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Devdutt Pattanaik

Deconstructing Devduttology

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Introduction

Devdutt Pattanaik is a prolific writer who has produced a vast amount of literature on various religious and social issues, especially pertaining to India and Hinduism. In his own words, he writes on the “relevance of mythology in modern times, especially in areas of management, governance and leadership.”¹ He has authored over fifty books, many of which are bestsellers, and has written over a thousand columns for various websites like *Mid-Day*, *The Times of India*, *DailyO*, *Scroll* amongst others. He was a speaker at the first TED² conference in India held in November 2009 and his talk is available in thirty-one languages; and has been viewed over 2.3 million times.³ Pattanaik has consulted for Star TV Network on popular Hindi serials like *Mahabharata*, *Devon Ke Dev...Mahadev* and *Siya Ke Ram*, helping provide “a different take” on the stories.⁴ *Devlok with Devdutt Pattanaik* is a very popular series on Indian mythology which airs on EPIC channel and Netflix.

Pattanaik is considered a modern-day authority on Hinduism and his followers accept his views as being grounded in authentic Indian tradition. His book *Indian Culture, Art and Heritage*, published by Pearson, is recommended as reading material for Civil Service aspirants in India.⁵ Pattanaik has received effusive praise for his work on Indian mythology from prominent personalities across disciplines such as humanities, films, and science, including writer Ashwin Sanghi, Hindi film actress Sonam Kapoor as well as psychologist Urmi Chanda-Vaz.

Through his TV programs, Pattanaik tries to attract young people and is confident that his work will be able to “procure eyeballs of younger audience as they’ll relate to it big time.”⁶ Pattanaik is very active on Twitter, with more than 7.4 lakh followers, and his Tweets are well-received and often shared.⁷ As is evident, Pattanaik is a very influential figure today in both mainstream and social media and is considered an expert in the interpretation of Indian tradition through the lens of mythology. His works impact the views of millions of Hindus both in India and abroad, while shaping global discourse about India, Hinduism and dharma. At the same time, his work has been criticized by Misra (2017) and Malhotra (2018), as well as practitioners of Hinduism for numerous factual errors, for distorting important philosophical ideas and for portraying Hinduism in a poor light.⁸ He has also been criticized for his derogatory and insulting remarks towards his detractors, including women, using abusive terms like ‘idiots’ and ‘bitches’; he accuses them of being Hindutva trolls, and has publicly shamed a woman by insisting that she is into ‘slapping’, ‘insulting’ and ‘BDSM’.⁹ Bhattacharjee (2019) finds it difficult to reconcile his rabid misogynist comments with his feminist credentials (albeit self-proclaimed), especially as an author who has penned books like *Devi* and *Laksmi*.¹⁰

In this essay, I explore some of the important ideas and themes that percolate his myriad works and examine his positions on various issues related to Hinduism and India. I have analyzed his scholarship from two perspectives. In the first level of examination, I illustrate how some of his claims on Indian traditions, in general, and Hinduism in particular, as well as Indian history, are problematic and at times, downright incorrect. Given that Pattanaik is viewed as an insider authority on Hinduism and his views end up providing millions of Hindus a false and pessimistic understanding about Hindu dharma and India’s past, I have countered his questionable claims by citing evidence from traditional sources themselves. At a structural level, I have analyzed his positions together, in order to create a complete picture of his world view, and shown how Pattanaik uses a combination of Postmodernism, mythology and colonial categories in his scholarship. While I have no problems with Postmodernism as a Western social construct being applied to Western

societies, I find a postmodern interpretation of Hinduism to be misleading and problematic on many fronts as I will show later. It is not only fundamentally opposed to how insiders view their own traditions, but also undermines the very ethos of unity and congruence that percolates through various Indic communities, howsoever distinct they may outwardly appear to be. Thus, rather than bringing together what appear to be disparate streams of thoughts, which is the essence of Hinduism; his scholarship, as I will demonstrate, accentuates differences, creates sharp binaries and promotes divisiveness in the guise of providing contemporary interpretations of Hindu ideas.

Dharma

Dharma has been an integral part of Indian spiritual systems from time immemorial and the idea of dharma, as that universal ideal which sustains or upholds civilization has been in vogue in India since ancient times.

“Dharma sustains the society, Dharma maintains the social order, Dharma ensures the well-being and progress of humanity.” –
*Mahabharata Karna Parva 69.58*¹¹

Hinduism is therefore, *sanatana dharma*, or the primordial dharma of more than a billion people worldwide. In Hinduism, dharma has a range of well-accepted contextual meanings like righteousness, piety, practices, customary observance like *yajnas*, prescribed conduct, duty, or the nature of things.¹² Some of the common characteristics of dharma in the human context are truthfulness, to be free from anger, sharing wealth with others, forgiveness, purity, absence of enmity, straightforwardness, patience, piety or self-control, honesty, sanctity, sense-control, reason, knowledge or learning, non-violence, and compassion.¹³ It would not be wrong to say that dharma has been the fountainhead and guiding principle of Indian civilization for millennia, and has informed people of their social and ethical duties, and roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis nature and other creatures, in order to ensure a sustainable civilization.

“Dharma is that which sustains and ensures progress and welfare of all

in this world and eternal Bliss in the other world.”—Madhavacharya¹⁴

It has been dharma that has bound together disparate streams of thoughts, myriad *sampradayas* and diverse people together in Bharata. In the last couple of centuries, and especially the last few decades, dharma has unfortunately been incorrectly translated as religion, an error which has been time and again pointed out by many scholars like Malhotra (2011) and Paranjape (2021).¹⁵ In fact, the Hindi translation of the Preamble to the Constitution rejects the equivalence of dharma and religion and translates secularism as *pantha-nirapekshata* or religiously-neutral and not as dharmically-neutral.¹⁶ Pattanaik (2015), however, does not accept the standard range of traditional meanings of the term dharma; nor does he view dharma as religion.

He instead provides a radically different purport and import to the term, ostensibly to simplify the idea behind the word. He says:

“Dharma has been made out to be a complicated word. That way you can call anything dharma... Dharma is potential. The best of what anything or anyone can do.”¹⁷

Let us consider his first statement. Contrary to his assertion, dharma is indeed a complicated concept, and traditional scholars have studied it with utmost seriousness. It is a technical philosophical term with reasonably well-defined and contextual range of connotations and denotations. Even the *Mahabharata* prefers to leave it as *that* ideal or principle, without venturing into specifics:

“It is most difficult to define Dharma. It has been explained to be that which helps the upliftment of living beings. Therefore, that which ensures the welfare of living beings is surely Dharma. The learned rishis have declared that which sustains is Dharma.” – *Mahabharata Shanti Parva* 109.9-10¹⁸

Again, unlike his second claim, people do not call everything dharma, since the scope and sources of dharma has been well-delineated in the tradition.

“Puranas including the Brahma purana and others, Nyaya including Tarkashastra, Mimamsa which involves discussion about the content of Vedas, Dharmashastras including the Manu and other Smritis, Angas including the Shad Vedangas, and Vedas (four of them)—these are the fourteen vidyasthanas and dharma-sthanas.” – *Yajnavalkya Smriti* 1.3¹⁹

In other words, the roots of dharma are the *Vedas*.

“Veda is the source of dharma and the tradition and practice of those that know it (the Veda).” – *Gautama Dharmasutra* 1.1.1-2²⁰

“For those greatly interested seekers of Dharma, the Vedas (Shrutis) are the highest authorities.” – *Manu Smriti* 2.3²¹

Any new definition of dharma or shade of meaning or expansion in meaning, must be based on pre-existing tradition and cite references from the texts. That has been the standard practice among various sampradayas. Pattanaik, however, does not explain how he arrived at the definition of dharma as ‘potential’ or which Vedic sources he consulted, in coming up with this specific meaning. ‘Potential’ is not a standard definition and is not found in any of the major Sanskrit dictionaries. Therefore, while he accuses ordinary Hindus of hijacking the term and reinterpreting it as commandments so as to “control (or oppress?) sections of the population”, by which he probably means Muslims and Dalits, he himself, indulges in a similar re-interpretive exercise.

The implications of this definition are manifold. A *mujahideen* terrorist may claim that by resorting to violence, he is fulfilling his potential as a terrorist and is therefore, more Dharmic than those who preach non-violence. By the same logic, even infamous iconoclasts like Mahmud Ghazni (11th century CE) or Aurangzeb (17th century CE) would have been able to justify their temple destruction. By destroying false gods, they were fulfilling their potential as ideal Muslims and therefore more Dharmic than those who created and revered the *murtis*. Clearly such a premise is problematic and goes against the traditional understanding of the term. Pattanaik (2015) further says:

“Neither violence, nor non-violence is dharma. For dharma is a thought, not an action.” ²²

This is a rather strange idea which again does not find support in tradition, and leads to some uncomfortable conclusions. Dharma should indeed be seen as transcending both the binaries of violence and non-violence, and thought and action, but at the same time it does require them to flourish. The entire *Bhagavad Gita* is premised on the fact that Arjuna as a Kshatriya had grave misgivings about his duty to fight the enemy, and Krishna exhorts him to wage war against the enemies. In this context, violence against the enemies is a Kshatriya's duty, and Krishna explicitly says so:

“Considering your specific duty as a kshatriya, you should know that there is no better engagement for you than fighting on religious principles; and so there is no need for hesitation.” – *Bhagavad Gita* 2.31²³

At the same time, there is ample space for non-violence as well. One of the important characteristics of dharma listed by both Yajnavalkya and Manu in their dharmashastras is *ahimsa* or non-harm.²⁴ In other words, defending dharma is as important as preserving dharma. If one were to take Pattanaik's position that dharma and violence are not related, one could potentially rationalize any kind of violence, whether against living creatures or cultures or societies. One could in fact, justify the slaughter of animals for food, saying that it is outside the purview of dharma, and in an Indian context, perhaps also make a pernicious case for beef-eating. Pattanaik's incorrect view of dharma therefore, negatively impacts Hindus on all fronts. By insisting that dharma is neither about violence nor non-violence, but a thought, Pattanaik is actually weakening Hinduism by propagating a world-negating and escapist ideology, which goes against the very spirit of pragmatics and realism as espoused by all great leaders like Krishna, Janaka, Kautilya, Adi Shankaracharya and Swami Vivekananda. Pattanaik (2015) then adds:

