Lecture Two

Somanātha: Narratives of a History

In the first lecture, I spoke about a narrative and how its retellings as well as the commentaries on it, can be used to illumine the historical times when these were written; and the historical context in turn can illumine the retelling or the commentary. In this lecture I shall start with a well-known event, and discuss the diverse narratives which contribute to constructing its representations in history. The second theme is in some senses an inversion of the first. It is the use of narrative in history, but in a different way from the first, although the focus is again on re-tellings or alternative tellings around an event and therefore of a different kind from those which I discussed in the first lecture.

In 1026, Mahmūd of Ghazni raided the temple of Somanātha and broke the idol. Reference is made to this in various sources, or, reference is omitted where one expects to find it. Some of the references contradict each other. Some lead to our asking ques-tions which do not conform to what we have accepted so far in terms of the meaning and the aftermath of the event. As I mentioned in the first lecture, an event can get encrusted with

interpretations from century to century and this changes the per-ception of the event. As historians therefore, we have to be aware not just of the event and how we look upon it today, but also the ways in which the event was interpreted through the intervening centuries. The analysis of these sources and the priorities in expla-nation stem of course from the historian's interpretation.

I would like to place before you five representations of this and other events at Somanātha, keeping in mind the historical ques-tion of how Mahmūd's raid was viewed. They cover a wide span and are major representations. The five are the accounts orig-inating from Turko-Persian concerns, Jaina texts of the period, Sanskrit inscriptions from Somanātha, the debate in the British House of Commons and what is often described as a nationalist reading of the event.

Let me begin with a brief background to Somanātha itself. It is referred to in the *Mahābhārata* as Prabhās, and although it had no temple until later, it was a place of pilgrimage, a *tīrtha* — also associated with Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas.[1] As was common to many parts of the sub-continent there were a variety of religious sects established in the area — Buddhist, Jaina, Śaiva and Muslim. Some existed in succession and some conjointly. The Śaiva tem-ple, known as the Somanātha temple at Prabhās, dates to about the ninth or tenth century AD.[2] The Caulukyas or Solankis were the ruling dynasty in Gujarat during the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Kathiawar was administered by lesser *rājās* some of whom were subordinates of the Caulukyas.

Saurashtra was agriculturally fertile, but even more than that, its prosperity came from trade, particularly maritime trade. The

[1] *Vana parvan* 13.14: 80. 78; 86. 18–19; 119. 1.
[2] B.K. Thapar, 'The Temple at Somanātha: History by Excavations', in K.M. Munshi, *Somnath: The Shrine Eternal*, Bombay, 1951, 105–33; M.A. Dhaky and H.P. Sastri, *The Riddle of the Temple at Somanātha*, Varanasi, 1974.

port at Somanātha, known as Veraval, was one of the three major ports of Gujarat. During this period western India had a conspicuously wealthy trade with ports along the Arabian peninsula and the Persian Gulf.[3] The antecedents of this trade go back many centuries. The Arab conquest of Sind was less indelible than the more permanent contacts based on trade. Arab traders and shippers settled along the west coast, married locally and were ancestors to many communities existing to the present. Some Arabs took employment with local rulers and Rāṣṭrakūṭa inscriptions speak of Tājika administrators and governors in the coastal areas.[4] The counterparts to these Arab traders were Indian merchants based at Hormuz and at Ghazni, who, even after the eleventh century, are described as extremely prosperous.[5]

The trade focused on the importing of horses from west Asia and also included wine, metal, textiles and spices. The most lucrative was the trade in horses.[6] Funds from temples formed a sizeable investment according to some sources.[7] Port towns such as Somanātha–Veraval and Cambay derived a handsome income from this trade, much of it doubtless being ploughed back to enlarge the profits. Apart from trade, another source of local income were the large sums of money collected in pilgrim taxes by the administration in Somanātha. This was a fairly common source of revenue for the same is mentioned in connection with

[3] V.K. Jain, 1990, *Trade and Traders in Western India*, Delhi.

