa education to acquire proficiency in Persian which was the means of obtaining government service. Attempts were also made to cleanse Persian of Indian usages, words, phrases, and ideas.⁵</p>
7	550	2	“But on a more positive vein, Hindu kings in medieval India arranged large-scale public debates.”	The statement is misleading and implies that Hindu kings in ancient India did not arrange large-scale public debates. One just needs to look at the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad to read about the debates in Janaka’s palace and so on. Doniger has herself referred to these debates in the chapter on the Upanishads.
8	551	1	“Mughal policies that encouraged trade and pilgrimage (in part because several of the Mughals collected taxes on pilgrims) benefited the sacred Vaishnava sites of Ayodhya and Vrindavan.”	<p>Doniger’s suggestion that the pilgrimage taxes levied on Hindus somehow promoted the sacred sites of Ayodhya and Vrindavan ignores the simple fact that the money collected by Moghuls were not used to develop these sites. If anything, there appears to be an inverse relation between the levy of pilgrimage taxes and the growth (or decline) of Vaishnava pilgrimage centers.</p> <p>Akbar abolished the pilgrimage tax in 1563 and it is after this year that Vrindavan temples started getting constructed! No new temples were constructed during the reign of Shah Jehan who</p>

⁵ For details see Muzaffar Alam, “The Pursuit of Persian; Language in Mughal Politics”, *Modern Asian Studies* 32, 2, 1998

				<p>revived this tax. In fact, crippled by these taxes, a delegation of Hindus led by Kavindracharya Saraswati petitioned Shah Jehan successfully, who rescinded this tax under the influence of his favorite pro-Hindu Prince Dara Shikoh. The news of the abolition of this tax caused a great rejoicing amongst Hindus and a festschrift ('Kavindrachandrodaya' – the work still exists today) for Kavindracharya was compiled by all the leading teachers and Saints of the Hindus of the day. This was quite ironical if pilgrimage taxes had benefited Ayodhya and Vrindavan!</p> <p>But before long, Shah Jehan's son Aurangzeb revived the pilgrimage tax and also started destroying Hindu temples in his long reign from 1658-1707. Aurangzeb issued orders to destroy the temples at Ayodhya⁶ (including the famous Treta ke Thakur and Swargadwara temples). In Mathura, the twin city of Vrindavan, he destroyed the Krishna Janmasthan temple, forcing the Hindus to stealthily remove the sacred Icons of Lord Krishna of other prominent temples in Mathura and establish them safely in the Hindu kingdom of Mewar and Jaipur. He destroyed numerous other temples in the Mathura-Vrindavan area including those constructed just a few generations earlier. Mathura was renamed as 'Islamabad'. The icons of practically all the major temples in Vrindavan established by the influence of Rupa Goswamin and his contemporaries were transferred to safe Rajput Hindu territories in Rajasthan due to actual or anticipated attacks on these temples at the orders of Aurangzeb.</p> <p>And yet, the devotion of Hindus towards their holy sites did not cease, despite their desecration and destruction by the Mughals (and not due to their encouragement!). A European traveler notes that even after Aurangzeb destroyed the temples at Ayodhya and Hardwar, Hindus continued to visit them in multitudes and offered alms at these sites.⁷ Sometime after 1700 (or in 1705), Aurangzeb</p>
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⁶ Sri Ram Sharma (1962), The Religious Policy of Mughal Emperors, Asia Publishing House (Bombay), p. 138

⁷ Ibid.

