

Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India

Author(s): Cynthia Talbot

Source: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Oct., 1995), pp. 692-722

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/179206>

Accessed: 31-01-2018 15:40 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Cambridge University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Comparative Studies in Society and History*

Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu–Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India

CYNTHIA TALBOT

University of Texas at Austin

The nature of medieval Hindu–Muslim relations is an issue of great relevance in contemporary India. Prior to the 200 years of colonial subjection to the British that ended in 1947, large portions of the Indian subcontinent were under Muslim political control. An upsurge of Hindu nationalism over the past decade has led to demands that the state rectify past wrongs on behalf of India's majority religion.¹ In the nationalist view, Hindu beliefs were continually suppressed and its institutions repeatedly violated during the many centuries of Muslim rule from 1200 C.E. onward. The focal point of nationalist sentiment is the most visible symbol of Hinduism, its temples. As many as 60,000 Hindu temples are said to have been torn down by Muslim rulers, and mosques built on 3,000 of those temples' foundations.² The most famous of these alleged former temple sites is at Ayodhya in North India, long considered the birthplace of the Hindu god Rama. The movement to liberate this sacred spot, supposedly defiled in the sixteenth century when the Babri Masjid mosque was erected on the ruins of a Rama temple, was one of the hottest political issues of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Tensions reached a peak in December 1992, when Hindu militants succeeded in demolishing the mosque.³

Earlier versions of this article were presented at the 1993 Western Conference of the Association for Asian Studies meeting in Mexico City and the 1994 national meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in Boston. I am deeply indebted to Richard M. Eaton and Phillip B. Wagoner, my fellow panelists on both occasions, whose ideas have so heavily influenced my own. Their editorial assistance is also gratefully acknowledged, as is the help of Susan M. Deeds.

¹ On Hindu nationalism, see Daniel Gold, "Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation," in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 531–93; Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

² Entry for the date 1688 in "Hindu Timeline," *Hinduism Today*, December 1994.

³ For discussion of the Ayodhya situation, see Asghar Ali Engineer, ed., *Politics of Confrontation: The Babri-Masjid Ramjanmabhoomi Controversy Runs Riot* (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1992); Ramesh Thakur, "Ayodhya and the Politics of India's Secularism," *Asian Survey*, 33:7 (July 1993), 645–64.

0010-4175/95/4393-5303 \$7.50 + .10 © 1995 Society for Comparative Study of Society and History

Today, Indian Hindus and Muslims see themselves as distinct religious communities, essentially two separate nations occupying the same ground. Hindu nationalist historians have projected this vision of separateness into the past, stating that Indian Muslims of the middle ages were a community totally different from, and implacably opposed to, the Hindu majority on religious grounds.⁴ Moreover, Indian Muslims are defined as a social group that is not indigenous, but of foreign, origin to the subcontinent. This implies that Muslims do not belong in India and have no real rights there. Secular Indian historians have decried this interpretation as a misrepresentation, a reading of the past that modern communal biases distort.⁵ Since most Indian Muslims have descended from converts and not from immigrants, how can they be cast as an alien group whose way of life differed radically from that of their erstwhile Hindu brethren? At least at the village level, secular historians argue that Hindus and Muslims shared a wide spectrum of customs and beliefs, at times even jointly worshipping the same saint or holy spot.

The dominant scholarly trend of the past ten years has emphasized colonialism's impact on identity formation. Because large-scale conflicts between Hindus and Muslims began under colonial rule, the emergence of broadly based community identities during the nineteenth century has been closely investigated.⁶ Communal violence was itself a British construct in some analyses because many other kinds of social strife were labelled as religious due to the Orientalist assumption that religion was the fundamental division in Indian society.⁷ There is a general consensus that it is questionable whether a Hindu or Muslim identity existed prior to the nineteenth century in any meaningful sense.⁸ Paradoxically, given the current criticism of the colonial sociology of knowledge and its emphasis on caste, most scholars of the colonial period feel that pre-colonial society was too fragmented by subcaste and local loyalties to have allowed larger allegiances to emerge.⁹ The primacy attributed to colonialism in forming contemporary Indian identities reflects the central role of modernity in current theories of nationalism and the emergence of nation-states. The work of Benedict Anderson, with its stress on the role of

⁴ For an older example of Hindu nationalist historiography, see R. C. Majumdar, "Hindu-Muslim Relations," in *The Struggle for Empire*, vol. 5 of *The History and Culture of the Indian People* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1957), 498.

⁵ Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia, and Bipan Chandra, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (Delhi: People's Publishing, 1969); Harbans Mukhia, "Communalism and the Writing of Medieval Indian History: A Reappraisal," in *Perspectives on Medieval History* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing, 1993), 33–45.

⁶ Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

⁷ Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁸ C. A. Bayly, "The Pre-History of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860," *Modern Asian Studies*, 19:2 (1985), 202.

⁹ Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*, 199.

print-capitalism, has been particularly influential in promoting the belief that identities uniting large numbers of people could arise only after a certain technological level had been attained.¹⁰

No one would deny that modernization has led to the sharper articulation of identities encompassing broad communities or that such identities have been “imagined” and “invented” to a large extent. Nor can we uncritically accept the primordialist view that postulates the inherent and natural roots of national and ethnic identity. However, modern identities do not spring fully fashioned out of nowhere. They commonly employ the myths and symbols of earlier forms of identity which may be less clearly formulated and more restricted in circulation but are nonetheless incipient cores of ethnicity.¹¹ Thus, this essay joins a mere handful of other works on India, both in its insistence that supra-local identities did indeed exist in pre-colonial India and that these identities themselves were historically constructed and hence constantly in flux.¹²

Understanding earlier forms of Hindu–Muslim identities may help us grasp the impulses leading to modern communal conflict. It even offers us the dim hope of defusing present-day tensions by demonstrating that the communities of the past were not identical to those of the present. For, as Sheldon Pollock states in reference to the present Indian situation, “the symbolic meaning system of a political culture is constructed, and perhaps knowing the processes of construction is a way to control it.”¹³ Particularly critical is the recognition that Hindu and Muslim identities were not formed in isolation. The reflexive impact of the Other’s presence molded the self-definition of both groups—indeed, the label Hindu was coined by Muslims to describe the people and culture of the Indian subcontinent. Only after prolonged contact with Muslims did the earlier inhabitants of India adopt the term. Although it may not be possible to reconstruct a detailed picture of Hindu–Muslim interactions in medieval India in terms of actual practice and behavior, we can and must recover the history of their mutual and self-perceptions.

In asking what it meant to be a Hindu or a Muslim in middle-period India, I focus on one particular region, Andhra Pradesh in the southeastern peninsula, from 1323 to 1650 C.E. This period commences with the collapse of Andhra’s indigenous Kakatiya dynasty under repeated military pressures from the Delhi Sultanate and ends at the point in time when the last major Hindu dynasty in

¹⁰ *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

¹¹ Anthony D. Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

¹² Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 12–24; John D. Rogers, “Post-Orientalism and the Interpretation of Premodern and Modern Political Identities: The Case of Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 53:1 (1994), 10–23; David N. Lorenzen, “Introduction: The Historical Vicissitudes of Bhakti Religion,” in *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action*, D. Lorenzen, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 2–13.

¹³ Sheldon Pollock, “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 52:1 (1993), 264.

Andhra was extinguished. In essence, the years examined span the period from the early stages of Muslim military presence in Andhra to ultimate Muslim dominance. The primary sources utilized consist of approximately 100 records inscribed in the Sanskrit or Telugu languages.¹⁴ The majority are situated within Hindu temple complexes, on stone slabs, pillars or walls. Because the vast majority of inscriptions document the endowment of land and other valuables to religious institutions, they are by nature the products of the propertied class. The perspective on medieval South India that we can obtain from these sources is strictly a privileged one, limited chiefly to the religious and political elites; yet it is from this strata of society that pre-modern ethnicity typically arose. By utilizing inscriptions, we can get some idea of how the powerful and influential segments of medieval Hindu society viewed Muslims and, conversely, how they viewed themselves.

THE MUSLIM AS DEMONIC BARBARIAN

The early centuries of Islamic expansionism left South Asia largely untouched. Although the lower Indus valley region of Sind in modern Pakistan was conquered by Arabs in the early eighth century, the effects of the Arab presence were restricted to the western portions of the subcontinent. From approximately 1000 C.E. onward, however, major centers of power in north-western India came under intermittent attack by armies of Turkic Muslims who were based in what is now Afghanistan. These raids into Indian territory culminated in the seizure of the Delhi region circa 1200 C.E. and in the establishment of a series of Islamic dynasties, collectively known as the Delhi Sultanate, that survived into the early sixteenth century. Much of North India came under the hegemony of the Delhi Sultanate in the early thirteenth century, while Sultanate expeditions began penetrating South India at the very end of the thirteenth century. The most momentous era of contact between Islamic and earlier peoples of the Indian subcontinent thus occurred between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.

The threat felt by Hindu society in the face of superior Muslim force during these initial centuries of interaction led to the political valorization of the ancient Ramayana epic, according to Sheldon Pollock's recent argument. Although the story of the hero-god Rama's conflict with the demonic king Ravana of distant Lanka had circulated widely throughout the subcontinent and beyond in the previous millennium, there are few signs of a temple cult of Rama worship prior to the eleventh century. Nor was Rama imagery often employed in the literature produced at royal courts. After approximately 1000

¹⁴ The inscriptions examined for this study, which all contain some reference to Muslims, were culled from a larger corpus of about 1,600 records issued in Andhra in this time period. The existence of another 400 inscriptions from the same era and place has been reported by the epigraphical branch of the Archaeological Survey of India, but the majority of these records are either heavily damaged or no longer available for consultation.

c.e., the situation changed dramatically with the spread of Rama temples and the frequent appropriation of Rama as a model for royal behavior. Pollock believes that this is because Rama's legendary battle against (and victory over) the forces of evil represented by Ravana's demon hordes provided a profound symbol for Indian kings beleaguered by Central Asian Muslim warriors entering the subcontinent in growing numbers. Unlike earlier conquerors or immigrants who had been gradually absorbed into Indian civilization, Indo-Muslims retained the distinctive religious and linguistic practices derived from the high culture of Islamic civilization. Because they were "largely unassimilating," Muslims were the Other *par excellence*, and their presence heightened Indian society's sense of self. Since the Ramayana epic was "profoundly and fundamentally a text of 'othering'," in Pollock's words, it was the perfect vehicle for demonizing these alien and dangerous newcomers.¹⁵

Inscriptions from Andhra provide little support for Pollock's thesis, as far as the Ramayana itself is concerned, for there are few direct references to the epic story. The demonization of Muslims that he argues constituted the medieval meaning of the epic can be perceived, however, even in the absence of explicit allusions to Rama. The most negative representations of Muslims in Andhra records appear in the immediate aftermath of the cataclysmic events of 1323 c.e., when armed forces of the Delhi Sultanate swept through the Andhra region and caused the collapse of the indigenous Kakatiya royal dynasty. Andhra warriors united under the Kakatiya banner had repeatedly fought the Turkic armies of Delhi during the previous twenty years. This was part of a larger conflict between the Delhi Sultanate and several kingdoms of peninsular India that began in 1296 with the Sultanate's attack on Devagiri, the capital of the Yadava dynasty in modern Maharashtra. Within a roughly quarter-century span, the four regional kingdoms of peninsular India—those of the Yadavas, Kakatiyas, Pandyas (of southern Tamil Nadu) and Hoysalas (of southern Karnataka)—disintegrated under the Sultanate's onslaught. By 1325, virtually all of southern India had been subdued by Muslim military force, and existing political networks were thoroughly disrupted.