[4] *Epigraphia Indica*, XXXI, 47 ff.

[5] Muhammad Ufi, *Jami-ul-Hikayat*, in Eliot and Dowson, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians* II, 201. Wasa Abhira from Anahilvada had property worth ten lakhs in Ghazni: impressive, even if exaggerated.

[6] Abdullah Wassaf, *Tazjiyat-ul-Amsar*, in Eliot and Dowson, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, III, 31 ff. Marco Polo also comments on the wealth involved in the horse trade especially with southern India. *Prabandha-cintamani*, 14: Rajasekhara, *Prabandhakosa*, Santiniketan, 1935, 121.

[7] Abdullah Wassaf, Eliot and Dowson, op. cit, I, 69; Pehoa Inscription, *Epigraphia Indica*, 1. 184 ff

the temple at Multan.[8] We are also told that the local rājās — the Cūḍasamas, Ābhīras, Yādavas and others — attacked the pilgrims and looted them of their donations intended for the Somanātha temple. In addition there was heavy piracy in the coastal areas indulged in by the local Chavḍa rājās and a variety of sea brigands referred to as the Bawarij.[9] As with many areas generating wealth in earlier times, this part of Gujarat was also subject to unrest and the Caulukya administration spent much time and energy policing attacks on pilgrims and traders.

Despite all this, trade flourished. Gujarat in this period experienced what can perhaps be called a renaissance culture of the Jaina mercantile community. Rich merchant families were in political office, controlled state finance, were patrons of culture, were scholars of the highest order, were liberal donors to the Jaina *sangha* and builders of magnificent temples.

This is the backdrop as it were, to the Somanātha temple which by many accounts suffered a raid by Mahmūd in 1026. There is one sober, contemporary reference and this comes not surprisingly, from Alberuni, a central Asian scholar deeply interested in India, writing extensively on what he observed and learnt. He tells us that there was a stone fortress built about a hundred years before Mahmūd's raid, within which the *lingam* was located — presumably to safe-guard the wealth of the temple. The idol was especially venerated by sailors and traders, not surprising considering the importance of the port at Veraval, trading as far as Zanzibar and China. He comments in a general way on the economic devastation caused by the many raids of Mahmūd. Alberuni also mentions that Durlabha of Multan, presumably a mathematician, used a round about way involving various eras, to compute the

[8] A. Wink, *Al-Hind*, volume 1, Delhi, 1990, 173 ff; 184 ff; 187 ff.

[9] Alberuni in E.C. Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, New Delhi, 1964 (reprint), I, 208.

year of the raid on Somanātha as Śaka 947 (equivalent to AD 1025–6).[10] The raid therefore was known to local sources.

Not unexpectedly, the Turko-Persian chronicles indulge in elaborate myth-making around the event, some of which I shall now relate. A major poet of the eastern Islamic world, Farrukhī Sīstānī, who claims that he accompanied Maḥmūd to Somanātha, provides a fascinating explanation for the breaking of the idol.[11] This explanation has been largely dismissed by modern historians as too fanciful, but it has a significance for the assessment of iconoclasm. According to him the idol at Somanātha was not of a Hindu deity but of a pre-Islamic Arabian goddess. He tells us that the name Somnat (as it was often written in Persian) is actually Su-manat — the place of Manāt. We know from the Qur'ān that Lāt, Uzza and Manāt were the three pre-Islamic goddesses widely worshipped,[12] and the destruction of their shrines and images it was said, had been ordered by the prophet Mohammad. Two were destroyed, but Manāt was believed to have been secreted away to Gujarat and installed in a place of worship. According to some descriptions Manāt was an aniconic block of black stone, so the form could be similar to a *lingam*. This story hovers over many of the Turko-Persian accounts, some taking it seriously, others being less emphatic and insisting instead that the icon was of a Hindu deity.