“In case of humans, dharma is the seed of thought that determines what will sprout as action. It is not what you do that is dharma; it is why you do it that is dharma.”²⁵

In this instance, Pattanaik seems to conflate dharma, which he refers to as seed, with the cycle of *karma* and *vasana* (or *samskara*).²⁶ Parthasarathy (2017) in his commentary of *Bhagavad Gita* describes *vasana* as “the seed of human personality” which manifests as thoughts, desires and actions. The root of all actions originates in a person’s *vasanas*, which are his innate tendencies. The *vasanas* in turn, are results of previous actions, and present *vasanas* go on to create further actions. The *karma-vasana* cycle goes on unceasingly similar to a tree-seed or hen-egg cycle.²⁷ The entire purpose of *yoga*, *sadhana* and knowledge is to break this cycle of *vasana/ samskara* and *karma*. Bryant (2009) explains how *samskaras* and actions tend to reinforce each other, perpetuating a vicious cycle or virtuous cycle, depending on whether the actions are dharmic or adharmic. One’s motives are the result of past experiences, and these motives prompt action, producing *samskaras* which further perpetuate the cycle of action and become increasingly reinforced. This is similar to how bad habits like smoking become reinforced with each puff of the cigarette. By changing the motivation, it is possible break this cycle, which is the entire purport of Yoga.²⁸ Pattanaik, however, equates these well-established concepts of *karma* and *vasana* with dharma, and provides a rather novel definition of dharma.

Instead of going into a detailed bottom-up exploration of Indian knowledge systems in general, and Hindu philosophy in particular, Pattanaik seems content to tread the surface and keep his analysis perfunctory. Such cursory perusal serves his purpose, as his target audience, the English-speaking urban Hindu elites tend to have superficial knowledge of Hindu *darshanas* and *sampradayas*. They have neither the time, nor the wherewithal nor the inclination to explore deep philosophical concepts. For them, Pattanaik is a guru of Hinduism, who offers them glib feel-good sound bites on Hindu ideas, in a language they know and using idioms they can relate to, while at the same time not shying away from exposing, to all intents and purposes, alleged evils of Hindu and Indian society. It is especially among the elite and corporate crowd, that Pattanaik is able to legitimize his standing as a “management guru.” He spares no effort to include Indian philosophical terms alongwith business management jargon, thereby coming across as a

profound modern-age philosopher. For Jayaraman (2013), Pattanaik is therefore, someone who “fuses scriptural knowledge with modern day management principles to evoke a very Indian approach to business and its role in society.”²⁹ However, more often than not, Pattanaik trivializes profound philosophical concepts and reduces complex personalities and heroes to uni-dimensional caricatures. In a discussion with Singh (2016) on Indian approaches to leadership and power, Pattanaik agrees with the view that Lord Rama’s “obsession with rules dehumanized him”. He uses Rama and Sita’s relationship to illustrate cost-benefit analysis and says:

“That Ram always follows the rule makes him dependable. You know what to expect from him. That’s a good quality too. It also means that around him, there will be Sitas who will suffer.”³⁰

This is a poor characterization of not only the personality of Rama, who is uniformly considered an exemplar of righteousness and virtue across India, but also a demeaning portrayal of Sita as a passive eternally-suffering wife. If one were to ask ordinary Indians, who they consider to be the embodiment of dharma, and the personification of purity and self-sacrifice, more often than not, the answer will be Lord Rama and Sita. Yet, in Pattanaik’s scholarship Rama and Sita are reduced to props in a business management and leadership case study. Even Raghavendra (2018), who has commended Pattanaik’s domain expertise and admired the fact that he is “well-informed on the most esoteric aspects” of Hinduism, finds Pattanaik’s discomfort with the idea of dharma as a social ethic, and its avoidance, very perplexing. He writes that dharma as a contextual ethical notion can be used to interrogate the moral questions of a society, and can also be seen as a mechanism to bind society as a whole; but Pattanaik with “self-improvement as his only objective, declines to address the issue.” He concludes:

“Pattanaik’s HRD-driven approach with self-improvement as the agenda consistently sidesteps what seems to me to be the most interesting aspects of mythology, which would be better presented by someone with a background in anthropology.”³¹

Truth and Knowledge

As important as dharma is the idea of Truth, and Indian rishis, philosophers and scholars throughout the ages continue to remain obsessed with the constructs of truth and knowledge. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says:

“Nothing is higher than dharma. The weak overcomes the stronger by dharma, as over a king. Truly that dharma is the Truth (Satya).”
- Brihadaryanaka Upanishad 1.4.14³²

In Hindu texts—whether *Vedas*, or their commentaries, or the *tantra* and *agamas* – ‘truth’ is the principal backbone against which the entire cosmos revolves, and against which everything else is to be evaluated. The concept of ‘truth’ is one of the central tenets of each and every school of Indian thought without any exception. So much so, that many of the pithy sayings in Indian tradition are associated with the idea of truth. The national motto of India is “*satyameva jayate*”, which means Truth alone triumphs. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* tells us: “*satyam vada, dharmam chara*”, which means “Speak the truth and abide by dharma.” Although there are many different schools of thoughts within Hinduism, almost all of them, including the Tantric schools³³ accept an Ultimate Truth which is beyond space, time and causation.

Hindu thought is very clear on technical definitions of Sanskrit terms, and hence, concepts like ‘truth’ and ‘reality’ are quite well defined in the *astika* schools, and non-standard interpretations not rooted in Vedic thoughts are classified as *nastika* and not accepted as Hindu thought. For example, *Advaita Vedanta* classifies reality into various categories, but accepts only one Ultimate Truth. The first category is *sat* or that which is eternally real. This is the *paramarthika satta* or *Brahman*. Another category is known as *asat* or that which is eternally non-real. The classic example given in traditions is that of a sky-flower or hare with a horn. The third category is *mithya*, which refers to that which is perceived to be real at first, but later on rejected when the Ultimate Truth is realized. This is again of two types – *vyavaharika* and *pratibhasika*.

Vyavaharika is related to the world around us, while *pratibhasika* is a category of personal errors, like mistaking a rope for a snake.³⁴

Related to Truth is the idea of what constitutes knowledge and how to attain such knowledge. Almost all dharmic schools, including the non-Vedic *nastika sampradayas* like Jainas and Bauddhas, accept ignorance as the root cause of all misery and removal of ignorance as the greatest aim of life. This requires right knowledge, and how that knowledge is acquired, varies from school to school. *Pramana shastra* or epistemology of Indian knowledge systems supports a wide variety of valid means of knowledge (*pramana*) like *pratyaksha* (perception), *anumana* (inference), *upamana* (comparison and analogy) and *shabda* (testimony of authority figures).³⁵ Thus, while the *Charvaka* school accepts only perception, the *Vishishtadvaita* and *Dvaita* Vedanta schools accept *pratyaksha*, *anumana* and *shabda* as valid means of knowledge. There is nothing ambiguous or wishy-washy about these definitions in dharmic traditions. Scholars, philosophers, grammarians and etymologists, have discussed, debated and argued on practically each syllable of every known technical Sanskrit word for millennia. Each term has a range of accepted meanings across different *sampradayas*, and one simply cannot super-impose their own meanings or interpretation on them, and pass them off as an insider view.

However, as a self-styled mythologist, Pattanaik (2006) dismisses the traditional understanding of truth and reality, and argues that there are many types of truth – subjective, objective, logical, intuitive, cultural, universal, evidence-based and faith-based truths.³⁶ Pattanaik (2017) views ‘truth’ as a political battleground, where different stakeholders like rationalists, secularists, atheists, traditionalists, supremacists, scientists and shamans, fight with each other for power and try to propagate their own versions of what they believe to be the truth.

“When truth becomes singular and definitive, truth invariably becomes territory – a battlefield. The warriors here are not just religious radicals, but also politicians fighting to make India or America or Britain great again, and of course, academicians and activists and journalists, armed with facts.”³⁷

He conceptually seems to understand and appreciates the differences between the Advaita view of *sat*, as truth independent of any frame of reference, and *mithya* as a delusion or limited and distorted view of reality. The ancient Hindu rishis, he says, made use of *mithya* as a window to understand the truth of *sat*.³⁸ Unlike them, however, Pattanaik (2018) prefers to make use of post-modern and post-structural models of thinking to understand and make sense of societies, cultures and religions. He sees truth as a continuous spectrum, something fluid, and not something absolute. On one end of the spectrum is fact, which is everybody's truth, and on the other end is fiction or nobody's truth. In the middle is myth which he defines as "somebody's truth" or "subjective truth."³⁹ He believes that facts, rather than truth, are more important for knowledge production.⁴⁰ Dharmically speaking, he assigns more importance to the idea of *pratyakasha pramana*, than *sat*, a view similar to that held by the ancient school of materialists *Charvakas* who were well-known for their animosity towards the followers of the Vedas. Dasgupta (1951) in his analysis of pre-Buddha *nastika* philosophies shows how the Charvakas not only rejected the validity of inferences (*anumana*) as an epistemic category, but also the very existence of an eternal Self.⁴¹ What this means, is that, in the Charvaka worldview, anything can be interpreted in any way, without recourse to any totalizing principle, and therefore we would not be wrong in locating Pattanaik in the *nastika* philosophical camp. His views on Hinduism are etic, or from the perspective of an outsider, and not emic.