The magnitude of the sociopolitical upheavals that the early fourteenth-century Muslim conquests induced in peninsular India is reflected in the tone of Andhra inscriptions issued soon thereafter. Particularly striking is the Vilasa Grant of Prolaya Nayaka, a long copper-plate grant written in Sanskrit and issued sometime after 1325 but before 1350 c.e.¹⁶ The beginning portion of the inscription praises the greatness of Andhra's previous Kakatiya dynasty and its last king, Prataparudra. The record then goes on to describe the

¹⁵ Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination," 282.

¹⁶ N. Venkataramanayya and M. Somasekhara Sarma, ed., "Vilasa Grant of Prolaya Nayaka," *EI*, 32:239–68. Parts of the inscription are translated in M. Somasekhara Sarma, *A Forgotten Chapter of Andhra History* (Madras: Ananda Press, 1945), 20, 35–36, 44–45.

hostilities between Prataparudra and the lord of the Turks, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq. After successfully fighting off the Sultan's army seven times, Prataparudra was eventually captured and died on the banks of the Narmada river in central India while being taken to Delhi as a captive.¹⁷ With the death of the righteous king, Kakatiya Prataparudra, the forces of evil became ascendant. In the words of the inscription, "when the sun who was Prataparudra thus set, the pitch darkness of the Turks enveloped the world."¹⁸ Various proofs of the wicked character of Muslim rule are next adduced—Brahmins were forced to abandon their sacrificial rites; Hindu temple images were overturned and broken; tax-exempt Brahmin villages confiscated; and cultivators deprived of their produce. Moreover, the vile Muslims were incessant in drinking wine, eating beef, and slaying Brahmins. And so, "tortured in this way by the demon-like Yavana soldiers, the land of Tilinga [Andhra] suffered terribly without hope of relief, as if it were a forest engulfed by a rampaging fire."¹⁹

Although some Hindu historians of Andhra have accepted the charges contained in the Vilasa grant as evidence of actual Muslim atrocities, the supposed depravity of the Muslims conforms too closely to a popular literary convention to be accepted as actual fact. The way that this inscription represents Muslims echoes the gloomy predictions of a body of Sanskrit literature known as the *puranas*, composed during the first millennium C.E. Among the contents of the major puranas is the history of India, narrated in the form of royal genealogies that end in the fourth century C.E. with the dynasties of the Kali age, the fourth and last era in the cycle of time. In the ancient Indian conception, truth and morality declined in each successive era, and one of the main symptoms of the Kali age's degeneracy was the growing strength of foreign dynasties. Because political power would increasingly pass into the hands of foreigners and non-royal Indians, the puranas prophesied a terrible future. People would no longer have respect for the Vedas, the central ritual texts of the Brahmanical tradition, in a world in which the hierarchical order of caste society was inverted through the ascendance of low-ranking castes over the ritually preeminent Brahmins.²⁰

¹⁷ The last two Sultanate expeditions into Kakatiya territory (in 1321 and 1323 C.E.) were led by the man then known by the title Ulugh Khan, who became Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq in 1325. The Khiljis had conducted several earlier campaigns against the Kakatiyas, beginning in 1303 C.E. Although this inscription indicates that there were eight Sultanate campaigns during the reign of Kakatiya Prataparudra, Muslim sources describe only five (N. Venkataramanayya, *The Early Muslim Expansion in South India* [Madras: University of Madras, 1942], 23–24, 31–43, 83–85, 99–108, 115–19).

¹⁸ Author's translation from Sanskrit; Venkataramanayya and Somasekhara Sarma, "Vilasa Grant," verse 21.

¹⁹ Author's translation from Sanskrit, "Vilasa Grant," verse 28.

²⁰ Aloka Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India; a Study in Attitudes towards Foreigners* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1991), 121–4 and 240–3; Romila Thapar, "The Image of the Barbarian in Early India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 13:4 (1971), 420–1.

The historical memories embedded in the puranas reflect the anxieties of their Brahmin composers and preservers in the period between the second century B.C.E. and the third century C.E.—a time when numerous peoples entered India from the northwest and, simultaneously, an era when the non-Brahmanical religion, Buddhism, achieved its greatest popularity. Similar fears of a loss of status resurfaced in the much later Vilasa grant of fourteenth-century Andhra, during another time of turbulence, when Brahmanical privilege was threatened. The Turks who invaded medieval Andhra are said to have oppressed Brahmins and suppressed religious practice, just as the earlier foreign invaders of the ancient period supposedly had done. It is notable that most of the evil acts attributed to Muslims in the Vilasa grant—confiscating villages endowed to Brahmins, destroying Brahmin-controlled temples, and ending ritual sacrifices performed by Brahmins—directly affected the Brahmin segment of the Andhra population. The majority of the people, the cultivators, are said to have suffered because their crops were confiscated, but this accusation is appended almost as an afterthought. The depiction of Muslim behavior in the Vilasa grant is formulaic, in other words, and follows a pattern expected of foreign groups in the Brahmanical tradition.

In the Sanskrit literature of ancient and medieval India, foreigners were frequently described as *mleccha*. The best English translation of *mleccha* is barbarian, for the word clearly connotes a lack of culture and civilization. By the end of the first millennium B.C.E., *mleccha* was applied not only to aliens but also to indigenous tribes—communities who were not part of the agrarian caste society of Indic civilization.²¹ As Romila Thapar has pointed out, *mleccha* was hence primarily “a signal of social and cultural difference.”²² It was a generic category into which all social groups lacking an adherence to Brahmanical norms were thrust. Among the early barbarians of foreign origin often mentioned in the puranas were the Yavanas and Shakas. Yavana, derived from Ionian, originally referred to the Hellenistic dynasties that controlled large areas of northwestern India and Afghanistan in the second century B.C.E. These Indo-Greeks or Yavanas were displaced by another invading group, the Shakas of Central Asia, in the first century B.C.E. The Shakas soon lost their hegemony over the entire northwest but remained entrenched in the Gujarat region of western India until the fourth century C.E.

The names Yavana and Shaka were revived in medieval India to designate Muslims, along with the characterization of barbarian.²³ As with earlier

²¹ Parasher, *Mlecchas in Early India*, 45 and 213.

²² Romila Thapar, “Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 23:2 (1989), 224.

²³ North Indian uses of these terms are frequent as well, see Ram Shankar Avasty and Amalananda Ghosh, “References to Muhammadans in Sanskrit Inscriptions in Northern India—A.D. 730 to 1320,” *Journal of Indian History*, 16 (1936), 24–26 and 17 (1937), 161–84; Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of the Delhi Sultanate* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Others, whether foreign invaders or indigenous tribal peoples, those following the Brahmanical tradition were not concerned with the specifics of Islamic belief. What was significant was their common failure to uphold the hierarchical order of caste or, in short, Brahmanical privilege. This is why Muslims could be called by the same names as barbarian peoples of the ancient period, such as the Yavanas or Shakas. In another transposition, the Muslim barbarian could be equated with all beings hostile to the Brahmanical order. And, thus, Muslims were demonized, that is, represented as being like the demons of ancient myth who engaged in endless battle against the forces of good. Assimilating Muslims to the mythological category of demons and substituting the names of various other foreign groups for them erased the distinctiveness of Muslims. All that matters in this perspective is their Otherness.

The very fact that Muslims could be incorporated into a generic category of barbarians presupposes an existing sense of identity, at least among the Brahmin composers of Sanskrit literary texts and inscriptions. A Brahmin, if not Hindu, consciousness clearly predated the Muslim entry into the Indian subcontinent. Upholding Brahmin preeminence in a hierarchical society was the critical feature of this orthodox identity. In this respect, I take my stance with scholars like Anthony D. Smith, who believe that there are shared elements which unify members of an ethnic group and that the attribution of alienness derives from a pre-existing sense of shared experience.²⁴ Others put more stress on the importance of boundaries in the formation of ethnicity, rather than on any commonly held content. For example, John A. Armstrong, following the Norwegian anthropologist, Fredrik Barth, thinks that groups define themselves primarily by exclusion. This explains how ethnic identities can persist for so long, even when the composition of the group changes.²⁵ Identity formation in praxis always involves both processes—the articulation of group boundaries that excludes others and the development of internal criteria for solidarity. These complementary aspects of ethnicity have been aptly described as “us-hood” and “we-hood,” respectively, by Thomas Hylland Eriksen.²⁶ In the case of pre-modern India, it is clear that a persistent core of Brahmin identity—a definite “we-hood”—had existed since ancient times.²⁷

²⁴ Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 49.

²⁵ John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 3–7. For more on boundaries between groups, see Kerwin L. Klein, “Frontier Tales: The Narrative Construction of Cultural Borders in Twentieth-Century California,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34:3 (July 1992), 464–90.

²⁶ “Nationalism, Mauritian Style: Cultural Unity and Ethnic Diversity,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 36:3 (July 1994), 566–7.

²⁷ Cynthia Kopley Mahmood, “Rethinking Indian Communalism: Culture and Counter-Culture,” *Asian Survey*, 33:7 (1993), 722–37; Wendy Doniger, “Hinduism by Any Other Name,” *Wilson Quarterly*, 15:3 (1991), 35–41.