In the thirteenth century, the famous Persian poet Sa'dī provides a garbled description.[13] He claims to have visited the Somanātha temple, although there is no other mention of this.

[10] Ibid., II.9–10, 54.

[11] F. Sīstānī in M. Nazim, 1931, *The Life and Times of Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazni*, Cambridge.

[12] Qur'ān, 53. 19–20. G. Ryckmans, 1951, *Les Religions Arabes Pre-Islamique*, Louvain.

[13] Sa'dī *Bustan* in A.H. Edwards, 1911, *The Bustān of Sadi*, London, 109. Quoted in R.H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, New Jersey, 1997, 100 ff.

According to him the idol was of ivory and decorated like the idol of Manāt — a faultless, female form. It hands moved magically, but when he secretly investigated this, it turned out that they were attached by string to the hands of a person standing behind the idol who worked their movements. According to him the rituals were conducted by priests who came from Iran. This is obviously the fantasy of a poet who has combined the story of Manāt, having associations with Iran and with the worship of the sun, perhaps confusing Somanātha with the sun-temple at Multan.

The identification of the Somanātha idol with that of Manāt has little historical credibility. There is no evidence to suggest that the temple housed an image of Manāt. Nevertheless the story is significant to the reconstruction of the aftermath of the event, since it is closely tied to the kind of legitimation which was being projected for Maḥmūd.

The link with Manāt added to the acclaim for Maḥmūd. Not only was he the prize iconoclast in breaking Hindu idols, but, in destroying Manāt, he had carried out what were said to be the very orders of the Prophet. He was therefore doubly a champion of Islam.[14] Other temples are raided by him and their idols broken, but Somanātha receives special attention in all the accounts of his activities. Writing of his victories to the Caliphate, Maḥmūd presents them as major accomplishments in the cause of Islam. And not surprisingly Maḥmūd becomes the recipient of grandiose titles. This establishes his legitimacy in the politics of the Islamic world, a dimension which is overlooked by those who see his activities only in the context of northern India.

But his legitimacy also derives from the fact that he was a Sunni and he attacked Ismā'īlis and Shias whom the Sunnis regarded as

[14] Nazim, op. cit.

heretics.[15] It was ironic that the Ismā'īlis attacked the temple of Multan and were in turn attacked by Maḥmūd in the eleventh century and their mosque was shut down. The fear of the heretic was due to the popularity of heresies against orthodox Islam and political hostility to the Caliphate in the previous couple of centuries, none of which would be surprising given that Islam in these areas was a relatively new religion. Maḥmūd is said to have desecrated their places of worship at Multan and Mansūra. His claims to having killed fifty thousand *kāfirs* — infidels, is matched by similar claims to his having killed fifty thousand Muslim heretics. The figure appears to be notional. Maḥmūd's attacks on the Hindus and on the Shias and Ismā'īlis, was a religious crusade against the infidel and the heretic. But interestingly, these were also the places and peoples involved in the highly profitable horse trade with the Arabs and the Gulf. Both the Muslim heretics of Multan and the Hindu traders of Somanātha had substantial commercial investments. Is it possible then that Maḥmūd, in addition to religious iconoclasm, was also trying to terminate the import of horses into India via Sind and Gujarat? This would have curtailed the Arab monopoly over the trade. Given the fact that there was a competitive horse trade with Afghanistan through north-western India, which was crucial to the wealth of the state of Ghazni, Maḥmūd may well have been combining iconoclasm with trying to obtain a commercial advantage.[16]

In the subsequent and multiple accounts — and there are many in each century — the contradictions and exaggerations increase. There is no agreement on the form of the image. Some say that it is a *lingam*, others reverse this and describe it as anthropomorphic — a human form.[17] But even with this there is no consistency as

[15] Wink, op. cit., 184–9; 217–18.
[16] Cf. Mohammad Habib, *Sultan Mahmūd of Ghazni*, Delhi, 1967.
[17] Ibn Aṣar quoted in Nazim, op. cit.; Ibn Asir in *Gazetteer of the Bombay*

to whether it is a female Manāt or a male Śiva. There seems to have been almost a lingering wish that it might be Manāt. Was the icon, if identified with Manāt, more important perhaps to Muslim sentiment?