His understanding of India's past is colored by this view and he understands *itihasa* as being neither history, nor fantasy but as cultural memoirs, and hence, the same as myth. It is the story which matters and not the facts, and these stories help produce "a map into the culture's mind over time and space", thereby facilitating one's understanding of the culture.⁴² Here also his interpretation of the term varies from that of tradition since the word *itihasa* itself is another technical term and related to the idea of *purusharthas* or the four aims of human life accorded primacy in Hinduism—*dharma*, *artha* (all-round prosperity), *kama* (all-round pleasure and love) and *moksha* (self-actualization).

Itihasa specifically refers to the re-telling of the past in such a way, so as to help the flowering of the purusharthas.⁴³ While he comes across as being critical of Western categories and assumptions of normativity, as in Pattanaik (2003)⁴⁴, he often uses the same categories to interrogate Hinduism. He (2006) says:

“Ideas such as rebirth, heaven and hell, angels and demons, fate and freewill, sin, Satan and salvation are religious myths.”⁴⁵

Almost all the categories and conceptual binaries used by Pattanaik are derived from monotheistic Abrahamic faiths. The idea of Salvation lies at the very heart of Christianity, and is the basis of massive global missionary programs to convert people. Christians of all denominations believe that all humans are born sinners and therefore, forever condemned. However, there is ‘Good News’ – a way out of what they call “Eternal Damnation.” Since Jesus died on the Cross and took upon himself the sins of mankind, by accepting Jesus as their savior and becoming a Christian, a person can redeem himself. It is thus the duty of every Christian to help facilitate salvation by showing them the true way of the Christ.⁴⁶ Similarly, the idea of Satan does not exist in Hinduism, because Satan pre-supposes the existence of a transcendent all-mighty Creator God. Again, ‘free will’ is not a universal idea but a theological term in Christianity and the shrill debates and polemic among Roman Catholics, Orthodox Church and Protestants on what constitutes free will is well documented. Even within the Protestant fold, Calvin, Luther and Arminius could not reach a consensus on the definition and scope of the concept.⁴⁷

The term ‘myth’ is a politically loaded term and has traditionally been used by the West to pejoratively refer to the non-West’s self-understanding of its past, especially in the context of religion and history. Therefore, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were considered mythical in the same way as Greek and Norse mythology, but the historicity of Jesus was never called into question. Hegel (1827) for example famously dismissed Hinduism as a “religion of phantasy” (*die Religion der Phantasie*)⁴⁸ while characterizing Christianity as a rational religion and

Jesus as a rationalist philosopher.⁴⁹ Jung (1949) saw myths as a necessary construct to make sense of the world. They were the “original revelations of the preconscious psyche” and a vital aspect of human life. Myths were in a sense the psychic life of the primitive tribe and mythology its living religion.⁵⁰ Graves (1968) defines myths as those heroic or religious stories which were “so foreign to a student’s experience that he cannot believe them to be true.”⁵¹ Leach and Fried (1984) define ‘myth’ as a story of a previous age which are meant to explain “the cosmological and supernatural traditions of a people, their gods, heroes, cultural traits, religious beliefs, etc.”⁵² Thury and Devinney (2017) in their seminal work, *Introduction to Mythology*, considered a standard introductory text on the subject, place everything from ancient Greek, Egyptian and Norse legends, to the Ramayana, to native American legends to *Star Trek* as well as *Harry Potter*, under the ambit of mythology. They say:

“Mythology allows you to take a journey into an exciting and mysterious world. In your travels, you can expect to encounter gods, heroes, monsters, exotic countries, and amazing adventures.”⁵³

Mythology may therefore, be seen as the culture, belief and religion of the ancient past; it served the same purpose to the people of a past period, as contemporary faith and belief does for the present-day society. Treating Hinduism or Indian past through the lens of mythology essentially means that Pattanaik does not see continuity between the past and the present. Hindu past becomes the “other” to be studied through the prism of mythology in the present post-modern world. While modernity may have its own contemporary myths, the West has in essence transcended the myths of their primitive past, while traditional societies like India still cling to them and consider it their living tradition. In this sense, unlike the progressive West built on secular ideals and Judeo-Christian ethics, Hinduism is frozen in a state of stagnant apathy and unchanging moral degeneracy. Pattanaik conveniently positions himself as an insider in this cultural milieu in order to liberate Hindus from the shackles of Hinduism itself. He uses this vantage point to perpetuate a sanitized and West-friendly version of Hinduism de-rooted

from tradition, while continuing to build his career as a leadership coach and expert in the “Indian approach to management.”⁵⁴

While Hindu leaders themselves, often refer to itihisas and puranas as myths, Christian theologians and serious practitioners outright reject all attempts to categorize their past as myths. Hardon (1998), an American Jesuit (Catholic) priest categorically stated: “Christianity is not mythology.”⁵⁵ Carl Henry, a prominent American evangelical (Protestant) Christian theologian was very clear that “Judeo-Christian revelation has nothing in common with the category of myth” (quoted in Mohler (2009)).⁵⁶ In fact, in Christianity the study of ideas like Heaven and Hell, the resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment and end of times is an important academic discipline in itself called Eschatology. The search for archaeological sites associated with Jesus is a serious endeavor and there is a large amount of academic literature, as well as popular programs on National Geographic and History channels on the “historicity” of Jesus.⁵⁷ Hindu deities, on the other hand, are considered mythical and dismissed casually as ancient aliens.⁵⁸

It is this lens of religious myth that Pattanaik uses to deconstruct, analyze and explain Hinduism to his millions of readers and followers. As is evident, his basic views on truth, reality, knowledge, epistemology and religio-spiritual categories are alien and often opposed to the traditional Hindu understanding of itself. Therefore, one should be wary of associating with him any expertise in either Hinduism or Indian knowledge systems.

Nationhood and India

Pattanaik does not accept the idea of nationhood, and considers ideas like sovereignty and nation state as myths and in this context, the independence movement, symbolism of national flags and national anthems are but tools to reinforce the myth of a nation state. He says (2006):

“Ideas such as sovereignty, nation state, human rights, women’s rights, animal rights and gay rights are secular myths.”⁵⁹

Pattanaik explains that there are two views about India and Hinduism. One view is that Hinduism and India are both rather recent colonial era fabrications. The other is the traditional view that both Hinduism and India, have existed in some form for many millennia. He says (2017):

“A large number of scholars ... write tomes informing us that Hinduism and India did not exist before the modern era, and that these are unifying constructions of colonial and post-colonial forces. This confuses the average Hindu who has spent all his life performing the ancient sankalpa ritual before any ceremony ... Why can't the two views coexist?”⁶⁰

In a free society like India, people are free to have an opinion on any matter, subject to reasonable restrictions, including the view that Hinduism and India are colonial constructs. However, for someone who is considered an authority on Hinduism and India, it is quite reasonable to expect that he or she should take an unequivocal and categorical stand on the matter. The onus is on them to state without any hesitation or ambiguity that while many theories may exist, the existence of both India and Hinduism, in some form, *is not a topic up for debate*. The concept of India as a civilizational state is an ancient idea, accepted by both Indians as well as people to the East and West of India.⁶¹ For Indians, India (or Bharata or Hindustan) has always been a sacred *bhumi*, a unifying force, and their association with it has been enriched with a deeply embodied physical recognition of the geography and its resources. As I will discuss later, many rituals and pilgrimages are tied to some specific sacred geography. For someone who is considered an expert on Hinduism, to not acknowledge or take a stand on this, is a pointer to his lack of deeper understanding of the matter. Pattanaik either sits on the fence, or openly admits that he does not subscribe to a single idea of India, since India being a diverse and extremely complicated society cannot have one over-arching grand narrative. He says (2015):

“I kept hearing the concept of the idea of India. I am very very uncomfortable with the definitive article ‘the.’ ... When we are talking of the idea of India, and the shifting idea of India, we are essentially

assuming that there is a definite idea of India and there is a shift to another definite idea of India. But if we were to look at it differently and say there are many ideas of India and some ideas amplify themselves at different points of time, the same thing looks very different.”⁶²

A single idea of India for him is simply a ploy to garner power and exercise control. It is an unrealistic imaginative ideal as well as a hegemonic tool, and he does not view with favor those who perpetuate such ideas.

“When somebody imagines one idea of India, they are really not scientific, they are poets with a control freak trait.”⁶³

This kind of posture towards nationhood is characteristic of much of Leftist and India-centric post-modern thought, and is also reflected in the views of eminent scholars like Romila Thapar, Nivedita Menon, and many other prominent Indian social scientists.⁶⁴ They subscribe to the view that since nation and nationalism are recent developments in world history and a result of specific institutional, technological and economic forces during the industrial age, India is therefore an imagined entity and essentially a British project. It is at best a nebulous idea and each community or subaltern group has its own idea of India. This is one of the usual canards raised by many scholars to challenge the antiquity of India as an unified geopolitical entity.

While it is true that India as a nation state may not have existed until recently, that does not mean that India as a civilizational state, subsuming clans, tribes and kingdoms, never existed. When Darius I, in 515 BCE referred to India as the land of the Hind, he, as well as the Indians whom he referred to, had a very good idea of whom Darius was talking about. When Megasthenes (350 BCE) talked about “Indica”, and came to India, it was not some imaginary amorphous South Asia that he visited, but a real land with well-defined borders, cultures and practices. Indians had their own traditional categories of *rajya*, *rashtra* and *desha* to denote various levels of citizenship, and well-known terms of self-identity like

Bharatavarsha and *Aryavarta*.⁶⁵ Apart from this, Indians had their own models of civilizational unity, such as sacred geography as encapsulated in the pan-India *tirtha-sthala* (pilgrimage sites) of *Kumbha Mela*, *Shakti Pithas* and *Jyotirlingas*, and those mentioned in *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Even today across India, when Hindus perform the *jala shuddhi* or water purification ritual, they invoke the seven pan-Indian rivers Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Godavari, Sindhu, Saraswati and Kaveri.⁶⁶ In other words, from ancient times, Indians had a reasonably clear idea of India's civilizational spread and understood dharma as the unifying principle which bound diverse people, languages, societies and cultures together. Diversity and multiplicity in India is civilizationally bound by the Hindu thread – it is neither chaotic nor a synthetically unified diversity as Pattnaik projects.