ETHNOGENESIS IN A FRONTIER SETTING

Although the emergence of a sense of Hindu unity can not be attributed solely to the stimulus of an opposing Muslim community, it is widely recognized that prolonged confrontation between different groups intensifies self-identities. While I believe that the Brahmanical tradition had a degree of self-awareness before the presence of Muslims, it seems that a broader, more inclusive, Indic identity began to develop after the Muslim polities were founded in South Asia. One sign of this is the non-Muslim writers' adoption of the designation Hindu, which begins to figure in Andhra inscriptions from 1352 C.E. onward, in the title "Sultan among Hindu kings" (*Hindu-raya-suratrana*) assumed by several kings of the Vijayanagara empire.²⁸ To the best of my knowledge, this is the earliest dated usage of the term Hindu in any Indian language source. Hindu was originally the Persian name for the Indus river of modern Pakistan, but the Arabs first included the entire Indian subcontinent under the rubric, "the land of the Hind" (*al-Hind*). By the eleventh century, Hindu had come to mean "the inhabitants of India" in Persian, the literary language patronized by the Turkish warriors of the Delhi Sultanate.²⁹ When the early Vijayanagara kings of mid-fourteenth-century South India invented the title "Sultan among Hindu Kings," they were borrowing both a phrase and a conception of being Indian that had originated in Muslim society.³⁰

The fact that some non-Muslims called themselves Hindu in fourteenth-century South India does not imply that a unified religious consciousness developed in this period, however, contrary to the current Hindu nationalist view. Even among Muslims, the term Hindu initially meant a resident of India rather than a person holding certain non-Islamic religious beliefs. Not until the late thirteenth century did Persian literature written in India routinely use Hindu as a religious designation.³¹ When the Vijayanagara kings said that they were the sultans among Hindu kings, they were most probably declaring their paramount status among the non-Turkish polities of the peninsula. That is, to them Hindu meant Indic as opposed to Turkish, not "of the Hindu religion" as opposed to "of the Islamic religion." In this interpretation, the definition of the self as Hindu can be seen as a sign of an incipient Indic ethnicity—incorporating territorial associations, language, a common past and customs, as well as religious affiliation—for ethnicity is composed of numerous elements, unlike linguistic or religious identity. Which of the several aspects of commonality is most emphasized in any particular ethnic group

²⁸ *SII*, 16.4; *NDI* copper-plate 10 and Kanigiri 23; *EI* 13.1; N. Ramesan, "The Kraku Grant of Harihara II," in *Epigraphia Andhrica*, vol. 2, N. Venkataramanayya and P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, ed. (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1974), 73–87.

²⁹ Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 22–23.

³⁰ Andre Wink, *Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam*, vol. 1, pp. 190 and 5, of *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³¹ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 24–25.

can vary considerably.³² But the perception of sharing a whole set of traditions that differentiates one group from another is crucial to ethnic identity.

Support for my assertion that the fourteenth-century epigraphical meaning of Hindu was not primarily a religious one comes from the negative evidence that the terms Islam and Muslim (in its Persian variant, Musalman) never figure in Andhra inscriptions of the fourteenth through mid-seventeenth centuries. The Vilasa grant of Prolaya Nayaka instead uses the ethnic labels Turk (Turushka), Persian (Parasika), and Greek (Yavana) for Muslims. Nor do we get any allusion to Islamic religious beliefs or doctrine, other than the prohibition against eating pork. Inscriptions from other areas of the Indian subcontinent during the first centuries of contact are similarly silent about Islamic religion and the Islamic affiliation of the Turks.³³ The Turkic intruders were certainly considered to be a people other than the earlier inhabitants, but the sense of difference was not grounded primarily on a religious base.³⁴

If religion was not the central feature of a budding Hindu self-identity, how do we explain the demonic representations of Muslims in early fourteenth-century Andhra inscriptions? To answer this question, we must first recognize that these records arose in the context of an advancing zone of military conflict. In frontier conditions such as these, large-scale destruction of existing sociopolitical networks is common, resulting in widespread uncertainty and feelings of crisis. At the same time, because of the rapid change occurring in a frontier setting, new sociopolitical groups are coalescing. Hence, frontiers are prime settings for ethnogenesis—the formation of new ethnic identities.³⁵ With war almost endemic along an active frontier, people were often brought together through some type of military association. The Franks of the late Roman Empire, for instance, were basically a confederation of warriors assembled around kings claiming descent from the war god, Odin.³⁶

³² George de Vos, "Ethnic Pluralism: Conflict and Accommodation," in *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change*, George de Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross, ed. (Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1975), 9–18; Charles F. Keyes, "The Dialectics of Ethnic Change," in *Ethnic Change* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 7–10.

³³ Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities?," 77–78; Pollock, "Ramayana and Political Imagination," 286.

³⁴ In this early period, the majority of Muslims in India most probably were either foreign immigrants or their descendants. They were thus marked with many distinctive non-Indian features in areas such as dress and food, in addition to their separate languages and religious beliefs. As the number of converts to Islam increased, the initial sense of ethnic separateness must have faded, explaining why ethnic referents were largely discarded in favor of the religious label Musalman in the Andhra of later centuries. Very little research has been conducted on conversion to Islam in medieval South India, unfortunately, so it is not possible to pinpoint when the trend emerged.

³⁵ David A. Chappell, "Ethnogenesis and Frontiers," *Journal of World History*, 4:2 (1993), 267–75; Igor Kopytoff, "The Internal African Frontier: The Making of African Political Culture," in *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, Igor Kopytoff, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

³⁶ David Harry Miller, "Ethnogenesis and Religious Revitalization beyond the Roman Frontier: The Case of Frankish Origins," *Journal of World History*, 4:2 (1993), 277–85.

In the case of fourteenth-century Andhra, the armed incursions of the Delhi Sultanate toppled the upper level of the political system when the Kakatiya dynasty was extinguished. But since the Kakatiya polity was a loosely knit organization of warrior bands, the loss of the capital did not mean the elimination of all armed resistance.³⁷ Prolaya Nayaka and other warriors who were entrenched in the localities continued to fight the Delhi Sultanate, which was also beset with internal strife. As quickly as the tide of conflict had washed over Andhra, it receded. By the 1340s, Muslim control in Andhra extended only over its extreme western sector. What was left behind, in this frontier borderland, was a power vacuum.

Presumably, the principal Kakatiya military leaders either died or were captured in the last days of the kingdom's defense; for none of them appear in inscriptions issued after the demise of the Kakatiyas. Instead, a totally different group of warriors figure in Andhra inscriptions of the 1330s and later. Prolaya Nayaka, who had the Vilasa grant composed, was the first member of the Musunuri lineage to leave behind historical traces. Rising from what must have been a humble background, he carved out a sizable domain for himself in the chaos following the Delhi Sultanate's incursions. A second man, Vema Reddi, is likewise the first historic figure in the Kondavidu Reddi lineage. Unlike Prolaya Nayaka's lineage, which waned rapidly, the Reddi lineage dominated coastal Andhra for nearly a century. Both of these men alleged prior association with the Kakatiya dynasty, and their descendants proudly publicized this connection. While it is possible that they may have held minor positions under some Kakatiya subordinate, there is no independent testimony to corroborate this assertion. It is more likely that the claim to have served the Kakatiyas stemmed from a desire to bolster their own tenuous positions.

Additionally, both Prolaya Nayaka and Vema Reddi emulated a classically royal style of behavior by making generous benefactions to Brahmins. The explicit purpose of Prolaya Nayaka's Vilasa grant was to document a village endowment to a learned Brahmin in Kona-sima, a small area in the delta of the Godavari river that even today is the heartland of Brahmin scholasticism and ritualism in Andhra. Vema Reddi's Madras Museum Plates of 1345 C.E. was also a copper-plate grant recording the transfer of a village to a Brahmin recipient.³⁸ Several other upwardly mobile warriors of fourteenth-century Andhra similarly boasted that they restored tax-free villages confiscated by the Turks to their rightful Brahmin proprietors. Generally, these endowments were recorded in Sanskrit on copper plates, a traditionally kingly type of gift and inscriptional medium.³⁹

³⁷ Cynthia Talbot, "Political Intermediaries in Kakatiya Andhra, 1175–1325," *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 31:3 (1994), 261–89.

³⁸ J. Ramayya, ed., "Madras Museum Plates of Vema," *EI*, 8:9–24.

³⁹ People of less elevated status typically made religious gifts to temples rather than to Brahmins in this period, and had their benefactions recorded in stone at the endowed temple. The most widespread gift was that of milk-bearing animals to provide oil for temple lamps.

In their quest for acceptance as legitimate kings, chiefs like Prolaya Nayaka and Vema Reddi sought the most prestigious support possible. That included not only the use of the all-India literary language of Sanskrit, the patronage of Brahmins, and the memory of the previous Kakatiya dynasty but also the rich symbolism of the age-old fight against demons and disorder. This is the context for the Vilasa grant's demonization of the Turks. As previously described, this document bemoans the unfortunate state of Andhra after the Turks conquered the Kakatiyas. But all was not lost. The grant goes on to inform us that the depredations of the evil Muslims were halted by a savior, Prolaya Nayaka, who appeared almost miraculously, like an incarnation of the god Vishnu descending from heaven out of pity for the peoples' suffering. Prolaya Nayaka resurrected righteousness (*dharma*) by reestablishing Brahmin villages, reviving Vedic sacrifices, and restricting himself to the lawful portion of the peasants' crops in revenue. He thereby "purified the lands of the Andhras which were contaminated by sin because the Turks had passed through them."⁴⁰ By granting a village to a learned Brahmin, Prolaya Nayaka could thus represent himself in the Vilasa grant as restoring order to a world that the Muslim incursions had disordered. Vema Reddi also sought to portray himself in the Madras Museum Plates as a protector of Brahmins when he boasted that he had "recovered all the Brahmin villages that had been appropriated by the wicked barbarian kings since the time of Prataparudra, who was the jewel in the crown of the Kakatiya clan."⁴¹

The use of tropes drawn from the Brahmin tradition does not indicate that the upstart warriors of fourteenth-century Andhra were religiously motivated in their actions. Nor can we assume that the pejorative language of these inscriptions reflects a deep hatred of the Muslim, much less proof of Muslim atrocities. But in a turbulent situation, where earlier sources of authority had been destroyed, the newly risen warrior leaders were attempting to mobilize public opinion and gain allegiance. One of the easiest ways of doing this was by resorting to older Brahmanical conceptions of barbarians and their demonic behavior. Elsewhere outside of India, pre-modern political elites similarly employed religious myths and symbols because they were the most resonant images in a collective social memory transmitted largely by religious institutions and specialists.⁴² By accentuating the threat from Muslims and their strange alien ways, aspiring kings in fourteenth-century Andhra could successfully cast themselves in the role of defenders of the Indic social order, the most essential justification for kingly status. The representations of Muslims as demons may therefore have been instrumental (that is, secondary) to the primary goal of providing Andhra warrior lineages with a secure notion of self

⁴⁰ Author's translation from Sanskrit; Venkataramanayya and Somasekhara Sarma, "Vilasa Grant," verse 37.