				<p>appointed hatchet men to dig up the foundations and destroy the stone temples in Maharashtra, including the famous shrine of Pandharpur. Aurangzeb also tried to destroy the icon of the famous Jagannath temple in Puri at least twice but without success because the local Hindus paid heavy bribes to the local government official. Nevertheless, the doors of the temple remain closed till his death in 1707.⁸</p> <p>Not surprisingly therefore, a historian remarks that due to the flight of Vaishnavas from Vrindavan with their icons during the reign of Aurangzeb, <i>“Mewar thus became the center of Vaishnavism in India....Thanks to Aurangzeb’s religious zeal, Udaipur State became a new Brindaban to the devotees of the Bhakti cult.”</i>⁹</p> <p>In short, Doniger’s blanket statements are historically untenable. A more accurate way to summarize the situation would be this – “Vrindavan and Mathura lay desolate during the reign of Babar and Humayun. During the reign of Akbar, the followers of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were inspired to rediscover and revive the sacred geography of Vrindavan. They were assisted by Man Singh, the devotedly Hindu nephew of his wife Hira Kunwar (popularly known today as Jodhabai) and a land grant from Akbar to construct the temple. Akbar also abolished pilgrimage taxes. Patronage was continued during the reign of Jehangir but Shah Jehan reinstated the pilgrimage taxes, only to abolish them later. Numerous temples in Varanasi, Allahabad, Kashmir and Gujarat etc., were destroyed during Shah Jehan’s reign. This was followed by a long 49 year reign of Aurangzeb who desecrated and destroyed numerous temples all over India, including in Vrindavan and Ayodhya. This lead to a flight of Vaishnava scholars from Vrindavan to Rajasthan, who fled with the sacred icons of the</p>
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⁸ Hermann Kulke, *Jagannatha under Muslim Rule in Kings and Cults, State formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia*, (Manohar, New Delhi), 1993, p.46

⁹ Sharma (1962), p. 134

				surviving temples of the region.”
9	551	1	“Devotional Vaishnavism flourished under the Mughals in the sixteenth century in ways that are foundational for subsequent Hinduism.”	<p>A basic and fundamental rule of statistics is that a positive correlation does not imply cause and effect relationship.</p> <p>How would Doniger explain the fact that Sikhism flourished under the Mughal rule even though several Mughal Emperors tried to persecute the Sikh Gurus (Babur, Jehangir, Aurangzeb, Farrukh-Siyar etc.)? Or how would she explain why Shavism and Shakta Hinduism did not flourish under the Mughals? Is it because the Mughal persecuted Shaiva and Shakta Hindus, or is it because the growth of devotional traditions of Vaishnava Hindus had nothing much to do with the attitude of Moghuls towards them?</p> <p>Therefore, to suggest that Vaishnavism flourished under 16th century Moghuls is misleading because it suggests some sort of a cause and effect relationship between Moghul patronage and the growth of Vaishnavism.</p> <p><i>As a counter to Doniger’s claim, it can be pointed out that none of these dozens of Vaishnava Saints of medieval India lived in the same space or time as the Moghuls (or were arguably outside of Moghul influence) –Mirabai, Namadeva, Jayadeva, Purandaradasa, Chaitanya, Bhadrachala Ramadas, Kanakadasa, Jnaneshwar, Narsi Mehta, Annamacharya, Jana Bai, Shankar Dev, Poontanam, Narayana Bhattadiri, Samartha Ramadas, Vallabhacharya, Prativadi Bhayankara, Eknath, Chandidas etc etc. If all these Saints could have flourished outside of Mughal rule, then it is incorrect to attribute the growth of Vaishnavism during the Mughal rule to the Mughals.</i></p> <p>Tulsidas was patronized by not Akbar, but by his devotedly Hindu noble Raja Man Singh. In his Dohavali, Tulsidas laments that in the Kaliyuga, the ‘Yavans’ (a category that would have included Akbar) have become the rulers of this earth. Surdas supposedly met Akbar but the Emperor is not conclusively known to have</p>