It is problematic therefore, when a public intellectual of his stature deliberately chooses to ignore all these conceptions of self-identity. More importantly, India today is a sovereign state with its own Constitution, judiciary and rule of law, and based on democratic ideals. To characterize India as an 'idea' is not only utterly irresponsible but reeks of nefarious intent, because if there is no India in the first place, there cannot be any unifying Indian meta-narrative. India for Pattanaik (2017) is therefore a hodgepodge of different sub-cultures, many of which are incompatible with each other and hence easy to fragment:

“Indian culture is like a masala box. The dominant spices we identify as Hindu, but not all of them came into being here, or at the same time. Some came into being following indigenous challenges, such as the rise of Buddhism, which introduced ideas of monastic orders. Others came into being following foreign challenges, such as the arrival of the Greeks who introduced the idea of stone temples enshrining stone images of heroes and gods, very different from the portable imageless rituals of Vedic culture, or the river and mountain and tree gods of local tribes. Some spices refuse to be identified as Hindu, but do not mind being called Indian. Some spices insist on being identified as non-Indian. Then there are spices that are best called global, as they are found everywhere.”⁶⁷

Constantly harping on diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism in order to question the legitimacy of the state is a typical postmodern posture. Such arguments do not hold water since the same postmodernists do not attempt to analyze American, British, French or Chinese metanarratives, which have in fact become increasingly stronger, especially in a post-Brexit era. Branding and identity are an important aspect of any social group. Every nation, corporate entity, sports team, or even a local library has a distinct identity as a group. Members may come from different backgrounds, but within the organization, have to abide by certain minimum common requirements. In the corporate world, for example, grand narratives are absolutely essential. Would it not be absurd if the company leadership suddenly start insisting that they are postmodernists and do not see any distinction between themselves and their competitors?

Of course, India is a diverse country, with different people, languages, food and practices. Similarly, China is too. Yet China has always had a very distinct identity as a world civilization from ancient times. Today, China has massive programs to propagate its grand narrative, which is based on ancient Confucian thought combined with Taoism, Buddhism and its own kind of modernity. Mandarin has played a very important role in unifying such a large country and in instilling national pride among all Chinese. Every Chinese learns about the greatness and glory of his civilization from ancient to modern times. Not only is this narrative popularized internally within China, but also promoted globally through a large network of Confucius Institutes.⁶⁸

Hindu Hegemony

For Pattanaik (2021), Hinduism is essentially a modern elitist upper-caste hegemonic enterprise which has used violence and intimidation to dominate other castes and communities. The term Hindu, he says, was a foreign term, first used as a self-identifier in the 14th century by Vijayanagar kings to differentiate themselves from foreign Turkish invaders. Although it gained currency across India, it remained an elitist

enterprise which had no room for either the untouchables or the tribal communities of India.⁶⁹ He says:

“Poets like Kabir and Chaitanya used the word Hindu loosely to refer to followers of Vedas who saw brahmins as the priests. But did this term apply to the ‘untouchables’ who were told they were impure by everyone, even new converts to Islam? Does this apply to the tribal communities of India? Did anyone ask them?”⁷⁰

Here too, Pattanaik seems to confuse the concept of Hindu identity and the term ‘Hindu’. While the earliest epigraphic evidence of the word Hindu as a self-identifier belongs to the second millennia CE, it does not necessarily mean that Hindus had no idea about their spiritual identity prior to that. The earliest reference to the term Hindu, in fact, appears in the *Zend Avesta*, the book of the ancient Iranians. It refers to a place called *Hapta Hindu*, or land of seven rivers, identical with the Vedic land of *Sapta Sindhavas*, and the connotation is geographical⁷¹ as well as doctrinal.⁷² By the time of Darius I in the 5th century BCE, the word was understood to mean the people to the west and east of Indus River, and who followed specific customs and rituals. Sharma (2002) argues that ‘Sindhu’ as a word acquired different semantic meanings as it traveled to the west and east of India. During the Islamic rule, the Arabic and Persian world was quite clear about the distinction between ‘Hind’ as a geographical term and ‘Hindu’ as a religious term.⁷³ As Elst (2013) points out, when the Muslims invaded India, they used the term Hindu to specifically mean anyone who was a resident of India but not Abrahamic – including so-called savarnas, Jains, Buddhists, low-castes and tribals.⁷⁴ This is the same definition which has been officially accepted by the Indian state during the drafting of the Constitution under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and is reflected in various laws.⁷⁵ In other words, the concept of Hindu identity has been well-understood across the board for a very long time, and to insist that Hinduism was an elitist upper-caste fabrication and that people were not consulted while this definition was being constructed is disingenuous to say the least.

Pattanaik (2015) builds upon his thesis by insisting that Hindus are a violent community. In his readings of Jain scriptures, he sees a tension between the Jains' self-view and the views of militant Hindus who consider Jains as a sect of Hinduism. The Jains, he says, have never been able to reconcile to the violent nature of Hinduism:

“...people simply assume that ‘ahimsa’ is a Hindu idea, when, in fact, it is a Jain idea and there is a vast amount of literature that shows us how animals were sacrificed during Vedic yagnas, but with the rise of monastic orders like Buddhism, this practice was frowned upon and eventually many brahmins – not all – adopted vegetarianism and saw non-violence as a virtue.”⁷⁶

Violence is thus, endemic to Hinduism according to him and he points out (2021) that there are numerous instances of Hindus fighting each other – battle between castes, over cattle, land and women. He also gives an example of India invading foreign lands – the invasion of Malaysia by the naval fleet of the Tamil Chola Empire in 1068 CE, which happened “less than 50 years after Mahmood of Ghazni raided the Somnath temple.”⁷⁷ He traces this to the Vedas and says that Vedic scriptures “are very clear that violence is a necessary component of existence, if one chooses to be part of existence.”⁷⁸ Pattanaik (2016) sees caste as playing a major role in the Hindu propensity for violence, inequality and discrimination. The question he asks is if caste is an essential requirement of Hinduism and whether it is traceable to *Vedas*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Manusmriti*.⁷⁹ Elsewhere, he says (2011) that it is this Vedic conception of caste which has hugely magnified hierarchy and inequality. The Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas dominated other members of society on religious, political and economic grounds. He argues that “the idea of human diversity and hierarchy is rooted in hymns that speak of varna” and that the core idea of caste was: “no sharing of women and food with members of other castes.”⁸⁰

Pattanaik (2018) attributes the present-day caste system to the chariot-riding Aryan warriors who, in collaboration with mantra-chanting divine mediums, asserted dominance over a large group of people. He blames Brahmins for making the system rigid and it was they

who set-up the infrastructure to marginalize and discriminate against ritually unclean people. This system by the Brahmins “dehumanised people, denied them human dignity, and access to common resources like water and education.”⁸¹ Hinduism for Pattanaik is therefore, a melting pot of all evils which has ever afflicted mankind since the beginning of human race. It is remarkable how his characterization of Hinduism as an elitist, and inherently discriminatory supremacist project, is no different from that of 11th century CE Muslim historian Albiruni who described Hindus as “haughty, foolishly vain, self-conceited”⁸², or of modern Dalit intellectual and Christian sympathizer, Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd who describes Hinduism as being “anti-scientific and anti-nationalistic” and bats for a post-Hindu India.⁸³ In fact, Pattanaik’s views on caste and Hinduism are no different from colonial Indologists who located every possible vice in Hinduism, and conveniently traced it to the Vedas and the so-called chariot-borne invading Aryans. As will be discussed later, Pattanaik relies heavily on the discredited colonial-era Aryan Invasion/ Migration Theory and in the colonial-era construction of caste, to arrive at his characterization of Hinduism as a tool of caste supremacy and Brahminical hegemony.

Characterizing Hinduism as being inherently violent, racist and oppressive, and blaming it all on upper-castes in general or Brahmins in particular, conveniently allows one to whitewash the crimes of foreign invaders. For example, the brutal Islamic invasion of India and centuries of persecution, torture and discrimination of Hindus during the Islamic period can now be viewed in a sympathetic light. The implication is that since Hindus had ostensibly persecuted Jains and Buddhists, and even colonized south-east Asia, they should not complain when they are invaded. This is of course, a spurious argument because of the fundamental differences in the very nature, scale and frequency of the two events. There is little evidence to suggest that Hindus carried out genocides of Buddhists or Jains in the same way that Muslims did of Hindus, Buddhists and Jains; the latter is well-documented in Islamic texts starting from the time of Mahmud Ghazni. Moreover, unlike Muslim invaders, who conquered new lands, to bring them under the pale of Islam, Indian military intervention in foreign lands (a very rare

occurrence), were usually for economic purposes, like capturing the lucrative sea route of Malacca Strait.

In all this, Pattanaik's disdain for Hinduism shines forth brightly and it is therefore, quite surprising that someone with such a deep-seated animosity towards Hindu dharma is considered an insider authority on Hinduism!