⁴¹ Author's translation from Sanskrit in Ramayya; "Madras Museum Plates," verse 12.

⁴² Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 58–67; Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism*, 201–40.

and legitimate authority. In other words, the self-identity of an emerging warrior elite in Andhra was strengthened through recourse to traditional notions of the enemy Other.

COLLABORATION AND ACCOMMODATION ON THE OPEN FRONTIER

For the past several decades, historians have extended the frontier paradigm to many societies outside of the United States.⁴³ Yet, unlike its western counterpart, the Christian–Islamic frontier in medieval Europe, the Muslim–Hindu frontier in medieval India has been virtually overlooked. One exception is Richard M. Eaton’s work on Bengal.⁴⁴ He differentiates the political frontier of Islam, which moved eastward most rapidly, from the religious frontier of allegiance to Islam. A further frontier was an agrarian one in which forest land was brought under settled agriculture. Where the agrarian and religious frontiers coincided for the most part, groups only recently introduced to settled agriculture identified Islam as a civilization-building ideology, a religion of the plow. As a result, the majority of the rice-cultivating population in eastern Bengal (modern Bangladesh) eventually became adherents of Islam. Islam never attained such religious dominance in South India, however, where the number of Muslims remained fairly low. Nonetheless, Muslim regimes were embedded in the peninsula’s geo-political landscape after the early fourteenth century. The continuing South Indian political frontier between Muslim and Hindu can be characterized as “open,” since neither side had complete hegemony.⁴⁵

From the early fifteenth through mid-sixteenth centuries, a relatively stable balance of power was maintained between three major power centers in the peninsula. A Muslim polity of some sort occupied the northwestern portion of the peninsula in what is today Maharashtra and northern Karnataka. The first to be established was the Bahmani sultanate, which broke off from the Delhi sultanate in 1347. Subsequently, several other sultanates were formed out of portions of the Bahmani realm. Of these, the Adil Shahi kingdom of Bijapur and the Qutb Shahi kingdom of Golkonda had the biggest impact on Andhra. Opposed to the sultanates of the peninsula’s northwestern corner was the Vijayanagara empire. Under its first three dynasties, Vijayanagara controlled

⁴³ For example, Dietrich Gerhard, “The Frontier in Comparative View,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1:3 (1959), 205–29; Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay, ed., *Medieval Frontier Societies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Howard Lamar and Leonard Thompson, ed., *The Frontier in History: North American and Southern Africa Compared* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); William H. McNeill, “The Great Frontier: Freedom and Hierarchy in Modern Times,” in *The Global Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 5–63.

⁴⁴ *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). An additional exception is John F. Richards, “The Islamic Frontier in the East: Expansion into South Asia,” *South Asia* n.s., 4 (October 1974), 90–109.

⁴⁵ Leonard Thompson and Howard Lamar, “Comparative Frontier History,” in *The Frontier in History: North American and Southern Africa Compared*, H. Lamar and L. Thompson, ed., 7 and 10.

most of the southern portion of the peninsula, the area south of the Krishna river encompassing much of modern southern Karnataka, southern Andhra, and the Tamil country. Two successive Hindu dynasties—the Eastern Gangas and Gajapatis—held sway over the northeastern portion of the peninsula along the Orissa-Andhra border. The areas in between were hotly contested and vulnerable to military campaigns that could lead to temporary extensions of borders, but the nuclear zones of these respective powers remained intact. Within Andhra itself, the Muslim presence was confined primarily to the northwestern portion of the modern state's expanse.⁴⁶

In this context of relative stability, quite different representations of Muslims surface in Andhra inscriptions. Throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Muslims figure mainly as mighty warriors. Victories over Muslims were lauded in the heroic titles of Hindu kings and chiefs or praised in their genealogies. Sometimes specific Muslim kings or generals are named, but more often generic labels for Muslims were used. So, for example, it was said of Devaraya I of the Vijayanagara empire in 1465 C.E. that “even the powerful Turks were dried up in the fire of the prowess of this king.”⁴⁷ In this type of reference, one gets little sense that the Muslim is any more than a typical, if respected, foe. Inscriptional eulogies of the Tuluva kings of Vijayanagara's second dynasty list the Turk along with non-Muslim enemies conquered by the dynastic founder, such as the Chera, Chola, and Gajapati kings.⁴⁸ In other words, Muslims are depicted as respected political rivals, just like the other major Hindu powers of the peninsula.

Phillip B. Wagoner suggests that shifts in the balance of power affected the attitude of South Indian elites toward Muslims and delineates three phases on that basis. From roughly 1300 to 1420 C.E., Hindu polities were on the defensive, and an anti-Turkic polemic was widespread. During the second phase (from circa 1420 to 1565), however, greater appreciation of Turkic culture is expressed in Hindu literature. This state of affairs corresponds in time with the apex of the Vijayanagara empire. The sacking of the Vijayanagara capital by a confederacy of Muslim states in 1565 ushered in another period of defensive polemics. Yet by the time this third phase occurred, many aspects of Islamic material culture and administrative technique had been assimilated by the non-Muslim peoples of South India.⁴⁹ Inscrip-

⁴⁶ John F. Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 7–8.

⁴⁷ Based on translation of T. A. Gopinatha Rao, “Srisailem Plates of Virupaksha: Saka Samvat 1388,” *EI* 15:24.

⁴⁸ *SHI* 16.47; P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, “The Polepalli Grant of Achyutaraya,” in *Epigraphia Andhrica*, vol. 4, P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, ed. (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1975), 133–40; N. Ramesan, ed., “The Jadavalli Grant of Sadasivaraya,” in *Copper Plate Inscriptions of the State Museum*, vol. 2 (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1970), 21–28.

⁴⁹ Phillip B. Wagoner, “Understanding Islam at Vijayanagara” (Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Boston, April 1994).

tional data from Andhra confirms the general validity of Wagoner's thesis that the representations of Muslims varied according to the success of Hindu polities in restraining Muslim power. The anti-Muslim rhetoric of the Vilasa grant occurred during phase one, when Andhra society was in a defensive posture. But, from the early fifteenth through mid-sixteenth centuries, there was little dramatic change in the power balance, and tensions subsided momentarily. Hence, in this second phase, we witness no demonization of the Muslim. Rather than an anti-Muslim polemic, the inscriptional sources display a tolerance of Muslim warriors and political power. Along the quiet frontier of fifteenth-century South India, the Muslim presence was accepted rather than rejected.

Frederick Jackson Turner's vision of the frontier as an uninhabited wilderness subdued by heroic individualism has long been rejected in favor of an understanding of frontiers as broad zones in which two societies encounter each other.⁵⁰ Their contact may be violent in nature, particularly during the initial stages of encroachment by members of the intruding society. But it is not uncommon for frontier societies to maintain an equilibrium for considerable periods of time, once this first violent confrontation is over. At about the same time that Hindu-Muslim relations in South India were going through a tranquil phase, the frontier between the Iberian Christian kingdom of Castile and the Muslim kingdom of Granada was stationary (1369 to 1482 C.E.).⁵¹ Faced with the practical reality of coexistence, a number of institutions specifically designed to facilitate mutual transactions were developed there, including procedures for negotiating truces and redeeming captives. Among the elite, alliances were formed that ignored differences in religion, while common people sometimes crossed the frontier and even converted to the other religion. Knowledge of each other's ways was widespread—in effect, a substantial degree of acculturation had taken place.

Since a majority of medieval South India's population continued to be non-Muslim population even within the regions where Muslims were politically dominant, the two societies always overlapped. A certain amount of cooperation and collaboration is to be expected in this setting.⁵² The Muslim polities of the peninsula were dependent on Hindu officials and warriors for tax collection and maintenance of order in the countryside.⁵³ Poets of Andhra's

⁵⁰ Robert I. Burns, "The Significance of the Frontier in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, R. Bartlett and A. MacKay, ed., 307–12.

⁵¹ Jose Enrique Lopez de Coca Castaner, "Institutions on the Castilian-Granadan Frontier," in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, R. Bartlett and A. MacKay, ed., 127–50; Angus McKay, "Religion, Culture and Ideology on the Late Medieval Castilian-Granadan Frontier," 217–22.

⁵² For more positive coverage of Hindu-Muslim relations in medieval India, see H. K. Sherwani, "Cultural Synthesis in Medieval India," *Journal of Indian History*, 41 (1963), 239–59; W. H. Siddiqi, "Religious Tolerance as Gleaned from Medieval Inscriptions," in *Proceedings of Seminar on Medieval Inscriptions* (Aligarh: Centre of Advanced Study, Dept. of History, Aligarh Muslim University, 1974), 50–58.

⁵³ Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600–1818* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 41–58; Richards, *Mughal Administration in Golconda*, 18–33.

vernacular language, Telugu, were generously patronized at the court of the sixteenth-century Qutb Shahi kingdom that also issued many of its inscriptions in a bilingual format.⁵⁴ Conversely, Muslim expertise in military and administrative affairs was admired and adopted by their rival Hindu polities. The Vijayanagara army included contingents of Muslim on horseback, a tacit acknowledgment of Muslim superiority in cavalry warfare.⁵⁵ Many secular structures at the Vijayanagara capital exhibit an original Indo-Islamic style of architecture, complete with domes and arches.⁵⁶ Adaptations of Muslim dress were also featured on formal court occasions.⁵⁷ Nor did the ostensible demarcation between Hindu and Muslim prevent military and marital alliances from being formed across religious boundaries in this period of South Indian history. These centuries of contact and interaction also resulted in an influx of Persian and Arabic words into the Telugu language.⁵⁸ Many parallels can be drawn between medieval Spain and medieval South India, in terms of the prevalence of cultural adaptations and borrowing.