The anthropomorphic form encouraged stories of the nose being knocked off and the piercing of the belly from which jewels poured forth.[18] Fantasizing on the wealth of the temples evoked a vision of immense opulence, and this could suggest that the Turkish invasions were a veritable 'gold-rush'.[19] One account states that the image contained twenty *man* of jewels — one *man* weighing several kilograms; another, that a gold chain weighing two hundred *man* kept the image in place. Yet another describes the icon as made of iron with a magnet placed above it, so that it would be suspended in space, an awesome sight for the worshipper.[20] The age of the temple is taken further and further back in time until it is described as thirty thousand years old. One wonders if Somanātha was not becoming something of a fantasy in such accounts.

More purposive writing of the fourteenth century are the chronicles of Baranī and Isāmī. Both were poets, one associated with the Delhi Sultanate and the other with the Bahmani kingdom of the Deccan. Both project Maḥmūd as the ideal Muslim hero, but somewhat differently. Baranī states that his writing is intended to educate Muslim rulers in their duties towards Islam.[21] For him, religion and kingship are twins and the ruler needs to

Presidency, I, 523; Eliot and Dowson, II, 248 ff; 468 ff; Al Kazwini, Eliot and Dowson, 197 ff; Abdullah Wassaf, Eliot and Dowson, III, 44 ff; IV, 181.
[18] Attar quoted in Nazim, op. cit., 221; Firishta in J. Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mohammadan Power in India*, Calcutta, 1966 (reprint).
[19] A. Wink, *Al-Hind*, volume II, 124 ff.
[20] Zakariya al Kazvini, *Asarul-bilad*, Eliot and Dowson, op. cit., I, 97 ff.
[21] *Fatāwa-yi-Jahāndārī* discussed in P. Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India*, Delhi, 1997 (repr.), 25 ff; 107 ff.

know the religious ideals of kingship if he claims to be ruling on behalf of God. Sultans must protect Islam through the *sharī'a* and destroy both Muslim heretics and infidels. Maḥmūd is said to be the ideal ruler because he did both.

Isāmī composes what he regards as an epic poem on the Muslim rulers of India, on the lines of the famous Persian poet Firdausī's earlier epic on the Persian kings, the *Shāh-nāma*. Isāmī argues that kingship descended from God, first to the pre-Islamic rulers of Persia — in which he includes Alexander of Macedon and the Sassanid kings, and subsequently to the Sultans of India, with Maḥmūd establishing Muslim rule in India.[22] Interestingly the Arabs, who had both a political and economic presence in the sub-continent prior to Maḥmūd, hardly figure in this history. That there is a difference of perception in these narratives, is important to a historical assessment and requires further investigation.

The role of Maḥmūd it would seem, was also undergoing a change from being viewed merely as an iconoclast to also being projected as the founder of an Islamic state in India, even if the latter statement was not historically accurate. Presumably given his status in Islamic historiography this was a form of indirectly legitimizing the Sultans in India. The appropriation of the pre-Islamic Persian rulers for purposes of legitimacy, suggests that there may have been an element of doubt about the accepted role-models of Muslim rulers. The Sultans in India were not only ruling a society substantially of non-Muslims, but even those who had converted to Islam were in large part following the customary practices of their *zāt*, their erstwhile caste, which were often not in conformity with the *sharī'a*. Is there then a hint of an underlying uncertainty, of a lack of confidence, in the insistence on taking

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22 *Futuh-al-Salātīn* discussed in Hardy, op. cit., 107–8.

Islamic rule back to Maḥmūd, a champion of the Islamic world? Can we say that these accounts had converted the event itself at Somanātha, into what some today would call, an icon?