Passport to Distort

Postmodernism, as a cultural phenomenon emerged primarily as a reaction against the philosophical assumptions of modernity in Western intellectual thought. Many of the ideas associated with Postmodernism are in fact an outright rejection of ideas usually associated with the Enlightenment movement in Europe as well as its derivatives like Marxism and Liberalism. Foucault (1977) argued that 'truth' and 'power' were intricately linked, and that, 'truth' is neither a universal ideal, nor the outcome of liberation. Truth is in fact, produced by power and shaped by different "knowledge regimes" in which certain things are assumed to be true. Every society has its own "general politics" of truth, which informs them what is sanctioned and what is not, and thus, there can be no truth without power.⁸⁴ Lyotard (1979) characterized the post-modern era as one which has no sympathy for quintessential enlightenment and modern values like 'reason' and 'truth' and dubs them as totalizing metanarratives. Postmodernism therefore, attacks the very idea of monolithic universals and instead encourages multiplicity of interpretations in the form of little narratives.⁸⁵ Butler (2002) says that post-modernists were heavily influenced by the works of Derrida and his central thesis of deconstruction, and believe that relationship between language and the world was not as trustworthy as they have been made out to be traditionally, and that we often tend to privilege "transcendental signifiers" like God or reality to organize our discourse.⁸⁶

Pattanaik uses these ideas of truth, power and metanarratives in his analysis of Hinduism, India and India's past. He incorrectly applies the postmodern critique of the Western universals, which is in essence a critique of culture and society, onto the spiritual domain, and labels

spiritual universals and truths as myths. A postmodern analysis of Hinduism is problematic, as it is in direct opposition to the Dharmic worldview, on multiple fronts. Traditionally dharmic knowledge systems can be understood through two categories of texts: *shruti* and *smriti*. *Shruti* is *apaurusheya*, or knowledge which is non-contingent upon humans, and hence considered spiritual truths. Rishis are considered *mantra drashta*, enlightened beings who “saw” the truth and expressed them in the form of poetry.⁸⁷ Postmodernism categorically rejects the notion of any absolute truth, and hence, denies the legitimacy of the shruti texts. More importantly it denies Brahman, the most fundamental truth of Hindu philosophical systems. It not only rejects logic and reasoning (anumana and upamana), but argues that traditional authority (*shabda*) is false, as well as, corrupt and hence, must be rejected, thereby repudiating standardized means of knowledge accepted as valid practices in Indian knowledge systems. What this means is that, everything that is quintessentially Hindu and Indian is rejected by Postmodernism. At the same time, it allows one to interpret texts in myriad ways without recourse to tradition, since the latter is seen as a totalizing hegemonic tool of oppression. This perhaps explains Pattanaik’s outlandish and often incorrect interpretation of Hindu sources.

Interpretation of Hindu texts has traditionally been a serious academic endeavor. Only a qualified person belonging to a specific sampradaya, who has undergone systematic training under his *guru* is considered eligible to interpret texts and write commentaries. Not everybody has the *adhikara* or necessary qualification to interpret the *Shastras*, since the subject matter in question is highly technical and requires decades of arduous training. Moreover, any new interpretation should strictly abide by the basic framework of *pramana shastra*. All schools of thought, irrespective of their positions, are based on this epistemology, since it enables one to understand the similarities and differences between two sampradayas by providing a common meeting ground. However, Postmodernism not only denies the importance of *adhikara* but also does away with the need for *pramana shastra* (epistemology) itself. Hence, anyone can interpret Hindu texts in whichever way they desire, without being held accountable for

mistranslations and misreading. As a postmodern thinker and self-proclaimed mythologist, Pattanaik perhaps feels that he has the license to undertake radical re-interpretation of standard terms and concepts, including precise technical terms, with no recourse to the pre-existing knowledge *parampara* of various sampradayas.

Another problematic issue is that Pattanaik (2013) maps many Western constructs onto Hinduism, ostensibly to highlight differences between Indian and Western thought, but ends up evaluating Hinduism using Abrahamic categories. For example, he equates the idea of the Abrahamic “promised land” to the Hindu ideas of *svarga*, *kailasha* and *vaikuntha*.⁸⁸ This is a controversial proposition, because the very notion of a promised land, which can be either a physical place or an imaginary place (heaven), pre-supposes the existence of one God, one Prophet, and one Holy Book. It is inherently discriminatory since it is a place meant only for the “chosen people” and worship of other divinities or idolatry is a punishable offence.⁸⁹ The entire premise is that humans do not have any agency and need to be saved by some super-human personality. In Hinduism, there is no concept of any one exclusive God who demands submission of people and designates certain groups as chosen people. *Svarga* for example, is not a physical location to which people can travel at will or under the commandment of some deity or prophet. It is a subtle plane of existence within the cosmos, and *Jivas* who strictly abide by their dharmas, reside there temporarily. Once their accrued karma is used up, they return to the mortal plane.⁹⁰ Inherent in this, is the idea of reincarnation, which again is something categorically rejected by Abrahamic faiths.

Mapping Western categories onto a dharmic framework is therefore, prone to irreconcilable errors, as it not only creates surface level confusion, but also generates deep-rooted misconceptions and prejudices. Pattanaik (2020) says:

“Hindus were seen as divided and there was a need for a philosophy to unite everyone... Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shankara seemed the right fit as it transcended Hinduism’s polytheistic paganism.”⁹¹

Let us focus on the phrase “polytheistic paganism.” Not only are both categories, polytheism and paganism, Judeo-Christian in origin as well as connotation, they are also deeply derogatory, and have been contested by many practitioners as well as academicians alike. Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar (1999) insist that pagan has been a standard “all-embracing, pejorative term for polytheists” and often has the “overtones of the inferior and the commonplace”.⁹² Lamb (2011) points out how even now Western monotheists denigrate polytheists as ignorant and often equate them with “evil and demonism.”⁹³ Pattanaik does not hesitate to use these disparaging terms, and in fact, seems to build upon his thesis that Hinduism is a rather recent invention of upper-caste Hindus, and an elitist project foisted upon the rest of Indians. Not only is Hinduism seen as an artificial construct, the motivation behind its creation is understood as being purely political.

An important idea which percolates much of Pattanaik’s work is his animosity for Hindutva. He (2015) is critical of contemporary Hindu-right politics and equates Hindutva with “militant Brahminism.”⁹⁴ He (2017) characterizes proponents of Hindutva, as crackpot figures that argue that mythical figures like Shiva, Rama and Krishna were real historical figures, and insist that India was always an advanced civilization “privy to advanced technology such as plastic surgery and even the aeroplane.” Hindutva for him, is an inherently discriminatory, intolerant and majoritarian enterprise which considers “secularism as minority appeasement” and sees “doctrines of social justice and gender equality (as) threatening traditional Hindu family values.”⁹⁵ Hindutva, he says (2021) is a racist and patriarchal system which admires Hitler and Zionists, and wants to impose Hindi across India.⁹⁶ At the same time, he points out that Hinduism is not to be confused with Hindutva. He says that Hindutva:

“...is political in nature, and has a distinct tendency to bristle with rage at even the slightest criticism, howsoever valid, of what are seen as Hindu customs and beliefs.”⁹⁷

Publicly Pattanaik insists that Hindutva is a sociopolitical movement while Hinduism is a spiritual movement. But then, what is one to make

of the following two statements from an essay (2020) on his views of *Advaita Vedanta*?

“Advaita Vedanta is the de facto philosophy followed by Hindutva. The reason for this is not spiritual. It is political.”

“The idea of Advaita Vedanta being the foundation of Hinduism is relatively new, with origins in writings of the 19th and 20th century Hindu thinkers like Dayanand Saraswati, Vivekananda and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.”⁹⁸

On the one hand, he equates Advaita and Hinduism, and on the other, he associates Advaita with Hindutva. What this means is that despite all his protests to the contrary, he sees Hindutva as being essentially the same as Hinduism. His criticism of Hindutva as a bigoted, unscientific, and supremacist ideology is therefore equally applicable to Hinduism, as seen in the previous section. By equating Advaita Vedanta and Hindutva, Pattanaik reduces an ancient and sophisticated philosophical tradition followed by millions of Hindus to a contemporary socio-political movement. Moreover, his view that Advaita – by which he presumably means Adi Shankaracharya’s interpretation – is the foundation of Hinduism is incorrect. Advaita is one of the many streams thriving in the Hindu ecosystem, and non-dualism is also seen in numerous sampradayas including different post-Shankara Vedanta schools, Kashmir Shaivism as well as many Tantric schools.⁹⁹

Pattanaik’s depiction of Hinduism as a spiritual system in perpetual war with nastika sampradayas like Jainas and Buaddhas, as well as being in a constant state of tension because of inter-sect rivalries, is another problematic thesis. Pattanaik deliberately exaggerates the so-called sectarian divide between the dualists and Advaitins, between followers of Bhakti and monastic traditions, and between Sringeri and Kanchi Mutt, and portrays them as major internecine conflicts.¹⁰⁰ Here I am reminded of the first scene of the Tamil movie *Dasavatharam* where Kamal Haasan intentionally exaggerates and plays up the schism between the Shaivites and Vaishnavites, by painting it as a bitter fight to death. Highlighting alleged sectarian divides only helps bolster Pattanaik’s

thesis that there is no unifying theme in Hinduism. This is not to say that there are no doctrinal differences and that there wasn't the occasional physical conflict. There are and always will be differences between different sampradayas, and it is in fact this diversity of thought that has propelled India's unmatched advancements in diverse domains like philosophies, arts, math and sciences. Unlike in the West, where the relationship between science and religion has been a subject of bitter and acrimonious debate, in Indian knowledge systems, all sciences and arts (*shastras*) are seen as varied manifestations of the fundamental principle of the unity of Brahman. There is neither perpetual war nor vicious antagonism nor a state of studied indifference between the spiritual domain and the domain of logic, reasoning and sciences. Brahman as the Universal Principle is beyond polarities, and every new domain is accepted and welcomed as yet another manifestation, as long as it abides by dharmic principles. For a self-proclaimed expert on Hinduism to not even acknowledge this, and portray the various sects, which adore and worship and follow different aspects of the same ultimate Brahman, as only fighting polarities, betrays his intent. Moreover, by and large, philosophical differences between sampradayas have been traditionally resolved through academic discussions and scholarship. As Kapoor (2005) points out, the intense debates between different groups like *Naiyayikas*, Buddhists and Jainas on epistemological and ontological questions, continued for a staggering period of over twelve centuries!¹⁰¹

More importantly, from time to time, there have been great rishis and scholars that unified disparate ideas and myriad streams of thoughts into an organic whole without subsuming their individuality. Traditionally it was Vyasa, who is believed to have compiled, organized and standardized the four Vedas from the disparate oral tradition of the rishis and rishikas spread over a large geography and accumulated over centuries and millennia prior to him. Similarly, as Ram (1995) argues, it was Vijnanabhikshu who in the 15th century CE developed a system of thought which seamlessly blended apparently disparate systems like Vedanta, Yoga, and *Samkhya* philosophies into his system of

avibhagadvaita (Integral Non-dualism).¹⁰² In other words, unlike what Pattanaik suggests, there were more attempts to understand, harmonize, integrate and synthesize wherever possible, purportedly disparate systems, under the broad umbrella of Hinduism, rather than to ameliorate and weaponize dissimilarities.