In one significant aspect, however, the Hindu–Muslim encounter in medieval South India differed from those of Christians and Muslims described by Charles J. Halperin.⁵⁹ Two of Halperin’s case studies involve the Christian conquest of Muslims (thirteenth-century Valencia in Spain and the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem), whereas the two others are examples of Muslim intrusion into Christian regions (the absorption of Byzantine territory by Arabs, Seljuk Turks and Ottomans; and the rule of the Mongol Golden Horde over Russia). According to Halperin, cultural synthesis and tolerance were displayed primarily when the intruders had not yet established total superiority. It was thus a function of the practical need for compromise. Cooperation violated the exclusivist thrust of Christianity and Islam, however, and so was never publicly discussed. In theory, the two groups remained implacably opposed, despite the considerable collaboration in practice. The ideology of silence concerning mutual influence and borrowing enabled medieval religious frontier societies to ignore the contradiction between theory and practice.

In contrast to the ideological negation of the other society found within

⁵⁴ K. Lakshmi Ranjanam, “Language and Literature: Telugu,” in *History of Medieval Deccan*, vol. 2, H. K. Sherwani and P. M. Joshi, ed. (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1974), 161–3. An example of a bilingual inscription is ARIE No. 48 of 1970–71.

⁵⁵ Stein, *Vijayanagara*, 29; K. Nilakanta Sastri and N. Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, 3 vols. (Madras: University of Madras, 1946), vol. 1, 106–8 and 267.

⁵⁶ John M. Fritz, George Michell, and M. S. Nagaraja Rao, *Where Kings and Gods Meet: The Royal Centre at Vijayanagara, India* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1984), 122–45.

⁵⁷ Phillip B. Wagoner, “‘Sultan among Hindu Kings’: Dress, Address, and the Islamization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara” (Paper presented at Rockefeller Humanities Workshop, “Shaping Indo-Muslim Identity in Pre-Modern India,” Duke University, Durham, NC, April 1995).

⁵⁸ K. Iswara Dutt, *Inscriptional Glossary of Andhra Pradesh* (Hyderabad: A. P. Sahitya Akademi, 1967), cxxv; Lakshmi Ranjanam, “Language and Literature: Telugu,” 172.

⁵⁹ “The Ideology of Silence: Prejudice and Pragmatism on the Medieval Religious Frontier,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26:3 (1984), 442–66.

Christian–Muslim frontier zones, an explicit scheme of accommodation can be found in the Hindu sources of medieval Andhra. This paradigm, which incorporated Muslim polities, appears from the early fifteenth century onward. It posits the existence of three major kings—the Ashvapati or Lord of Horses, the Gajapati or Lord of Elephants, and the Narapati or Lord of Men. Each element of the triad—horses, elephants, and men—forms a contingent in the traditional Indian army. Royal titles proclaiming a single king to be lord of the cavalry, elephant corps, and infantry are found elsewhere in India during the middle ages.⁶⁰ But late medieval South India was unique in dividing the various parts of an army and assigning each to a particular dynasty. The first of the titles to be assumed was Lord of the Elephant Corps, adopted by the Eastern Ganga kings of the Orissa-Andhra region as early as the thirteenth century.⁶¹ The subsequent kings of this northeastern portion of the peninsula (fl. 1434–1538 C.E.) used the epithet Gajapati, or Lord of Elephant Forces, so frequently that it has become their dynastic label in modern historiography. The heavily forested Orissa-Andhra coast had indeed been famous since ancient times for the excellence of its elephants. By a logical corollary, kings of northwestern India, where the best horses in the subcontinent were to be found, deserved to be called the Lord of Horses or Cavalry.⁶² A dynasty without access to superior elephants or horses—as was the case in the dry interior of South India—would by default gain the epithet, Lord of Infantry.

The conception of a geo-political universe divided into three realms, each ruled by a king laying claim to superiority in one contingent of an army, is first witnessed in an Andhra inscription of 1423 C.E.⁶³ The most detailed treatment is found in a Telugu chronicle of the late sixteenth century, the *Rayavacakamu*. In this work, the Lord of Men (Narapati) is the king of Vijayanagara, the Lord of Elephants (Gajapati) is the Orissan king, and the

⁶⁰ Phillip B. Wagoner, *Tidings of the King: A Translation and Ethnohistorical Analysis of the Rayavacakamu* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), 178 n. 49; Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions*, 56.

⁶¹ C. V. Ramachandra Rao, *Administration and Society in Medieval Andhra (A.D. 1038–1538) under the Later Eastern Gangas and the Suryavamsa Gajapatis* (Nellore: Manasa Publications, 1976), 85–86.

⁶² I thank Thomas R. Trautmann for bringing the correlation between the geographical location of these lords and the distribution of horses and elephants to my attention. For more on elephants in ancient India, see Trautmann, “Elephants and the Mauryas,” in *India: History and Thought, Essays in Honour of A. L. Basham*, S. N. Mukherjee, ed. (Calcutta: Subarnarekha, 1982), 263–6. For a discussion of the quality of horses during the medieval period, see Simon Digby, *War Horse and Elephant in the Delhi Sultanate* (Oxford: Orient Monographs, 1971), 21–31.

⁶³ The Kaluvacheru grant of the Reddi queen Anitalli, partially published in Somasekhara Sarma, *Forgotten Chapter*, 111–2. This Sanskrit inscription identifies the Lord of Elephants as the king of Utkala (a sub-region of Orissa), the Lord of Horses as the ruler of the territories in the west, and the Lord of Men as Kakatiya Prataparudra, the Andhra king. In this instance, the Lord of Horses in the west must refer to the Bahmani Sultanate, which controlled the territories to the immediate west of northern Andhra during the early fifteenth century.

Lord of Horses (Ashvapati) is the Mughal emperor of northern India. The Mughals had replaced the Delhi Sultanate as the supreme Muslim polity in the subcontinent in the first half of the sixteenth century. Previously, the *Rayavacakamu* tells us, the sultan of Delhi was the Lord of Horses. The text calls the Lords of Horses, Elephants, and Men the occupants of the “Three Lion Thrones,” as opposed to other petty kings who lacked legitimacy. Not only did the Lords of Horses, Elephants, and Men possess authority as the rulers of ancient and prosperous kingdoms, but they also exemplified royal righteousness. As the text’s translator, Phillip B. Wagoner, points out, the three Lion Thrones were regarded as emanations of the three main gods of Hinduism—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.⁶⁴

More commonly in Andhra sources, the Lord of the Horses designated not a North Indian Muslim dynasty but a local Muslim polity of the peninsula. At times the title was applied to the Bahmani sultans in opposition to the Gajapati kings of Orissa and the Narapati kings of Vijayanagara.⁶⁵ Or it could refer to any of the leaders of the successor states that arose after the division of the Bahmani Sultanate. In other words, the Lord of Horses was a designation that could signify any Muslim king. The Qutb Shahs of western Andhra even appropriated the title in a Telugu inscription of 1600 C.E., in which we are informed that King Mahmud was ruling from the Lord of the Cavalry’s throne at Golkonda.⁶⁶ The concept of a triad of lords must have been widely known, indeed, for a Muslim polity to use it in reference to itself. Allusions to the three lords occur as late as circa 1800 C.E., when Andhra village histories were collected under the direction of Colin Mackenzie.⁶⁷ The notion of a triple division of power is also embodied in the *Prataparudra Caritramu*, a Telugu prose history of the Kakatiya dynasty composed in the early to mid-sixteenth century.⁶⁸

The tripartite scheme of the Lords of Horses, Elephants and Men can be interpreted on one level as a pragmatic acceptance of the geo-political realities of the Indian peninsula during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. When the Bahmani Sultanate was established in 1347 C.E., the Muslim presence in the area had become firmly entrenched; it was now an inescapable fact. Yet the nature of this three-fold classification also suggests that Muslim polities were viewed as legitimate powers, ranking equally with the great Hindu dynasties of Orissa and Vijayanagara. Just as the Hindu Lords of Elephants and Men were granted divine sanction in the *Rayavacakamu*, which described

⁶⁴ *Tidings of the King*, 60–69.

⁶⁵ Andugula Venkayya’s *Narapati Vijayamu*, cited in Lakshmi Ranjanam, “Language and Literature: Telugu,” 165.

⁶⁶ *SI* 10.753.

⁶⁷ T. V. Mahalingam, ed., *Summaries of the Historical Manuscripts in the Mackenzie Collection*, vol. 2 (Madras: University of Madras, 1976), 36–37.

⁶⁸ C. V. Ramachandra Rao, ed., *Ekamranathuni Prataparudracaritramu* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1984), 59–71.

them as emanations of the gods, so too was the Muslim Lord of the Horses.⁶⁹ One Andhra inscription from the mid-sixteenth century claims that all three lords worshipped the god at Srisailam, Andhra's most renowned Shaiva temple.⁷⁰ Besides being valid in their possession of royal power, the Muslim kings were seen as an integral component of the political order. No member of this triad of lords could exist in the absence of the other two, in the same way that an army would be incomplete without the three contingents of cavalry, elephant corps, and infantry or that the universe would be stagnant without the triple processes of creation, preservation, and destruction. Far from being alien intruders whose very existence was abhorrent to the natural order of the universe, as the early fourteenth-century Vilasa grant portrayed them, Muslims were now represented as an essential element in the sociopolitical world.

THE GROWTH OF TELUGU ETHNICITY

While Muslims, on the one hand, were increasingly viewed as intrinsic to the peninsula, the identities of non-Muslim groups were at the same time becoming more firmly differentiated. These identities had emerged in the pre-Muslim era with two, largely congruent, focal points: language and territory. Andhra was understood as the territory within which Telugu was spoken. The association between region and language is clearly drawn even in the eleventh century, when the term Andhra language figures in reference to Telugu.⁷¹ It was in the eleventh century that the earliest extant Telugu literature was produced, although another century elapsed before numerous works were composed.⁷²

As the Telugu linguistic sphere expanded over time, the conception of Andhra's regional extent grew larger. At first the territory encompassed within the Telugu realm of Andhra was quite small. In the eleventh century, Andhra was defined as the region extending from southern Orissa down along the coast almost to the modern state's southern border. But the western boundary of Andhra was severely truncated, reaching only about halfway across the modern state.⁷³ This restricted notion of Andhra mirrors the paucity of Telugu

⁶⁹ Further expression of the idea that Muslim kings were god-like in the same manner as Hindu kings is found in an episode from the *Prataparudra Caritraamu*. This story, repeated in the later *Rayavacakamu* as well, concerns the Delhi sultan's mother, who one night viewed the sleeping bodies of her son and the captive, Kakatiya Prataparudra. The brilliant light issuing forth from their forms made her realize that both the Delhi sultan and Prataparudra were manifestations of the gods Vishnu and Shiva (Ramachandra Rao, *Prataparudracaritramu*, 66–67; Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*, 122–3).