In the post-fourteenth century, narratives of the event continue with still greater embellishments and these are perhaps what we would see as a cloud of hype. Of the actual temple the impression sought to be created is that it never recovered from the raid and ceased to be important. Yet every few decades some Sultan is said to have attacked the Somanātha temple and converted it into a mosque.[23] Logically therefore, and logic is not at a premium in these accounts, they would, after the first attack, be attacking a mosque. In a sense the claim ceases to be history and becomes rhetoric. Nor does this stop Sanskrit texts from continuing to refer to it as a temple, a holy city, a second Kailāśa.[24] Was this a parallel situation to the mosque-church toggle-switching at places such as Cordoba in Spain and Santa Sophia in Istanbul, each time the area changed rulers or a religion receded?

Let me turn now to the Jaina texts of this period. These, not unexpectedly associate a different set of concerns with the event, or else they ignore it. The eleventh century Jaina poet from the Paramāra court in Malwa, Dhanapāla, a contemporary of Maḥmūd, briefly mentions Maḥmūd's campaign in Gujarat and his raids on various places including Somanātha.[25] He comments however, at much greater length on Maḥmūd's inability to damage the icons of Mahāvīra in Jaina temples for, as he puts it, snakes

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23 Dhaky and Sastri, op. cit.
24 Ibid.
25 *Satyapurīya-Mahāvīra-utsāha*, III.2. D. Sharma, 'Some New Light on the Route of Mahmud of Ghazni's Raid on Somanātha: Multan to Somanātha and Somanātha to Multan', in B.P. Sinha (ed.), *Dr Satkari Mookerji Felicitation Volume*, Varanasi, 1969, 165–8.

cannot swallow Garuda nor can stars dim the light of the sun. This for him is proof of the superior power of the Jaina images as compared to the Śaiva, the latter having been desecrated.

In the early twelfth century, another Jaina text informs us that the Caulukya king, angered by the rākṣasas, the daityas and the asuras who were destroying temples and disturbing the ṛṣis and brāhmaṇas, campaigned against them.[26] One expects the list to include the Turuṣkas as the Turks were called, but instead mention is made of the local rājās. The king is said to have made a pilgrimage to Somanātha and found that the temple was old and was disintegrating. He is said to have stated that it was a disgrace that the local rājās were plundering the pilgrims to Somanātha but could not keep the temple in good repair. This is the same king who built a mosque at Cambay, which mosque was later destroyed in a campaign against the Caulukyas of Gujarat by the Paramāras of Malwa. But the Paramāra king also looted the Jaina and other temples built under the patronage of the Caulukyas.[27] It would seem that when the temple was seen as a statement of power, it could become a target of attack, irrespective of religious affiliations.

In the late twelfth century during the reign of the famous Caulukya king, Kumārapāla, there is much activity around the Somanātha temple. Among the ministers of Kumārapāla was Hemacandra; a respected and erudite scholar of Jaina religious history, and incidentally a rival of the Śaiva Pāśupata chief priest of the Somanātha temple, Bhāva Bṛhaspati. Such Śaiva–Jaina rivalry was known to other parts of the sub-continent as well. There is

[26] Hemacandra, Dvyāśraya-kāvya, in Indian Antiquary 1875, 4, 72 ff, 110 ff, 232 ff, 265 ff; Ibid.; J. Klatt, 'Extracts from the Historical Records of the Jainas', Indian Antiquary 1882, 11, 245–56.
[27] P. Bhatia, The Paramāras, Delhi, 1970, 141.

therefore some discrepancy between the statements of the minister and the chief priest.