Another major theme that permeates Pattanaik's scholarship is violence. He is obsessed with conflicts and wars among castes, sects and different groups in India and in his endeavor to show Vedic Hindus (whom he views as descendants of Aryans) as being violent. He literally tortures literary texts to glean non-existent invasions and conquests. Hindu narratives, according to him (2006), retain memories of conflicts between the nomadic invasion-loving Indo-European herdsmen, settled agriculturists, and animist hunter-gatherers of the forest, and he cites the example of Kadru and Vinata from the *Mahabharata* as an example of such a war. His readings of southern Indian folklore suggest that they retain the memories of migration of the *Nagas* from the north after their forest homes were destroyed by migrating Aryans.¹⁰³ Pattanaik (2019) is not sure whether to characterize the movement of Brahmins from areas near Saraswati, Ganga, Godavari and Narmada rivers to southern India, as an immigration or invasion. He wonders whether the story of Agastya moving from Kailash to southern India refers to Vedic migration or invasion, while sparing no thought as to why the texts across the canon would fail to mention either.¹⁰⁴

Incidentally, this obsession with invasions also neatly ties into what Malhotra (2018) refers to as the "Invasion Theory of India" which is widely accepted by many Indologists and social scientists. A legacy of colonial scholarship and its assumptions of teleological historicism, this theory posits that India is a passive entity without any agency, which from time to time undergoes significant historical change under the influence of invasions and immigrations.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the Aryans brought to India Sanskrit language and its associated culture, the ancient Greeks brought philosophy, mathematics and astronomy, the Mughals gave India art, architecture and composite culture, while the British gave India modernity, science, technology and railways. The implication is

that if Mughals and British colonialists are to be considered outsiders, then so were the Vedic Aryans or Hindus. At the same time, every significant positive change or major shift in Indian society post-Aryans has been on account of external impetus or invasions, while all social evils in India are attributable to the inherently discriminatory and rigid practices of Brahminical Hinduism.

In fact, Pattanaik (2019) subscribes to the idea that everybody in India is an immigrant:

“Recent genetic studies have shown that everyone in India is a migrant. If we are all migrants, to whom then does any land belong? On what basis? Does it belong to those who came first, the mool-nivasis as some aboriginal tribal groups have now started identifying themselves?”¹⁰⁶

This is such an outlandish and unscientific assertion, that one is rendered dumbstruck. According to the “Out of Africa” model of early human migration, which is the currently the dominant model of early migration of anatomically modern humans (*Homo sapiens*), all modern non-African populations are substantially descended from people who migrated out of Africa starting 100,000 years ago (Nei, 1995)¹⁰⁷, with the last wave being about 70,000–50,000 years old. However, since then, the Indian subcontinent has remained continuously populated for *at least 50,000 years* (Pugach et al. 2013).¹⁰⁸ Surely if a land has been peopled for such a long time and where its natives have lived for thousands of generations, calling everyone a migrant is a stretch. Of course, there have been multiple waves of *small migrations* both out of and into India, a phenomenon that continues till today – but that is something which is not specific to India, and happens all across the world.

Pattanaik’s works are therefore, replete with all these categories of errors and debatable positions, and this is particularly troublesome since consumers of his knowledge consider him an expert and figure of authority. They tend to accept his views on Hinduism as authentic without seeing the necessity of undertaking further due diligence. In his analysis of Pattanaik’s scholarship, Misra (2017) points out a large number of specific mis-readings, incorrect translations and misinterpretations.¹⁰⁹

He says that Pattanaik often gets basic facts wrong during his retelling of Purana and Itihasa episodes and assigns motives which are not there in the original texts. He also invents etymologies of many Sanskrit words and ascribes new meanings to standard Sanskrit terms. Pattanaik loves to read sex, violence, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender themes in Hindu texts even when nothing of this sort exists. Seeing two *gopis* together in a picture, Pattanaik concluded that they are lesbians, although as Misra points out there is nothing in our tradition to suggest lesbianism in such a context.

In fact, Pattanaik (2021) appears to consider the entire institution of marriage a patriarchal ploy denying married women the right to choose men outside their marriages; he uses itihisas, puranas and other texts to somehow justify his positions. Demure and domesticated wives such as Anasuya and Arundhati are praised, he says, whereas adulterous wives like Ahalya are punished, and for Pattanaik this is yet another example of patriarchal domination.¹¹⁰ Pattanaik narrates an incident from the Bhil version of *Mahabharata*, where Radha has an affair with a handsome bangle-seller, who eventually turns out to be Krishna himself. From the absence of any anger on Krishna's part, he concludes that Krishna accepted and endorsed infidelity. Similarly, from the story of Vasuki and Arjuna, he argues that at no point does Arjuna expect fidelity from his wife.¹¹¹ In other words, Pattanaik sees the Brahmanical version of the epics as being essentially patriarchal, and unwilling to accept the sovereignty of women's desire independent of the institution of marriage. As a postmodern intellectual, Pattanaik challenges what Vorster (2016) refers to as the "old idea of heterosexual official marriages" and in its stead encourages "new forms of civil relationships". The idea of 'sanctity' in marriage is deemed irrelevant and marriage is seen "as a social construct that is fully determined by various historic and contemporary cultural situations."¹¹²

Pattanaik distorts well-established philosophical ideas and misrepresents them as socio-political issues. For example, as Misra (2017) points out, Pattanaik mis-translates critical philosophical words like *brahman*, *adhyatma* and *adhidaiva* by relating them to mind and

body. He incorrectly translates *brahmana* as expanding the mind, an interpretation not found in any known Sanskrit dictionary or *nirukti*, and in twenty-eight instances in *My Gita* (2015) uses the word in this erroneous sense.¹¹³ Misra is perplexed at how Pattanaik ignores well-established traditional interpretations, and is quite critical of Pattanaik's questionable interpretation of well-established concepts:

“The book—categorised as ‘non-fiction/philosophy’ on its back cover by Rupa Publications—is replete with errors. Its interpretations display a lack of basic knowledge of Sanskrit. The philosophical elements are a hodgepodge (or ‘masala-mix’) of terms, ideas, and concepts drawn from various kinds of sources, including probably the author’s own imagination, and presented as if they are based on Hindu texts. The work falls short when it comes to both nuanced details as well as the big picture. Consequently, one of the core texts of Hindu philosophy has been trivialised to a deficient caricature.”¹¹⁴

Aryans and Invasions

Regarding the origin of Indo-European languages and ancient Indian history, Pattanaik (2017) accepts the Aryan Migration Theory (AMT) as a “scientific theory” explaining the origin of Sanskrit. Pattanaik points out that the AMT is viewed negatively among the Hindutva circle, as they consider it a newer version of “the old discarded colonial Aryan Invasion Theory (AIT).”¹¹⁵ He (2019) subscribes to the view that the so-called Vedic Aryans as a distinct group of migrants who spoke proto-Indo European languages and brought Vedic culture to India, after Harappan cities had collapsed.

“DNA studies are now showing that Harappans did not have genes of steppe pastoralists (Aryans). But these Aryan genes are found in about 30 per cent of the Indian population. This means the Aryans came after Harappan cities had collapsed. They did not invade Harappa, but many Aryan men, who came in waves, over centuries, certainly did migrate and marry Harappan women. More accurately, Aryan men married women whose ancestors built Harappan cities, and who followed Harappan customs.”¹¹⁶

Pattanaik (2011) concedes that AIT is based on the Western template of a violent conflict where the winner always overwhelms the loser, yet he believes that “any alternate theory, howsoever rational, as a result, sounds defensive and apologetic, and so is invalidated even before it is presented.”¹¹⁷ He (2017) insists, that proponents of Hindutva prefer the Out of India Theory (OIT) according to which, Indo-European languages spread out of India to the whole world, and their speakers the Vedic Aryans were “100 per cent Indian with no foreign contamination.”¹¹⁸ According to him, proponents of Hindutva believe, that all that is good in the world, including plastic surgery are products of the Vedic civilization, while all social evils like casteism originated from dark-complexioned non-Aryans. He dubs the OIT as a Hindutva supremacist ideology which claims that Indian-ness originated in the Vedas alone,¹¹⁹ and as Right-wing propaganda as ludicrous as flat-earth theory in America.¹²⁰

Discussing the various positions held by scholars in the Aryan Migration theory versus Out of India Theory debate is beyond the scope of this essay. Rather, we will try to see how much Pattanaik’s positions differ from that of the Hindu tradition he claims to represent. None of the Itihasas, Puranas or Shastras, refer to any specific Aryan race, or have any memory of a distant foreign homeland from where the Aryans supposedly came to India. This absence has been pointed out time and again by many prominent historians since the colonial times when these racial theories first started developing, along with Hindu spiritual giants like Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda, in the previous century. Sri Aurobindo insisted that the difference between Aryan and un-Aryan was “a cultural rather than a racial difference.”¹²¹ Swami Vivekananda dubbed the entire scholarship about Aryans coming from some foreign land and invading India as “fanciful ideas” and “pure nonsense.”¹²² Using a *Nyaya* framework, the present author (2019) has demonstrated how traditional authority figures (*aptas*) such as Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar have categorically rejected the Aryan invasion/migration theory.¹²³ A detailed analysis by Sastry and Kalyanasundaram (2019), of thirteen different Sanskrit sources to understand the context

and nature of the occurrences of the terms *arya* and *dravida* in Sanskrit literature, not only demonstrates the complete absence of any Aryan invasion/migration event in literary records, but also reinforces the traditional understanding of the term *arya* as a person of “cultural refinement and noble standing.”¹²⁴ Moreover, genetics may inform us about the makeup of certain individuals or populations and the migrations of certain people, but it cannot tell us the language spoken by the migrants or about the spread of languages. The relation between genetics and linguistics is no different from the relation between nasal index/skull-measurement based anthropology and race science a century ago.