⁷⁰ *SI* 16.175 of 1550 C.E.; unfortunately, only the first few lines of the inscription survive. It was issued by Santa Bhikshavritti Ayyavaru, the head of the Virasaiva monastery at Srisailam, who also asserts that the three lords were his disciples.

⁷¹ Iswara Dutt, *Inscriptional Glossary*, iii.

⁷² N. Venkataramanayya and M. Somasekhara Sarma, "The Kakatiyas of Warangal," in *Early History of the Deccan*, G. Yazdani, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 691.

⁷³ K. Sundaram, *Studies in Economic and Social Conditions of Medieval Andhra* (Machilipatnam and Madras: Triveni Publishers, 1968), 1.

inscriptions in the inland area. The expansion of Telugu inscriptions into the interior zone contiguous to the coast occurred during the heyday of the Kakatiya dynasty from the late twelfth to the early fourteenth centuries. The spread in the geographic distribution of Telugu inscriptions can be partly attributed to the increased tempo of agricultural settlement in interior Andhra. But the dynamism of the Kakatiya polity is another contributing factor. As the sphere of Kakatiya influence enlarged, Telugu inscriptions increasingly appear in areas where other epigraphical languages (and other political elites) had previously been prominent.⁷⁴ By the time Kakatiya Prataparudra was proclaimed the lord of Andhra in early fourteenth-century inscriptions, the conceptual dimensions of the region encompassed about three-quarters of the modern state's territory.

When Turkic armies entered peninsular India, the basic contours of the current Telugu linguistic community had thus already been established. The other language communities of the peninsula had similarly emerged in forms that roughly approximate modern distributions. Each of the four regional kingdoms conquered by the Delhi Sultanate in the early fourteenth century corresponded with a separate linguistic realm: the Marathi-speaking area in the case of the Yadavas, the Telugu area of the Kakatiyas, the Kannada area of the Hoysalas, and the Tamil area for the Pandyas. Despite losing their respective political centers under Muslim attack, the nascent linguistic identities of these four communities continued to evolve in subsequent centuries.

From the fifteenth century onward, in fact, Andhra inscriptions display a heightened sense of being Telugu. Whereas earlier references occurred in isolation, Telugu identity was now frequently juxtaposed on other regional and ethnic identities. One inscription dated 1485 C.E., for instance, appends a phrase at the end to state that "if an Orissan king, a Turkic king, a king of Karnataka, a Telugu king, or anyone who works for these kings should seize these (donated) cows, they will incur the sin of cow-killing and of Brahmin-killing."⁷⁵ Similar verses are widespread in Andhra inscriptions, the one difference being that the Muslim king is generally threatened with a more relevant curse. For example, an inscription from the early sixteenth century warns, "if any Orissan king or Telugu king should violate this charity, they will incur the sin of killing cows on the banks of the Ganges; if any Turkic kings should violate (this charity), they will incur the sin of eating pork."⁷⁶ Greater contact

⁷⁴ Prior to the Kakatiya period, most inscriptions from western Andhra were composed in Kannada (the language of the Karnataka region to the west), while inscriptions in southern Andhra were often composed either in Kannada or Tamil (the language of Tamil Nadu to the south). The description of the geographical distribution of Telugu inscriptions is derived from my own work in progress. It is based on the mapping of roughly six thousand inscriptions issued within the boundaries of modern Andhra Pradesh between 1000 and 1650 C.E.

⁷⁵ Author's translation from Telugu, ll. 12–15 of *SHI* 4.659.

⁷⁶ Author's translation from Telugu, ll. 157–162 of *EI* 6.22.

with other areas and polities of the peninsula may account for the increasing tendency to formulate Telugu identity in terms of its others.

In twentieth-century India, linguistic allegiance has been a highly charged political issue capable of mobilizing millions. Popular movements demanding homelands for particular language communities have resulted in the redrawing of many administrative boundaries to correspond with linguistic distributions. Echoing the modernist view of Benedict Anderson, scholars of colonial India have recently cast doubt on the existence of these language communities prior to the nineteenth century. Both David Washbrook and David Lelyveld believe that bounded linguistic populations arose out of the British colonial project to count, classify, and control Indian society.⁷⁷ The nineteenth-century preoccupation with language as the cementing bond of social relations and the belief that races or nations were situated in set territorial locations were the underlying impetus. Indians gradually adopted their colonizer's view of language and incorporated it as one of the bases of a new social identity, according to Lelyveld and Washbrook.

To be sure, in the days before mass communication, the perception of shared commonalities would be far more attenuated than today, whether we are speaking of language, caste, or religious or regional affiliation. The tendency to identify one's spoken tongue as belonging to a major language recognized by linguists is certainly a new phenomenon. Moreover, the compilation of dictionaries, production of textbooks, and development of print, radio, and film media since the nineteenth century has led to considerable standardization of India's various languages. But even today, bounded linguistic populations are more of an abstraction than an observable reality. As in pre-colonial times, in modern India the dialects spoken at home are numerous, the line of demarcation between one language and another vague, and multi-lingualism widespread.

More relevant than the question of whether territorially based language communities existed in pre-colonial India is the issue of linguistic allegiance. Certainly the number of people who thought of themselves as members of a particular linguistic culture may have been quite small in the pre-colonial period. The depth of their attachment to a language may also have been relatively shallow when compared to the situation in modern India. As Sudipta Kaviraj observes:

Earlier communities tend to be fuzzy in two ways in which no nation can afford to be. First, they have fuzzy boundaries because some collective identities are not territorially

⁷⁷ David Washbrook, "'To Each a Language of His Own': Language, Culture, and Society in Colonial India," in *Language, History and Class*, Penelope J. Corfield, ed. (London: Blackwell, 1991), 179–203; David Lelyveld, "The Fate of Hindustani: Colonial Knowledge and the Project of a National Language," in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 189–214.

based. . . . Secondly, part of this fuzziness of social mapping would arise because traditional communities, unlike modern ones, are not enumerated.⁷⁸

Because their boundaries were far more blurred, pre-modern communities were less likely to engage in collective action than modern ones. That is, they were not self-conscious to the same extent as in modern nationalisms, with their focused and intense allegiances.

The sharply articulated identities of modern nationalism are, thus, far from being the only forms of collective identity. It is untenable to argue that there was no sense of linguistic community in pre-colonial India just because the population involved was a limited or ill-defined one. To be fair, Lelyveld mentions the earlier histories of literary languages, while Washbrook concedes that pre-modern grammarians viewed languages as objects that could be classified.⁷⁹ But their main intention is to refute the notion of language communities as inherent natural entities by stressing the impact of nineteenth-century ideology and technology. In the process, they downplay the importance of pre-modern linguistic identities, at least at the literary level. Although peasants may not have consciously named the language they spoke, poets and scribes were indisputably aware of their linguistic heritage, as were the wealthy patrons who financed their literary production.

In pre-colonial India, as in other pre-modern societies, social identities were most strongly developed among the privileged. Smith describes the elite sense of belonging in medieval Europe as “lateral-aristocratic” ethnicity in contrast to the “vertical-demotic” ethnicity of the modern period.⁸⁰ Medieval European ethnicity was centered in the aristocratic class, spanning geographic boundaries but staying within the strict confines of the upper social strata. Ethnicity in late medieval South India must have also been an elite phenomenon. Certainly, the social identities displayed in inscriptions pertain to the propertied class, the only people who could commission expensive records to document their religious endowments. They were no less meaningful for being elite in nature, nonetheless. A case in point is the Kakatiya dynasty’s switch in epigraphic usage. While the Kakatias were nominally subordinate to the Western Chalukya dynasty of Karnataka, the bulk of their records was inscribed in Kannada, the language of Karnataka. Once the Kakatias ceased acknowledging Chalukyan overlordship, they immediately stopped issuing inscriptions in Kannada.⁸¹ The Kakatiya shift to Telugu and Sanskrit inscrip-

⁷⁸ Sudipta Kaviraj, “The Imaginary Institution of India,” *Subaltern Studies VII*, Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey, ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 26. Kaviraj does not believe that language formed the basis for pre-modern communities in India, however. Whatever the situation might have been in the Bengali-speaking area, which was Kaviraj’s case study, I believe that the medieval South Indian evidence sufficiently demonstrates the existence of elite linguistic identities there.

⁷⁹ Lelyveld, “Fate of Hindustani,” 201; Washbrook, “To Each a Language,” 180.

⁸⁰ Smith, *Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 79–84.

⁸¹ Early Kakatiya records are *HAS* 13.6, 7, 12; *IAP-K* nos. 14, 15, 19, 22, 24; *IAP-W* nos. 14,

tions had a certain political significance, of course, but was also a symptom of a solidifying Telugu ethnicity.

Linguistic affiliation was a large, but not the only, component in the formation of South Indian ethnicities. Region of residence and religion were also constituent elements reflected in the categories of Turk, Orissan, or of the Karnataka region (sometimes “the land of the Kannada language”⁸²) found in Andhra inscriptions. But, despite the growth of an Andhra identity derived at least partially from linguistic unity, the land of the Telugu speakers was politically fragmented after the fall of the Kakatiya capital, Warangal, in 1323. In the absence of a regional kingdom that was exclusively and uniquely Telugu, Andhra warriors increasingly relied on the memory of the Kakatiyas to construct a legitimizing past that provided them with both authority and a feeling of community. It is this emergence of a shared history that most clearly justifies calling the medieval Telugu sense of self an ethnic identity. And for Andhra society of later centuries, the Telugu past led straight back to the Kakatiyas.⁸³

A striking illustration of the role of the Kakatiyas in Andhra historical consciousness is provided by the man known as Chittapa Khana. Although his name is a Sanskritized form of the Persian name, Shitab Khan, Chittapa Khana is called an infidel in Muslim chronicles and was clearly not a Muslim. He owed his appointment as governor of the northern Andhra territories that had formed the core of the Kakatiya polity to Humayun Shah of the Bahmani Sultanate.⁸⁴ In 1504 C.E., Chittapa Khana cast off his allegiance to the Bahmanis and portrayed himself as an independent monarch in an inscription situated at Warangal, the former Kakatiya capital. Like Prolaya Nayaka and Vema Reddi of the fourteenth century, Chittapa Khana’s antecedents are obscure. To secure royal prestige, Chittapa Khana drew an explicit linkage with the Kakatiyas of two centuries past in the statement:

The great and prosperous king Chittapa Khana . . . captured the beautiful city of Ekashilapuri [Warangal] formerly ruled by a number of virtuous kings belonging to the Kakatiya family, for the sake of worshipping the gods and Brahmins.⁸⁵

In effect, Chittapa Khan was engaged in a form of cultural revival, for he tried to recreate the greatness of the Kakatiyas—the Golden Age of Andhra warriors—through his own acts. The purpose of the inscription is to com-

22, 25, 29. Later Kakatiya inscriptions are *ARIE* no. 126 of 1958-59; *HAS* 13.3, 56; *IAP-W* no. 37; *SII* 4.1071, 1095, 1107; *SII* 6.212.

