

Translation Rights

I have read "Five Holy Virgins, Five Sacred Myths - a Quest for Meaning" by Pradip Bhattacharya with much interest. We at Penn Wimochana Gnanodayam wish to translate/adapt it into Tamil and publish it in three instalments in our very humble magazine *Malai Mangai*. Our membership is 99.99 per cent women tea pickers who are Tamil speaking and 95 percent Hindu in religion.

We would appreciate obtaining the translation rights into Tamil.

Annathaie Abayasekera, Srilanka

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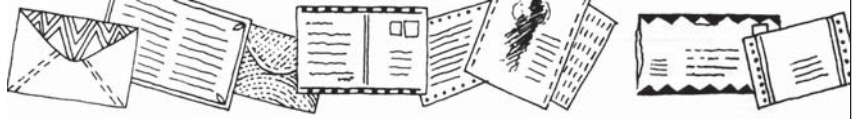
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Editor

Kunti's Last Years

This is in response to the article "One-in-Herself: Why Kunti Remains a *Kanya*" by Pradip Bhattacharya. On page 31 the article says that Kunti went along with Dhrutharashtra and Gandhari to the forest to spend their last years (*vanaprastha*). I was told that in the *Srimad Bhagavatham* Vidura accompanied Duryodhana's parents, not Kunti Devi. She collapsed and died when Arjuna announced in the royal assembly to Dharmaraja that Lord Krishna was no more.

T. G. Krishnamurthy, Chennai



Readers' Responses

The Author's Response

The Mahabharata is quite clear that Kunti accompanied the blind royal couple, and that so did Vidura. The epic antedates the Bhagavata by centuries, the Purana being a Vaisnavite bhakti composition while the epic celebrates Shiva repeatedly. It is only later interpolations that bring in the divinity of Krishna.

Pradip Bhattacharya, Kolkata



Adorable Daughters

The three-part article by Pradip Bhattacharya on the five virgins of *Mahabharata* is very informative and helps the reader to understand the complexities of these characters to a great extent.

I shall like to add a word to the interpretation of Prof. P. Lall,

mentioned by your correspondent Susmita Bhattacharya. These five virgins are known as *Pancha Kanyas* because they are adorable and acceptable in the families as daughters and not despised inspite of molestations by the *devatas* and debauches.

I would also like to point out the following printing mistakes (:) in an otherwise excellent article. The word "painting" has been printed twice below the Kangra painting (Page 25, Issue 143). Then in the End Notes, there is a reference to a book by Dr. Nrishinghe Prasad Bhaduri. The name of the book I think is *Krishnaa Kunti Kaunteya*, and not as printed. Please verify.

Sarbakinkar Banerjee, Kolkata

The Author's Response

Banerjee is correct. The book by Dr N.P. Bhaduri is Krishnaa, Kunti O Kaunteya. However, I cannot agree with his equating "kanya" with "daughters", as that is not borne out by their lives. You do not find any of the five being treasured by their parents, most being "not of woman born" (Ahalya, Tara, Mandodari, Draupadi) and in Kunti's case being given away in infancy, for which she harbours a lifelong resentment.. The theme of being rejected is very strong and the feature being celebrated is the

independent resoluteness they display in the face of such rejection to make their mark in society.

Pradip Bhattacharya

We sincerely regret the few inadvertent errors that crept in Pradip Bhattacharya's article.

Editor

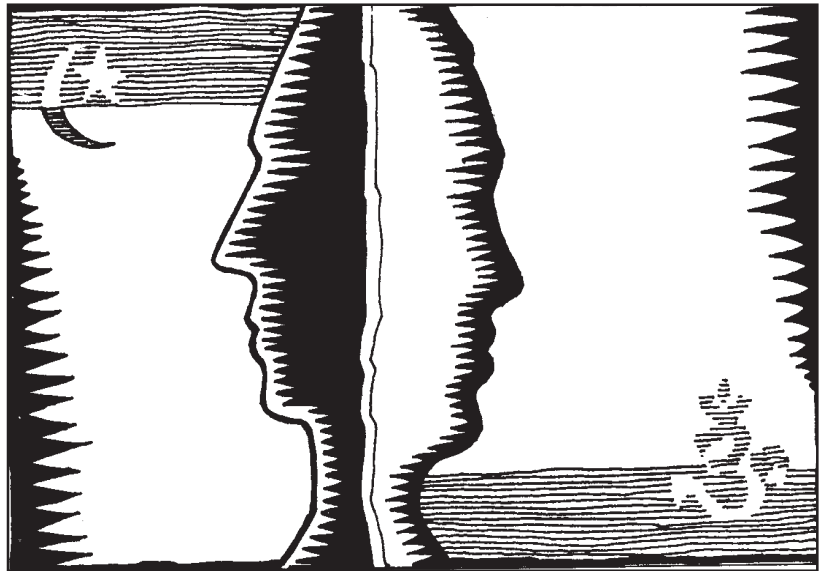
Why the Divides?

This is in response to Dr. Bajaj's defence of his book *Religious Demography*. While I have not read Dr Bajaj's book, I am always glad to read the writings of all those like Bajaj who have been influenced by Shri Dharampal. He has been an important mentor for these two authors as well as other members of what was called the Patriotic People's Science and Technology Group. I also enjoyed the brilliant ideas of Ashok Jhunjhunwala of PPST, which you had published some years ago. As a community health graduate, I also study demography. But I feel numbers give way to living human beings when we work among people.