				<p>patronized the saint.¹⁰ Some Hindu nobles and a few others patronized the Vrindavan Goswamis.</p> <p>But, after the relatively peaceful interlude (for Hindus) of 100 years covering the reigns of Akbar, Jehangir and (portions of) Shah Jehan, it was back to square one for Hindus – destruction of temples, Jaziya (poll-tax on infidels), discrimination for administrative posts, forcible conversions etc. And even these three Emperors periodically oppressed the Hindus for religious reasons.</p>
10	552	1	<p>“Though the Mughals picked up some aspects of caste, by and large they ignored it....”</p>	<p>Caste was apparently replaced in the Moghul rule by racism and religious discrimination!</p> <p>Doniger should have also pointed out that a majority of nobility in the reign of the Great Moghuls comprised of non-Indian, imported Muslims from Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Arabia. Indeed, it was only for a brief period of seven years under the Sayyid brothers in the 18th century, that Indian Muslims were able to break the monopoly of Foreign Muslims in the top echelons of power.</p> <p>And even amongst Indians, the Moghuls pretty much edged out Hindus. After recalling Man Singh from the governorship of Bengal, Jahangir did not appoint any Rajput as subedar. Shah Jahan appointed only two Rajputs as governors from a total of 152 such appointments made by him. A study of 172 appointments to the post of faujdars made by Shah Jahan reveals that the Rajput share was a paltry 4. Similarly, only 14 of 86 appointees to the</p>

¹⁰ It is perhaps not out of place to mention that Saint Vallabhacharya, the Guru of Surdas, was born prematurely when his mother (in a state of advanced pregnancy) was rushing out of Varanasi to flee an attack to the holy city of Hindus by Muslims, and was mistakenly abandoned as a still-born infant. A miracle from Lord Krishna is said to have saved the infant’s life, telling the parents in a dream that He had Himself animated the infant’s body that they should go back to the site where they had left the infant. The parents were overjoyed to discover that the child that they had lovingly abandoned as dead was alive.

				post of qiladars examined by scholars, were Rajputs. The position of Rajputs declined further under Aurangzeb. In 1671 Jaswant Singh was appointed to the low post of thanedar of Jamrud, while Ram Singh of Amber was dispatched to the east. Both were made to languish in these outposts for considerable periods. Aurangzeb also began to clamp down on promotions of Rajputs early in his reign. ¹¹
11	552	2	“Tulsidas, who composed his poem at a pilgrimage center that had been attacked by Muslims, said that even the Muslims would be saved by Rama’s name (rather reminiscent of earlier claims that this or that pilgrimage spot would save even Pariahs).”	<p><i>Comment:</i> A more apt comparison is the following verse of Bhagavata Purana which is line with the Hindu belief that the grace of Lord Vishnu can deliver even the greatest sinner on this earth –</p> <p><i>“Hunas, Kiratas, Pulindas, Andhras, Aabhiras, Kanka, Yavanas, Khasas and other despised and sinful tribes become purified by merely seeking refuge with His devotees – to that Lord Vishnu I offer my respects.” Bhagavata Purana 2.4.18</i></p> <p>The addition of Turushkas and other Mlecchas to this list was just a natural extension.</p>
12	552	2	“The Brahmins of Varanasi, where this text [Ramcharitmanas] was composed....”	<p>The claim that the Ramacharitmanas was composed in Varanasi is contradicted by traditional Hindu as well as by modern scholarship (including the very Indological works cited by Doniger!).</p> <p>According to Hindu tradition, Tulsidas initially started composing his work in Sanskrit verse in Varanasi, but the previous day’s compositions would disappear every night. Lord Shiva then recommended to the Saint that he should instead go to Ayodhya and compose the work there in the ‘people’s language’. Therefore, Tulsidas went to live in Ayodhya and composed the work there in</p>

¹¹ See Firdos Anwar, *Nobility under the Mughals (1628-1658)* Manohar (New Delhi), 2001; and Afzal Husain, *The Nobility under Akbar and Jahangir. A study of Family Groups*, Manohar (New Delhi), 1999