⁸² *SII* 6.796.

⁸³ For some other historical memories of the Kakatiyas, see Talbot, “Political Intermediaries,” 281–3.

⁸⁴ Hirananda Sastri, *Shitab Khan of Warangal*, Hyderabad Archaeological Series No. 9 (Hyderabad: H. E. H. the Nizam’s Government, 1932), 3 and 10.

⁸⁵ Based on translation of *Ibid.*, 23.

memorate the restoration of two divine images. One was Krishna “who was removed from his place by the strength of the wicked.” The other was the goddess who “was the font of prosperity [Lakshmi] for the throne of the Kakatiya kingdom” but “had been removed from her place by the wicked Turks.”⁸⁶ Although it is unlikely that these images actually dated back to the Kakatiya period, that is clearly irrelevant to the symbolic meaning of Chittapa Khana’s acts, which are intended to close the gap in historical time between the present and the pre-Muslim past. The inscription ends with a vision of Chittapa Khana daily worshipping the Warangal deity who was the protector of the Kakatiya dynasty.

Even in an era of relative political stability, when Muslims were widely depicted as a natural element in the South Indian sociopolitical universe, the symbolism of Muslims as evil enemies of the gods and of Brahmins could still be resonant. Chittapa Khana, in declaring himself and Warangal free from the nominal control of a Muslim polity, utilized the longstanding Brahmanical trope of the barbarian. Yet, the primary intent of Chittapa Khana’s inscription is not to denigrate the Muslim *per se* but to evoke continuity with a glorious Telugu past in order to substantiate his own claim to kingship. The pejorative characterization of Muslims in this instance is a by-product of the process of identity formation. Muslims are what Telugu warriors are *not*, but the main emphasis is on what a true Telugu warrior *is*—a spiritual descendant, so to speak, of the Kakatiya dynasty.

The shifting use of the title Lord of Horses for both a North Indian Muslim polity and for one of the smaller Muslim polities of the peninsula indicates that non-Muslims did have some sense of Muslims as a distinct and unified group, regardless of their exact political affiliation. From a military perspective, of course, the various Muslim polities could indeed have been perceived as sharing a similar technology and emphasis on cavalry, justifying grouping them together in one larger category. Andhra inscriptions also use the various ethnic labels of Turk, Persian, and Arab interchangeably in reference to any given group of Muslims. The effacement of ethnic differences is further evidence that Muslims were seen as composing one common category. Conversely, the term Hindu continued to occasionally appear in inscriptions in opposition to Turk.⁸⁷ But in the peninsular India of circa 1500 C.E., more relevant than any shared Hindu identity were the emerging identities based on common language and region of origin. And in the evolution of these incipient ethnicities, the construction and articulation of a common past played a significant part. Excluding the Muslim other was one way through which Telugu ethnicity was consolidated, but the evoking of a shared history centered on the Kakatiyas was an equally important means.

⁸⁶ Based on translation of *Ibid.*, 24. P. V. Parabrahma.

⁸⁷ *SI* 26.622; P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, *Select Epigraphs of Andhra Pradesh*, Andhra Pradesh Archaeological Series No. 31 (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, n.d.), 76–77.

TEMPLE DESECRATION

The balance of power between Hindu and Muslim polities in South India was abruptly shattered in 1565 when the peninsular sultanates launched a combined attack against Vijayanagara, leading to its defeat and the sacking of the capital city in Karnataka. The Vijayanagara kings of the fourth or Aravidu dynasty retrenched in southern Andhra but saw the territory under their control diminish rapidly over the next ninety years. The central portion of coastal Andhra fell to one Muslim polity—the Qutb Shahs of Golkonda/Hyderabad—in the 1580s. Successful campaigns in southern Andhra were conducted in the 1620s by another Muslim polity, that of the Adil Shah of Bijapur, and again in the 1640s by the Qutb Shahi armies. The last Vijayanagara king, Sriranga III, eventually had to flee the region entirely; and by 1652 C.E. all of Andhra was under the hegemony of Muslim polities.

After 1565, therefore, we witness a second rapid expansion of frontiers, paralleling in enormity the events of the early fourteenth century. For a second time, existing political networks were shattered, and several new Telugu warrior lineages came to prominence in Andhra that were nominally subordinate to the tattered remnants of the Vijayanagara imperium. Somewhat surprisingly, Andhra inscriptions of this period are silent on the catastrophic events of 1565. Nor do they rail against the demonic Muslim enemy, unlike what we find in the fourteenth century.⁸⁸ One reason for the absence of anti-Muslim rhetoric may simply be the small quantity of inscriptions issued in Andhra after 1565.⁸⁹ This paucity of inscriptions is itself a consequence of the political instability that plagued Andhra in the decades following the Vijayanagara defeat. With anarchistic conditions prevailing, temple patronage declined abruptly, and therefore few donative inscriptions were issued. Worship may have been suspended at many Hindu temples due to the loss of lands and valuables that supported regular temple services.

At several larger temple complexes with sufficient prestige and resources to survive in the long run, there are reports of disturbances in the course of continuing Muslim expansion in Andhra after 1565. From these reports and other evidence, it appears that temple desecration was on the rise during this third phase of the Hindu–Muslim encounter in Andhra. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to gauge the extent of damage wrought on Hindu temples without systematic and unbiased study of the subject, a project that has not yet

⁸⁸ However, other types of sources do engage in an anti-Muslim polemic. Notable among these are the *Rayavacakamu* (Wagoner, *Tidings of the King*) and the village, family, and temple histories (*kaifiyat*) collected by Colin Mackenzie around 1800, many of which mention anarchy and destruction in the decades after the battle of 1565 (Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources*, 2:245–50).

⁸⁹ In contrast to the 862 records originating in the eight decades between 1490 and 1570 C.E., the eighty-year span from 1570 to 1650 C.E. yields only 318 inscriptions—a mere third of the earlier total.

been conducted.⁹⁰ My general impression, based upon inscriptions and the secondary literature, is that some Hindu sites in Andhra were demolished in the fourteenth century in the initial Turkic conquest and shortly thereafter. Most notable among these are the temples in the Kakatiya capital, Warangal.⁹¹ However, there are few verifiable cases of Andhra temple destruction or desecration in the following period, when the balance of power was relatively stable (Wagoner's phase two from 1420 to 1565 C.E.). Maharashtra underwent a similar experience—temple destruction occurred there primarily in the fourteenth century.⁹²

The long lull in attacks on Hindu temples seems to have ended in the late sixteenth century.⁹³ The best-documented incident pertains to the popular Ahobilam temple (Kurnool district). An inscription dating from 1584 C.E. tells us that Ibrahim of the Qutb Shahi dynasty captured the Ahobilam temple with the help of the Hindu Hande chiefs in 1579 and held it for five or six years.⁹⁴ The record commemorates the recapturing of the site by a Vijayanagara subordinate who is said to have restored the temple to its past glory. The traditional account of Ahobilam additionally states that those jewels and silver or gold vessels belonging to the temple that survived a raid in 1565 were looted in the 1579 attack.⁹⁵ Local folklore reports that the main Ahobilam image was brought before Ibrahim Qutb Shah, who vomited blood and died as a result.⁹⁶

Evidence also exists for the plundering of another major Andhra temple site, Srikurman (Visakhapatnam district). An inscription issued by a Muslim general of the Qutb Shahs in 1599 C.E. claims that he damaged the temple and

⁹⁰ At present, lists of sites where Hindu temples were destroyed and mosques or tombs (*dargah*) built in their place are being circulated by nationalist scholars. The data upon which these lists are based are not always provided, making the evidence suspect. Muslim chronicles and Perso-Arabic inscriptions are sometimes utilized, but neither of these types of sources is totally reliable. Sita Ram Goel is one scholar compiling such lists, see his "Let the Mute Witnesses Speak," in *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them, A Preliminary Survey*, Arun Shourie et al., ed. (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1990), 88–181; and *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them, Pt. 2 The Islamic Evidence* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1991). Thanks are due to Richard M. Eaton for acquainting me with these works.

⁹¹ George Michell, "City as Cosmogram: The Circular Plan of Warangal," *South Asian Studies*, 8 (1992), 12.

⁹² Sherwani, "Bahmanis," 208.

⁹³ Although I believe Goel's lists are greatly inflated, this statement would be true even by his reckoning. In the approximately 140 sites of temple desecration that he records for Andhra Pradesh ("Let the Mute Witnesses Speak," 88–95), the dates for the alleged incidents are given in sixty instances. Five date from the fourteenth century (phase one), six come from phase two, and nineteen date from 1565 to 1650 C.E. (phase three). The remaining thirty or so cases stem from the century after 1650, with a notable bunching of incidents in the late 1600s, when the Mughal empire was absorbing the former Qutb Shahi kingdom of Golkonda.

⁹⁴ *SIH* 16.296.

⁹⁵ The Ahobilam Kaifiyat is summarized in Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources of Vijayanagara History*, 3:246.