The following sentence in Dr Bajaj's rejoinder makes me sad."...we do believe that there is a sense in which Hindus and adherents of other religions of Indian origin belong to a group, and to which adherents of religions of non-Indian origin do not belong."

Why draw a line and say that "This" is white and "That" is black, This one is 'Hindu', that one is 'Muslim'? Surely there are many shades of grey in between. Many may feel that Ram and Rahim are one. Or that Mariamma can be seen as Draupadi. Others may not agree.

In America Vivekananda spoke about his reading of the famous line from the Bible: "I am the way and the truth and the life". To him



Rustam Vania

it meant the same as *sarva dharma sambhava*. Again, Rahul Sankritayan in Bihar saw his interest in Markus Baba (Marx) as a logical consequence of his interest in Pali scriptures.

Prabir, Godda, Jharkhand

Non-Partisan Approach

This is just a short note to say how much I liked Madhu Kishwar's articles in Issue Nos.140 and 141 on the achievements of the NDA government and why the NDA lost the 2004 election. This is a rare example of objective analysis. I very much like the way you refuse to be on any "side".

Renana Jhabwala, Ahmedabad

Demographic Fears

Shri Bajaj's response to my review of his co-authored *Religious Demography* misses the main point I was trying to make. There is no text without a context. To pretend that *Religious Demography*, by carrying a foreword by Shri L. K. Advani at the time he was Deputy Prime Minister, intended no ideological implications, is disingenuous to say the least. It is

precisely this ideological context of interpretation that I have been challenging that has gone unaddressed.

Thus to define Indian-Religionists as indigenous, and including Parsis and Jews in this classification, then waiting till a brief chapter in the later half to disaggregate this data is hardly being very 'exact'! Of course Muslims and Christians have not been defined as non-Indian Religionists, but if they are classified as the 'other' in relation to the Indian-Religionists the implication is clear. We are left wondering if this is intentional or just being 'inexact' again.

Using the term "India" for all of British India is certainly not consonant with present usage. The Indian subcontinent is still a contiguous geographical entity but not a unified political one. There is a certain slippage that easily goes unnoticed by readers in the way the co-authors define their "India" and later use the term without the inverted commas. Would the other nations of the subcontinent accept their inclusion in the term, with or

without the inverted commas, even as they have now begun to concede the term as referring to the Indian Union?

To project demographic data into the future is a dangerous and misleading exercise. Such population bomb scares have been notoriously used to play on people's unfounded fears for obvious political reasons. Curiously, it is majorities that have done this more often though they are less in danger of demographic ethnicide than minorities. The apparently 'objective' projections that the co-authors have made about the Hindus being in danger of becoming a minority have not found much support from other serious demographers. Who then is being alarmist?

Indeed, if Bajaj claims to have taken note of the other critical reviewers, Partha Chatterjee, Ashish Bose, Jayraj and Subramiam, then it is certainly not apparent in this response. In fact the last mentioned reviewers were very dismissive of the supposed 'exactness' of the presentation of the statistical data and they show how other presentations could well give very different results from the ones the authors have claimed. Hence they feel the authors are guilty of "Abusing Demography".

Bajaj welcomes a disaggregation of the data for a more fine-tuned analysis. The point of my review was that presentations and interpretations made without such a disaggregation do not take adequate cognisance of the context and so are already distortions. A proper disaggregation of the Census data must give due weightage to the diversity and

pluralism in Indian society, even that of the Hindu communities.

Bajaj finds that Indian-Religionists represent a significant aspect of Indian reality though he grants that this is not an exhaustive one, yet there is little acknowledgement of the complex internal differentiation that obtains in all these various communities, religious and otherwise. Moreover, to privilege the religion of a community as a defining identity marker in this manner is precisely what leads to religious communalism that easily spills over into all kinds of extremism, as when "religion in danger" becomes a political battle cry. When will we privilege our common identity as citizens of the Republic of India above our other multiple identities?

More recently there has been a controversy over the latest census data that illustrates the ideological convolutions that enter into these controversies. The Muslim growth rate was notoriously distorted by a report made by the Census Commissioner in what was hardly a responsible presentation. Yet it was seized on by certain quarters and politicised. Even after the corrections were made, the controversy still lingers to confirm old prejudices. Meanwhile the dreadfully alarmist issue of

horrendously distorted sex ratios and their implications are not addressed.

Contemporary demographic analysis points to one emphatic conclusion which in the current controversy is being missed. The most pertinent variables associated most positively and robustly with declining population growth rates concern the status of women. And the logic is ever so simple: in a society, especially a patriarchal one, it is the women who carry the burden of bearing and rearing children, whereas it is the men who make the decision to have them or not. This disjunction in gender roles cannot but result in high population growth rates, which become immune to factors that do not impact such patriarchy. But then women's status is hardly the concern of religious demographers, even though this may be the most crucial demographic issue for us today.

In sum, as the Kerala model has amply confirmed, there are civilised and fair policy options in dealing with demographic problems which, rather than playing on people's fears, can disabuse them of their anxieties. But then demography must first be a humanist discipline, not an ideology that distorts supposedly objective analyses! □

Rudolf C. Heredia, Mumbai

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