				<p>2 years, 7 months and 26 days. Thereafter, he moved back to Varanasi.¹²</p> <p>Even Lutgendorf, whose work¹³ is relied upon by Doniger, cites¹⁴ the following verse of the Ramcaritmanas to support the tradition–</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>“On Tuesday, the ninth of the gentle month in the city of Avadh, these acts are revealed. Ramcaritmanas I.34.5”</i></p> <p>Lutgendorf then speculates that as the Ramcaritmanas is a long work, Tulsidas must have taken several years to complete it and the invocation to Varanasi at the beginning of the 4th book is taken to mean that Tulsidas had shifted his residence to Varanasi by then. He does not refer to Hindu tradition in this regard. [It may be noted that more than 2/3 of the Ramacharitmanas is contained in its first 3 of the 7 books].</p>
13	552	3	“Some Brahmins also objected to Tulsidas’ challenges to caste.”	Unfounded statement.
14	552-553	3,22-3	““Although by and large Tulsidas toes the Brahmin party line and upholds caste, there are also moments of compassion for Pariahs and tribals, such as this story about a Pariah, told, significantly, through the masking device of an animal [crow]..... This story [from Ramcharitmanas 7.53] stands in marked contrast with Rama’s treatment of a crow in Valmiki’s Ramayana in which he	A false comparison and a false analysis and conclusion. The context here is that Doniger is trying to contrast Tulsidas’ empathy for low-caste Hindus with Valmiki’s supposed antipathy for them in order to push her thesis that under the Moghul rule “...some Hindus followed up their [Mughals’] lead and loosened up [in matters of caste].” (p. 552). In doing so, she has also grossly exaggerated the connection between saintly Tulsidas and the Moghul courts – “Tulsidas....one of the main architects of North

¹² This version is prefixed to numerous editions of the Ramacharitmanas, including those by the Geeta Press (Gorakhpur).

¹³ Philip Lutgendorf (1991), *The Life of a Text – Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas*, University of California Press

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 8

			regards the crow as an enemy and blinds him.”	<p><i>Indian Vaishnavism, was close to several movers and shakers of the Mughal court, including Man Singh.”</i> (p. 552) to perhaps suggest an influence of the Mughals on Tulsidas.</p> <p>The Saint however never sought the company and patronage of Emperors (and never got it). In fact, Tulsidas characterizes the Moghul rule as the reign of ‘Yavans’ in Kaliyuga in his Dohavali. To attribute Tulsidas’ rejection or downplaying of caste to Mughal influence is quite disingenuous and ignores the role of pre-Moghul Hindu social reformers like Ramanujacharya (11-12th century) and Ramananda (14th cent.).</p> <p>Doniger states that the crow is a representative of the untouchables, and Tulsī’s version of the story shows his compassion for these Hindus. When we examine the two stories however, it is clear that the two crows (one in Tulsī’s work and the other in Valmiki’s work) have nothing in common and are unrelated, despite Doniger’s failed attempts at Freudian free association. The crow referred to in Ramcharitmanas 7.53 is Kak Bhushundi, who is credited with the authorship of another Sanskrit version of the Ramayana (the Bhushundi Ramayana). The crow in Valmiki’s Ramayana was Jayanta, the son of Indra, who was blinded by Rama because the crow pecked at and injured Sita. It is simply incredible to see casteism in these stories the way Doniger does.</p>
15	553	3	Doniger then tries to portray Tulsidas as less misogynist than Valmiki by contrasting their treatment of Sita’s fire-ordeal episode – “[In Ramacharitmanas 3.23-24; 6.107-108] Sita enters the fire at the ordeal and	<p>It would be relevant to bring in the concept of illusion if Tulsidas is accepted as a follower of Advaita Vedanta (or of similar schools) which he is not.</p> <p>In fact, rather than bringing the concept of illusion in this context, Doniger could have fallen back on her favorite divine mare</p>