⁹⁶ P. Sitapati, *Sri Ahobilam Narasimha Swamy Temple* (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1982), 15.

constructed a mosque there.⁹⁷ The temple can not have suffered substantial destruction, however, as this inscription remains on its walls alongside many others. Furthermore, a mere five years later, another subordinate of the Qutb Shahs—this time a Hindu chief—recorded his gift of a village to the temple.⁹⁸ Srisailam, a famous temple in the Nallamallai hills, seems to have been affected several decades later, when the territory surrounding it fell under Muslim control. Around 1625 C.E., the Hindu chief who ruled this area of Andhra's interior was defeated by Adil Shahi forces from Bijapur in Karnataka. Srisailam's traditional account tells us that this led to the appropriation of Brahmin and monastic lands, forcing many people to leave the area and resulting in curtailment of ritual services.⁹⁹ At Ahobilam, also affected by this particular advance of Muslim forces, temple valuables were again taken away.¹⁰⁰

Two salient points arise out of the reports of temple desecration at Ahobilam, Srikurman, and Srisailam. The first is that all the incidents took place in contested territory. Ahobilam was plundered once when the Qutb Shahi forces were on a campaign against Vijayanagara and a second time when Adil Shahi armies were moving further into southern Andhra. The Srikurman incident occurred during a Qutb Shahi expedition into northeastern Andhra. At no time do we get reports of temples well within Muslim spheres of influence being looted or damaged, only of those situated along the lines of conflict. Temple desecration in Andhra is thus a phenomenon of the moving frontier, an activity occurring primarily in the highly charged moments of armed encounter. Richard M. Eaton believes that temple destruction by Turks and other Muslim rulers throughout India was motivated by political, far more than religious, considerations. The temples destroyed lay either in kingdoms in the process of being conquered or within the realms of rebels. Because a royal temple symbolized the king's power in Hindu political thought, destroying it signified that king's utter humiliation. The characterization of Muslims as rabid iconoclasts driven to destroy idols because of religious ideology is far from the truth, in Eaton's opinion.¹⁰¹ The situation in medieval Andhra appears to support Eaton's thesis.

A second implication of the Andhra evidence is that violence to temples often only involved the appropriation of movable property rather than the

⁹⁷ *SI* 5.1312.

⁹⁸ *SI* 10.755 and *SI* 5.1260. The same chief additionally granted a village to the famous temple at Simhacalam, also in northeastern Andhra. This leads K. Sundaram to surmise that the Simhacalam temple had been plundered at the same time as Srikurman (*The Simhacalam Temple* [Simhacalam, A.P.: Simhacalam Devasthanam, 1969], 33 and 104).

⁹⁹ P. Sitapati, *Srisailam Temple Kaifiyat*, 2 vols. (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1981), 13.

¹⁰⁰ Sitapati, *Ahobila Temple*, 16; Nilakanta Sastri and Venkataramanayya, *Further Sources*, 3:246.

¹⁰¹ "Temple Desecration and the Image of the Holy Warrior in Indo-Muslim Historiography" (Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Boston, April 1994).

actual demolishing of idols and buildings. The Andhra incidents described above dating from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are instances of temple desecration and not actual destruction, unlike the situation during the fourteenth century. However, the symbolic value of temple desecration was far greater than the material loss experienced and was exploited by both Hindus and Muslims. At Ahobilam, for example, the recapturing of the site in 1584 is represented as a major objective of Vijayanagara strategy, and its successful conclusion is celebrated through the conferral of temple honors. The Srikurman case, on the other hand, clearly illustrates the gap between reality and rhetoric in Muslim sources. It is ironic, indeed, that a Muslim warrior would have used a slab on which numerous endowments were inscribed to record his own attack, of which no visible evidence remains.¹⁰²

This last example should warn us to be more cautious about taking Muslim claims at face value. The rhetoric of religious war in Indo-Turkish historical chronicles frequently served to either inflate the importance of minor military campaigns or to mask the raw political ambition of rulers.¹⁰³ And not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries does the image of the holy warrior (*ghazi*) actually figure in Indo-Muslim writing, although this status was then attributed retroactively to numerous individuals of earlier centuries.¹⁰⁴ Tragically, the medieval Muslim rhetoric of iconoclasm is today being interpreted literally by Hindu nationalists and used as a weapon against Indian Muslims. Yet, just as anti-Muslim polemic in Hindu sources like the Vilasa grant of Prolaya Nayaka had self-serving motives, so too should the boasts of Muslim warriors at the edge of the Islamic frontier be regarded as efforts to enhance legitimacy. In any case, it is evident that much more research needs to be carried out before we can make any definitive statements about the extent to which Hindu temples were damaged or demolished by Muslim armies in medieval India.

CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have argued that the medieval Hindu-Muslim encounter should be viewed as a process occurring in a frontier zone. The intensity of contact varied dramatically over time along the South Indian frontier, from the devastation of the first armed conflict through a period of equilibrium and mutual borrowing to a renewed era of advancing military borders and cultural hostility. Only through understanding the changing contexts of Hindu-Muslim interaction can we account for the diversity in Hindu representations of Muslims. Images of Muslims as demon-like barbarians did occur in medieval Andhra but primarily in the aftermath of severe military strife. Reports of temple desecration likewise surface mainly along the edges of an advancing frontier.

¹⁰² The other inscriptions on this slab are published as *SI* 5.1289–1311.

¹⁰³ Ernst, *Eternal Garden*, 22–29 and 38–59.

¹⁰⁴ Richard M. Eaton, "Islamic Iconoclasm in India—Some Case Studies" (Paper presented at Annual Conference on South Asia, Madison, WI, November 1994).

When times were more peaceful and the atmosphere more accepting, a conceptual scheme that incorporated Muslim polities circulated widely in Andhra. But both denigrating and tolerant representations co-existed at any given phase—medieval Andhra conceptions of the Muslim were never monolithic or uniform.

While Muslims were often cast as the Other in medieval Hindu discourse, Andhra inscriptions never placed Islam in the foreground as the basis of the Muslim's alien character. The Muslim warriors of Turkic origin who invaded and settled in peninsular India were certainly a separate ethnic group, comprising their own social unit and possessing their own culture. But their Otherness included many distinct features beyond simply religion—language, costume, marriage customs and fighting styles, to name but a few. This is not to say that the non-Muslim inhabitants of India were unaware of the particulars of Islamic beliefs and practice. Popular works by devotional poet-saints of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries explicitly contrast numerous aspects of Hinduism and Islam, often in the setting of a religious debate.¹⁰⁵ But for the political elites who financed the composition of inscriptions, religious differences were of no great import. Far more significant were the military skills of the Turks and the administrative heritage of the Islamic civilization that they introduced into the peninsula.

Because the initial Andhra encounter with Islamic peoples took place in a context of confrontation, we witness a sharp delineation between Muslim and non-Muslim in discourse. In my interpretation, both sides used the language of us-versus-them to strengthen emergent identities in a fluid and constantly changing sociopolitical milieu. Neither the parvenu Andhra warriors of the fourteenth century nor the Turkic intruders of the Delhi Sultanate, relative newcomers to Islam, had much stature as authority figures. What better way to shore up shaky claims to legitimacy than to exploit the ancient symbols of their respective religious traditions? New Andhra leaders could draw on earlier Brahmin images of the struggle against demons and the goddess, while the Central Asian Turks could present their activities within the paradigm of the Islamic *jihād*. But the rhetoric of the destroyer of temples in the case of Muslim elites and of the protector of temples and Brahmins in the case of Hindu elites can be misleading in suggesting that the primary motivations for conflict were religious in nature. Instead, I believe that these representations should be understood as strategies aimed at consolidating community allegiance.

While the presence of a markedly different Turkic people undoubtedly facilitated the formation of a Hindu or non-Muslim identity, the growth of

¹⁰⁵ This is true of the North Indian poet-saints, Kabir and Guru Nanak (Lorenzen, "Vicissitudes of Bhakti," 12) as well as Eknath from Maharashtra (Eleanor Zelliot, "A Medieval Encounter between Hindu and Muslim: Eknath's Drama-Poem Hindu-Turk Samvad," in *Images of Man: Religion and Historical Process in South Asia*, Fred Clothey, ed. [Madras: New Era Publications, 1982]).

regional identities in medieval South India was more striking. Though restricted to the elite segment of the population, the medieval definition of self in terms of region was a precursor of regional loyalties in the twentieth century. Because the core elements of medieval regional identity included collective memories of the past, as well as a common language and homeland, it can be classified as an early form of ethnicity. For Andhra warriors during the late middle ages, unity was fostered through construction of a shared history in which the Kakatiya dynasty played a seminal role. By focusing too exclusively on religion as a source of difference, scholars have overlooked the significance of other attributes differentiating the medieval communities of India. And by failing to contextualize the development of Hindu and Muslim identities within the historical processes of migration and a moving frontier, a static and simplistic view of identity formation in South Asia has prevailed for too long.

The ethnic identities of elite groups in pre-modern India may differ from modern nationalisms in their restricted social range and rallying power. But too much has been made of the distinction between traditional and modern societies in this, as in many other, respects. Whether we are speaking of medieval India or modern India, the sense of community evolved through a twofold process—the distancing of the group from others whose alienness is highlighted, on the one hand, and the elaboration of a set of common social attributes, on the other. In the development of an ethnicity, earlier myths and images were often appropriated to provide an all-important illusion of continuity with ancient times. By representing themselves as extending far back in time, communities could claim to be natural entities, inherent to the social world. Although the antiquity of many ethnic groups is suspect, in terms of the continuity of actual membership, the symbols that represent the community's cohesion may indeed possess prior histories. In both pre-modern and modern societies, in other words, the imagining of the past was an on-going creative process.

APPENDIX

In citing inscriptions, the following abbreviations have been used:

- | | |
|--------|---|
| ARIE | <i>Annual Report on Indian Epigraphy</i> (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India). |
| EI | <i>Epigraphia Indica</i> (New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India). |
| HAS 13 | P. Sreenivasachar, ed., <i>A Corpus of Inscriptions in the Telingana Districts of H.E.H. The Nizam's Dominions, Pt. II</i> , Hyderabad Archaeological Series No. 13 (Hyderabad: H.E.H. The Nizam's Government, 1940). |
| IAP-K | P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, ed., <i>Inscriptions of Andhra Pradesh: Karimnagar District</i> , Andhra Pradesh Govt. Epigraphy Series No. 8 (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, n.d.). |

- IAP-W N. Venkataramanayya, ed., *Inscriptions of Andhra Pradesh: Warangal District*, Andhra Pradesh Govt. Epigraphy Series No. 6 (Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, 1974).
- NDI Alan Butterworth and V. Venugopal Chetty, ed., *A Collection of the Inscriptions on Copper-Plates and Stones in the Nellore District*, 3 vols. (1905; rpt., New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1990).
- SII *South Indian Inscriptions*, 26 vols. (Madras or New Delhi: Archaeological Survey of India).