Pattanaik trivializes the entire scholarship under the broad umbrella of Out of India Theory/Indigenous Aryan theory, by labeling all its supporters as proponents of Hindutva, and by characterizing them as fringe elements and chauvinists who believe in plastic surgery and nuclear wars in ancient India. He summarily dismisses the scholarship of numerous serious Indian, as well as Western scholars who have proposed different models for decades, without even a modicum of investigation, thereby demonstrating his own vested interests and intolerance towards alternate viewpoints. As early as 1930, Lachhmi Dhar had provided a linguistic model for an Out of India Theory. Sethna (1992) as well as Kenoyer (1997) theorized that Indo-European languages were spoken in a large area spanning north-western Indian subcontinent in the east and Caspian Sea to the west, and from there it spread to Europe.¹²⁵ Elst (1996) proposed a linguistic model explaining how Proto-Indo European languages developed in India, and how “other Indo-European languages left India at various stages, some of them preserving particular Proto-Indo-European linguistic features that were not preserved in Vedic.”¹²⁶ Apart from this, scholars like Nicholas Kazanas, Igor Tonoyan-Belyayev and Aleksandr Semenenko have also contributed significantly to OIT scholarship.¹²⁷

Shrikant Talageri’s comprehensive model explaining the origins of Aryan culture within India, and the spread of Indo-European languages in various waves, is yet to be challenged by any mainstream proponent of AIT. Based on an extensive investigation of the *Rig Veda*, *Avesta* and

archaeological evidence in terms of Mitanni inscription, Talageri provides a dateable model which reconciles dispersal of IE-languages as well as physical migration of tribes mentioned in Vedas and Puranas like *Anu* and *Druhyu*.¹²⁸ His two books *The Rigveda, A Historical Analysis* (2000) and *The Veda and the Avesta, the Final Evidence* (2008), along with his articles in various websites provide a comprehensive linguistic model explaining the OIT, and challenging the AIT/AMT. But Pattanaik, dismisses his entire scholarship and wonders whether Talageri knows Sanskrit or not.¹²⁹ Dismissing counter-theories without even bothering to examine them, and then indulging in polemics against opponents is but a single example of Pattanaik's questionable scholarship.

Hindu tradition is essentially indifferent to the question of Aryan invasion. Since the entire construct of Aryan race and Proto-Indo-European homeland was a product of 19th century European Indology, Sanskrit works produced before such time, have no reference to AIT/AMT. Vedic knowledge is considered *apaurusheya* and not contingent upon human inputs, and hence, unconcerned about issues like AIT/OIT. However, given that AIT was proposed and did develop into a full-fledged model in Western academia, many academic and spiritual teachers like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo defended their tradition by categorically rejecting the theory.¹³⁰ In this respect also, Pattanaik's position is diametrically opposite to Hindu tradition that he claims to represent.

Conclusion

As is evident, Pattanaik's understanding of Hinduism is significantly different from that of most of the well-known sampradayas, and practitioners of faith may find his view incorrect, bizarre and often controversial. His scholarship is replete with what any serious and unbiased researcher, would consider blatant falsehoods and gross misrepresentations. In terms of traditional Indian categories, Pattanaik may be classified as a 'Charvaka'. As noted earlier, historically Charvakas were bitterly opposed to the Vedic system as well as other *shramanic* sects. Therefore, a Charvaka claiming to represent and popularize

Hinduism, is as ludicrous and dangerous, as a Pakistani coach advising Indian cricket players on how to win the World Cup. By systematically sabotaging from inside that which they are supposed to represent they cause irreparable harm. Pattanaik is a very influential and powerful figure in the postmodern camp, and his characterization of Hinduism as a problem-ridden system with inbuilt discrimination, casteism, patriarchy, misogyny and racism is readily accepted by his millions of followers who do not doubt his academic credibility. His creative output in terms of popular books, TV programs, YouTube videos and sketches, inform the views of a large section of Hindus and non-Hindus alike, both in India and abroad.

As noted by Gerbner (1969), long-term exposure to extremely negative portrayal of a society, make people interpret social realities in a way which is closer to how they are portrayed in the media.¹³¹ Nabi & Riddle (2008) based on a study on the impact of different personality traits on perceptions of violence, concluded that people across the board are susceptible to either cultivation regarding personal vulnerability to crime or to cultivation regarding societal violence perceptions.¹³² Pattanaik's view of Hinduism as a violent and divisive system, therefore, becomes accepted as an authentic representation of Hindu dharma. In fact, it is likely that prolonged and consistent media exposure to the same biased ideas over and over again, may end up mainstreaming such views, as noted by Griffin (2012); as pointed out by Gerbner (1998) people then suddenly start finding resonance or similarities between their lives and what they see on screen.¹³³ Hinduism is perceived as being even more brutal, militant, divisive and patriarchal; and Hindus end up suffering from a greater sense of anxiety, pessimism, an inferiority complex and become more vehement in criticizing their native traditions.

Pattanaik's prejudiced deconstruction of Hinduism, Indian civilization and Indian nation state, ostensibly in the guise of academic freedom, not only feeds into academia, but also impacts the general populace through media, judiciary, civil services and the executive. Laws or policies enacted based on such questionable Western models of state and societies have real-life social and economic impact – often negatively impacting family structures, marriages, and relationship between

different groups. The fact that Postmodernism rejects grand narratives and by extension ideas like sovereignty and nation-states, is another challenge because the very legitimacy of India as a nation-state is challenged. India is seen as a battleground of different subalterns fighting against the hegemonic state, and each myriad group has its own idea of India. India is thus, not a single unified entity with minimum common principles and shared past as behooves a nation, but as a marketplace of competing identities, ideologies, narratives and histories. As Appiah (1992) points out, Postmodernism emerged as a response to Eurocentric hegemony attitudes masquerading as universalism, and not as a response to universalism per se.¹³⁴ It opposed the universality assumed by the white, male, heterosexual, Western viewpoint, and is therefore, a Western solution to a Western problem, which uses a Western map of categories. It is an etic perspective when it pertains to Hinduism, and Pattanaik is no different from a Western trained anthropologist or sociologist analyzing India and Hinduism. Malhotra (2016) says in this regard:

“Postmodernism has provided academic respectability to a whole generation of bright Indians to deconstruct their own nationality and civilization. The self-flagellation is made fashionable by association with West-based, ‘successful’ Indian scholars, and is encouraged through funding and career paths. India is to be replaced by a large number of ‘sub-nations’ according to this trendy theory.”¹³⁵

It is necessary for those with a dharmic inclination to not only understand why his interpretations of Hindu texts are radically different from traditional interpretations, but also, how such views have negative real-world implications. In the Hindu tradition, Ravana is often depicted as an extraordinarily brilliant but flawed figure. Ravana was a great devotee of Shiva, a scholar par excellence, and a great performer of *yajnas*, and in that sense, he was a Dharmic individual. Yet, because he ultimately followed the path of *adharma*, he lost the battle against Lord Rama. Today, in Hindu thought, Ravana is the embodiment of *adharma* and everything that is undesirable. If *dharma* is to be accepted as the absolute gold standard that defines Hinduism, then it is clear, that Devdutt

Pattanaik's scholarship promotes adharma in the guise of glorifying dharma. Just as Ravana kidnapped Sita and carried her away to Lanka, in the same way, Pattanaik has hijacked traditional discourses on Hinduism and popularized a flawed postmodern and Left-liberal compliant domesticated *avatar* of Hinduism. Many of the core ideas of Pattanaik are opposed to dharma and need to be brought to light systematically and with determination, in the same way as Sita was rescued from Lanka. In this essay, I have performed an initial *purvapaksha* of Devdutt Pattanaik's scholarship, identified issues where his views differ significantly from that of the tradition that he claims to represent and responded to some of his more bizarre and controversial claims. His scholarship must be understood for what it is – a nastika view of Hinduism masquerading as an insider astika view. It is imperative that traditional scholars of Hinduism and Sanskrit studies, understand and respond to his work and counter his misinterpretations and distortions.

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Notes

1. "Devdutt Pattanaik." devdutt.com. Retrieved April 30, 2022 (<https://devdutt.com/about>).
2. TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) is an American media company that organizes free online talks by experts in various domains under the slogan "ideas worth spreading." See: "TED Ideas worth spreading." ted.com. Retrieved April 30, 2022 (<https://www.ted.com>).
3. (TEDIndia 2009)
4. (Yadav 2017)
5. (Srinivasan 2021)
6. (Sen 2013)
7. "Devdutt Pattanaik@devduttmyth." Twitter. Retrieved April 30, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/devduttmyth>).
8. See: (Misra 2017a) and (Rajiv Malhotra Official 2018)
9. "So easy to fool idiots. Don't know difference between 'invention' and 'popularising'. Did your mother feed these @TlinExile bitches while menstruating ??????". Twitter. Retrieved April 30, 2022 (<https://i0.wp>).

com/www.opindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/fgf.jpg). Original Tweet has been deleted by the author.

“For her abuse is like 🤖 as she is into slapping insulting and BDSM. I support her perversion.” Twitter. Retrieved April 30, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/devduttmyth/status/1230117081569517569>).

“She will swallow the pea and the pee as part of BDSM.” Twitter. Retrieved April 30, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/onlinecolloquy/status/1223726656197660674/photo/1>). Original Tweet has been deleted by the author.