			<p>“both the shadow and form and the stigma of public shame” are consumed in the blazing fire. Thus the Vedantic concept of illusion allows Tulsidas to argue that Rama never intended or needed to test Sita (since he knew she wasn’t in Ravana’s house at all but goaded the shadow Sita into undertaking the fire ordeal merely in order to get her into the fire so that he could bring the real Sita back from the fire.”</p>	<p>Saranyu who created her shadow Chhaya to live with her husband Surya!</p> <p>A better explanation for this innovation in the retellings of this episode is that it strengthens the doctrine that the Divine couple Rama and Sita are perfect, omnipotent and omniscient. In both the verses, the Ramcaritmanas uses the word ‘<i>pratibimba</i>’ (reflection or likeness) and not ‘<i>Maya</i>’ (illusion).</p>
16	566	2	<p>“The authors of the regional equine epics were either ignorant of the Puranic bias against mares (which is unlikely) or chose to ignore it in favor of an imported Arabic pre-mare tradition, a narrative pattern of considerable detail repeated in many different stories.”</p>	<p><i>Comment:</i> It appears more likely that the supposed Puranic bias against mares is merely a figment of the author’s imagination.</p>
17	566-568	-	<p>Doniger devotes 2 pages to a discussion on the elite Muslim women in Mughal harems, and Muslim women in other dynasties.</p>	<p><i>Comment:</i> What does this digression have to do with the history of Hindus? This is just one of the dozens of useless digressions in the book that unnecessarily and greatly increase its bulk.</p>
18	571 sqq	-	<p>Section title: “Kshetravya’s Courtesans in Andhra”</p>	<p>Comments: Doniger herself states that he lived under the Nayaka rulers. Therefore, his inclusion in a chapter titled ‘Hinduism Under the Mughals’ is rather problematic. The section abounds in cute phrases (which do not mean much in essence), often taken from the writings of her close professional colleagues (David Shulman, Narayana Rao, A K Ramanujan). The one main reason this section was included (whereas dozens of other Saints were excluded) seems to be that it gives Doniger just another opportunity to talk about her favorite topics – rape, sex, adultery.</p> <p>Her commentary on the one composition of his that she quotes is quite bizarre. In this hymn, the devotee (in the voice of a</p>

				<p>courtesan) has a violent sexual encounter with the lover (God). Doniger then claims that “<i>god has raped the worshipper,</i>” (p. 572) and then proceeds on another bout of Freudian free association. Doniger of course likes to use the word ‘rape’ wherever she can, because her book is all about sex, rape, sleaze, booze, drugs through her muses of ‘women, horses, dogs, low castes.’ What she conveniently forgets is that Kshetravyya’s poems abound in such erotic imagery of passionate love of the courtesan and her lover. To suggest that the verse indicates the ‘rape’ of the worshipper by god is to overlook his poetry as a whole which abounds in metaphors, some of which could even be interpreted by Doniger as an instance of “devotee raping god”.</p>
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Appendix 1

Amitav Ghosh's views are found outline (at <http://www.littlemag.com/2000/amitav2.htm>) in the leftist magazine "The Little Magazine" and we quote them below in order to critique them –

"In any event, it is beyond dispute that Babur's descendants presided over a virtually unprecedented efflorescence in Hindu religious activity. Hinduism as we know it today - especially the Hinduism of north India - was essentially shaped under Mogul rule, often with the active participation and support of the rulers and their officials and feudatories. The Ramcharitmanas, for example, the version of the Ramayana that was to be canonised as the central text of north Indian devotional practice, was composed in Akbar's reign by the great saint-poet Tulsidas. The early years of Mogul rule also coincided with a great renaissance in the theology of Krishna. It was in this period that Rupa Goswami and other disciples of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu rediscovered and mapped out the sacred geography of the Krishna legend.

Brajbhumi - the region that is most sacred to Krishna bhakti - lies between Agra and Delhi, the two principal centres of Mogul power in the 16th century. The road connecting these two imperial cities runs right past the sacred sites of Braj. It is self-evident that if the Moguls had wished to persecute Vaishnavites they could easily have done so. But far from suppressing the burgeoning activity in this area, Akbar and his nobles actively supported it. The Hindu generals and officials of his court built several of the most important temples in this area, with Akbar's encouragement. Akbar was personally responsible for sustaining some of these temples: he granted land and revenue in perpetuity to no less than 35 of them.

Hinduism would scarcely be recognisable today if Vaishnavism had been actively suppressed in the 16th century: other devotional forms may have taken its place, but we cannot know what those would have been. It is a simple fact that contemporary Hinduism as a living practice would not be what it is if it were not for the devotional practices initiated under Mogul rule. The sad irony of the assault on the Babri mosque is that the Hindu fanatics who attacked it destroyed a symbol of the very accommodations that made their own beliefs possible."

These views are problematic from several perspectives. Tulsidas was patronized not by Emperor Akbar (the saint does not even mention him, and instead refers to the rule of 'yavan' or barbarians in India in his Dohavali) but the devotedly religious Hindu noble Man Singh who worked for Akbar.

The same Man Singh, a trusted commander of Akbar, and a nephew of his wife now commonly known as Jodhabai, was responsible for patronizing the Goswamis of the spiritual lineage of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. It is somewhat misleading to say that Rupa Goswami and other disciples of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu mapped out and rediscovered the sacred geography during the Moghul rule. First, this enterprise was the inspiration of Chaitanya, and the Moghuls had nothing to do with it. And chronologically speaking, Rupa Goswami lived in Vrindavan before Akbar's patronage started, and he died before the grants of Akbar. The only Goswami out of the six who survived by the time the temples of Vrindavan were constructed was Jiva Goswami. Ghosh makes much of imperial grants to Vaishnava temples during the reign of Akbar, ignoring that these very temples were then demolished in dozens during the reigns of his successors like Aurangzeb barely in less than a 100 years after their construction. The temples of Vrindavan built by the inspiration of Rupa Goswamin and other disciples of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were attacked and destroyed (partially or fully) by Aurangzeb and their sacred Icons were taken to Jaipur, Karoli and other safe sites in Rajasthan under Hindu Rajput control (see <http://www.mydivineplanet.com/city.asp?city=Vrindavana>).

The reasons why Rupa Goswamin etc went to Vrindavan were different from what Ghosh implies, who conceals the fact that they were fleeing Islamic religious persecution elsewhere. When Husain Shah, the ruler of Bengal, asked Sanatana to accompany him on the Orissa expedition, the latter refused saying "you are going to desecrate Hindu temples and break images of Hindu gods; I cannot accompany you". The furious king thereupon imprisoned Sanatana who however managed to escape by bribing the prison

guards. Both brothers (Sanatana and Rupa Goswami) thereafter renounced the world and went to Vrindaban, where they wrote treatises on Gaudiya Vaishnavism. [See R. C. Majumdar, *History of Mediaeval Bengal*, G. Bharadwaj and Co. 1973]. It was not the lure of Akbar's grants but the inspiration of their Guru Chaitanya Mahaprabhu to reclaim Vrindavan from continued desolation, and religious persecution back home in Bengal that motivated them to make Brindavan their home.

Jehangir, the son of Akbar, destroyed the Varaha Vaishnava temple in Rajasthan, even while largely continuing the more tolerant policies of his father. But his son Shah Jehan revived the crippling pilgrimage tax on Hindu pilgrims visiting Vrindavan, Mathura, Ayodhya and other holy Vaishnava centers (and destroyed more than 80 temples in Varanasi) but rescinded it later. However, Aurangzeb reinstated this tax with a vengeance and ordered large scale destruction of temples in Mathura, Vrindavan, Ayodhya (and even in southern India). The hard fact is that hardly any temples preceding the 17th century survive today in the Hindu centers in Gangetic plains. The revival of Mathura and Varanasi as religious places of Hindus perhaps owes more to the Marathas than to the Moghuls preceding them. To cite exceptional instances where Aurangzeb's Hindu nobles patronized a few Hindu temples and make much of them is like exonerating Hitler because he was a vegetarian and could not see animals suffer pain. In short, the flowering of some aspects of Vaishnavism during the rule of Mughals was not due to their patronage, but largely in spite of them and despite their periodic persecutions. The number of Hindu temples destroyed from 1500-1700 and replaced by mosques number in hundreds [See the online resource <http://www.voiceofdharma.org/books/htemples1/ch10.htm#4a>].

The cause and effect relationship between Mughal rule and efflorescence of Hindu Vaishnavism that Amitav Ghosh suggests simply does not exist to any significant degree. Not only did dozens of Vaishnava saints thrive outside the regions and periods of the Mughal influence, it is an insult to the intelligence and vitality of Hindus to suggest that Moghul emperors were an impetus to the development of some lasting Hindu traditions that continue to this day.

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Rev A: 06 Feb 2010.