10. (Bhattacharjee 2019)
11. dhāraṇād dharma ityāhurdharmo dhārayate prajāḥ
| yat syād dhāraṇasaṃyuktaḥ sa dharma iti niścayaḥ ||
12. The meaning of dharma is narrower in spiritual systems of the Bauddhas and the Jainas, but they make use of the same nomenclature and epistemology as the parent system from which they evolved.
13. dhṛtiḥ kṣamā damo'steyaḥ śaucamindriyanigrahaḥ |
dhīrvidyā satyamakrodho daśakaḥ dharmalakṣaṇam || - *Manusmṛiti* 6.92
ahiṃsā satyamasteyaḥ śaucamindriyanigraḥ |
dānaḥ damo dayā kṣāntiḥ sarveṣāḥ dharmasādhanam ||
- *Yajñavalkyasmṛiti* 1.122
14. abhyudaya-niśreyase sādhanasattvena dhārayati iti dharmāḥ |
See: (Islampurkar 1893:63)
15. See: (Malhotra 2011) and (Paranjape 2021)
16. “Bharat ka Samvidhan.” Government of India – Legislative Department.
Retrieved April 30, 2022 (<https://legislative.gov.in/sites/default/files/Hindi.pdf>).
17. (Pattanaik 2015b)
18. tāḍṣo'yamanupraśno yatra dharmāḥ sudurlabhaḥ |
duṣkaraḥ pratisaṃkhyātum tatkenātra vyavasyati ||
prabhavarthāya bhūtānām dharmapravacanaḥ kṛtam |
yaḥ syātprabhavasāmyuktaḥ sa dharma iti niścayaḥ ||
19. purāṇanyāyamīmāṃsādharmasāstrāṅgamiśritāḥ |
vėdāḥ sthānāni vidyānām dharmasya ca caturdaśa ||

20. vedo dharmamūlam tadvidām ca śmṛtiśīle |
21. dharmajijñāsānām pramāṇam paramam śrutiḥ ||
22. (Pattanaik 2015b)
23. svadharmamapi cāvekṣya na vikampitumarhasi |
dharmyāddhi yuddhācchreyo'nyatkṣatriyasya na vidyate ||
24. ahimsā satyaṁ asteyaṁ śaucaṁ indriyanigrahaḥ |
dānaṁ damo dayā kṣāntiḥ sarveṣāṁ dharmasādhanam ||
25. (Pattanaik 2015b)
26. In the Yoga Sutra, the author has used vasana with samaskara. See: (Bryant 2009:423-424)
27. (Parthasarathy 2017:201-205)
28. See: Yoga Sutra 4.11 (Bryant 2009:423-424)
29. (Jayaraman 2013)
30. (Singh 2016)
31. (Raghavendra 2018)
32. tasmāddharmātparaṁ nāsti | athō abaliyān baliyāmsamāśamsatē dharmēṇa |
yathā rājñāivam | yō vai sa dharmaḥ satyaṁ vai tat |
33. From a lay practitioner's standpoint, there is hardly any difference between Vedic, Purnaik and Tantrik streams. He sees them as one integrated system. A typical *Nitya Karma Paddhati/ Puja* book anywhere in India, typically contains mantras and rituals from a variety of different sources. For example, the section of *Japa Vidhi* (rules for performing *Japa*) refers to *Nrisimha Purana*, *Yamala* (Tantric texts), *Acharabhushana* as well as Dharmashastra texts while enumerating the necessary japa practices (Mishra and Mishra 2017:44-46). Agama texts are the basis of temple construction – they describe in details eligible locations, image types, permissible materials, sacred dimensions and a host of other things.
34. (Chaudhuri 2012:28)
35. See: (Satprakashananda 1974:35-39) for a detailed discussion on the different pramanas accepted by various schools of Indian thought.
36. (Pattanaik 2006a:xiii)
37. (Pattanaik 2017a)

38. (Pattanaik 2006a:xiii-xxiv)
39. (DevduttMyth 2018)
40. (Pattanaik 2017a)
41. (Dasgupta 1932:79)
42. (Pattanaik 2017b)
43. dharmārthakāmamokṣāṇāmupadeśasamanvitam pūrvavṛttaṃ kathā-yuktamiti hāsaṃ pracakṣate |
44. (Pattanaik 2003:1-2)
45. (Pattanaik 2006a:xiv)
46. (Graham 2010)
47. For an easily accessible overview of Calvinism, Arminianism and Lutherism, and their positions on free will, see (Stewart 2018)
48. (Signoracci 2017:104)
49. See Chapter 6 “Hegel’s Philosophical Interpretation of Christianity” of (Stewart 2022)
50. Quoted in (Dundes 1984:248)
51. (Graves 1968:v)
52. (Leach and Fried 1984:778)
53. (Thury and Devinney 2017:3)
54. “Business Sutra: By Devdutt.” devdutt.com. Retrieved April 30, 2022 (<https://devdutt.com/books/business-sutra>).
55. (Hardon 1998)
56. (Molher Jr. 2009)
57. (National Geographic 2017)
58. (HISTORY 2016)
59. (Pattanaik 2006a:xii-xxv)
60. (Pattanaik 2017a)
61. (Sharma 2002:4)
62. (IPPAI SPEAKS 2015:00:13:40)

63. (IPPAI SPEAKS 2015:00:13:40)
64. See: (The Wire 2017) 00:25:25 onwards. Also: (Samim Asgor Ali Photographer 2016)
65. (Rajiv Malhotra Official 2019)
66. gaṅge ca yamune caiva godāvāri sarasvati | narmade sindhu kāveri jale'smin
saṃnidhiṃ kuru ||
67. (Pattanaik 2017e)
68. (Malhotra 2018:7-8)
69. (Pattanaik 2021a)
70. (Pattanaik 2021a)
71. (Jackson 1922:324-325)
72. Thompson (1999) mentioned in (Sharma 2002:2)
73. (Sharma 2002:4)
74. (Elst 2013)
75. See: "Hindu Marriage Act, 1955." India Code: Digital Repository of All
Central and State Acts. Retrieved April 30, 2022 (https://www.indiacode.nic.in/show-data?actid=AC_CEN_3_20_00004_195525_1517807318992&orderno=2).
76. (Pattanaik 2015a)
77. (Pattanaik 2021b)
78. (Pattanaik 2015b)
79. (Pattanaik 2016)
80. (Pattanaik 2011a)
81. (Pattanaik 2018)
82. (Badrinath 2019)
83. See: (Ilaiah 2009)
84. (Foucault 1980:131)
85. (Lyotard 1984)
86. (Butler 2002:18-21)

87. Smritis are texts which contextualize spiritual truth according to time, place and customs.
88. (TEDx Talks 2013)
89. (Zavada 2014)
90. te taṃ bhuktvā svargalokaṃ viśālaṃ kṣīṇe puṇye martyalokaṃ viśanti (Gita 9.21)
91. (Pattanaik 2020)
92. (Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar 1999:625)
93. (Lamb 2011)
94. (Pattanaik 2015a)
95. (Pattanaik 2017c)
96. (Pattanaik 2021a)
97. (Pattanaik 2017c)
98. (Pattanaik 2020)
99. (Lokeswarananda 1989:42-44, 76, 163)
100. (Pattanaik 2020)
101. (Kapoor 2005:1)
102. (Ram 1995:157)
103. (Pattanaik 2006b)
104. “When Brahmins in South India claim roots to families who once lived near Saraswati, Ganga (Kashi), Godavari or Narmada, does it mean they are immigrants to South India, or invaders? Does the story of Agastya moving from Kailas to South refer to Vedic migration or invasion?” Twitter. Retrieved October 18, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/devduttmyth/status/1169959879517147137>).
105. (Malhotra 2018b:66-67)
106. (Pattanaik 2019a)
107. (Nei 1995:6720)
108. (Pugach et al. 2013:1803)
109. (Rajiv Malhotra Official 2018)

110. (Pattanaik 2021c)
111. (Pattanaik 2021d)
112. (Vorster 2016:1)
113. (Misra 2017b:5-6)
114. (Misra 2017a)
115. (Pattanaik 2017d)
116. (Pattanaik 2019b)
117. (Pattanaik 2011b)
118. (Pattanaik 2017d)
119. (Pattanaik 2017d)
120. “The Aryan problem for Indians. No matter what scientific papers say: <https://thequint.com/voices/opinion/genomic-study-vedic-aryan-migration-dravidian-languages-sanskrit> LW will refer to Aryan migration as 'invasion' and 'conquest' RW will insist Out of India is truth, like Flat Earth theory in America. Let us accept this reality and be at peace.” Twitter. Retrieved October 18, 2021 (<https://twitter.com/devduttmyth/status/982098173257658368>).
121. (Bryant 2001:55)
122. (Bryant 2001:56)
123. See: (Mukhopadhyay 2019)
124. See: (Sastri and Kalyansundaram 2019:101-103) for more details. The authors have analyzed Ṛg Veda, Sāma Veda, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Brahmapurāṇa, Skandapurāṇa, Garudapurāṇa, Nāṭyaśāstra, Arthaśāstra, Manusmṛti, Abhijñānaśākuntalam, Kumārasambhavam, and Raghuvamśam. They have also demonstrated that there are no references to the word *drāviḍa* in any of the three books of the Tolkāppiyam—the Ezhuttadikaram, the Solladikaram and the Poruladikaram—the oldest surviving work on Tamil grammar, literature and linguistics.
125. (Bryant 2001:140-142)
126. (Bryant 2001:146)
127. (Elst 2019)
128. (Talageri 2019)

129. "Somebody asked me if Shrikant Talageri knows Sanskrit? I assumed he does since he quotes Rig Veda a lot. Doesn't matter really. But does he? In all videos he speaks only English. If someone can forward me a video of him speaking Sanskrit would love to forward on Whatsapp." Twitter Retrieved April 30, 2022 (<https://twitter.com/devduttmyth/status/1185791457405235205>).
130. See (Mukhopadhyay 2019) where I have summarized the positions of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda on the Aryan question.
131. See: (Gerbner 1969)
132. (Nabi and Riddle 2008:237)
133. See: (Griffin 2012) and (Gerbner 1998:180)
134. (Appiah 1992:58)
135. (Malhotra 2016:179)