Various Jaina texts, giving the history of Kumārapāla mention his connection with Somanātha. It is stated that he wished to be immoralized.[28] So Hemacandra persuaded the king to replace the dilapidated temple at Somanātha with a new stone temple. The temple is clearly described as dilapidated and not destroyed. When the new temple on the location of the old had been completed, both Kumārapāla and Hemacandra took part in the ritual of consecration. Hemacandra wished to impress the king with the spiritual powers of a Jaina ācārya, so on his bidding Śiva, the deity of the temple, appeared before the king. Kumārapāla was so overcome by this miracle that he converted to the Jaina faith. The focus again is on the superior power of Jainism over Śaivism. The renovating of the temple which is also important, takes on the symbolism of political legitimation for the king. It does seem curious that these activities focused on the Somanātha temple, yet no mention is made of Mahmūd, in spite of the raid having occurred in the previous couple of centuries. The miracle is the central point in the connection with Somanātha in these accounts.

Some suggestion of an anguish over what may be indirect references to the raids of Mahmūd come from quite other Jaina sources and interestingly these relate to the merchant community. In an anthology of stories, one refers to the merchant Javadi, who quickly makes a fortune in trade and then goes in search of a Jaina icon which had been taken away to the land called Gajjana.[29] This is clearly Ghazna. The ruler of Gajjana was a Yavana — a term by

[28] Merutunga, Prabandha-cintāmaṇi, C.H. Tawney (trans), Calcutta, 1899, IV, 129 ff. G. Buhler, The Life of Hemacandracarya, Shantiniketan, 1936.
[29] Nābhinandanoddhāra, discussed in P. Granoff, 'The Householder as Shaman: Jaina Biographies of Temple Builders', East and West, 42, 1992, 2–4, 301–17.

now used for those coming from the west. The Yavana ruler was easily won over by the wealth presented to him by Jāvaḍi. He allowed Jāvaḍi to search for the icon and when it was found, gave him permission to take it back. Not only that but the Yavana worshipped the icon prior to its departure. The second part of the narrative deals with the vicissitudes of having the icon installed in Gujarat, but that is another story.

This is a reconciliation story with a certain element of wishful thinking. The initial removal of the icon is hurtful and creates anguish. Its return should ideally be through reconciling iconoclasts to the worship of icons. There are other touching stories in which the ruler of Gajjana or other Yavana kings are persuaded not to attack Gujarat. But such stories are generally related as a demonstration of the power of the Jaina ācāryas.

The Jaina sources therefore underline their own ideology. Jaina temples survive, Śaiva temples get destroyed. Śiva has abandoned his icons unlike Mahāvīra who still resides in his icons and protects them. Attacks are to be expected in the Kaliyuga — the present age — since it is an age of evil. Icons will be broken but wealthy Jaina merchants will restore the temple and the icons will invariably and miraculously, mend themselves.

The argument about Kaliyuga and iconoclasm also occurs in the Purāṇas, where an increasing decline in dharma accompanies the passing of the cycle of time. Deities desert their icons in the Kaliyuga especially if kings are not attentive enough to them.[30] Sometimes there is a mention of temples being destroyed but generally they are said to have been dilapidated and neglected —

30 P. Granoff, 'Tales of Broken Limbs and Bleeding Wounds: Responses to Muslim Iconoclasm in Medieval India', East and West, 41, 1991, 1–4, 182–203. Vāyu Purāṇa, 1.58.31–74; II.36.115–25.

as would be expected in an age of declining virtue — and therefore requiring repair. The association with Kaliyuga gives the situation a feeling of infallibility. Kaliyuga is therefore a partial but generalized reference to the vulnerability of the practice and symbol of dharma. What remains curious is the lack of specific mention about Mahmūd's raid on Somanātha, which in the Turko-Persian chronicles is so central.

The third category of major narratives is constituted by the inscriptions in Sanskrit from Somanātha itself, focusing on the temple and its vicinity. The perspectives which these point to are again very different from the earlier two. In the twelfth century the Caulukya king, Kumārapāla, issues an inscription. He appoints a governor to protect Somanātha and the protection is against the piracy and the looting by the local rājās.[31] A century later, the Caulukyas are again protecting the site, this time from attacks by the Malwa rājās.[32] The regular complaint about local rājās looting pilgrims at Somanātha becomes a continuing refrain in many inscriptions.

In 1169, an inscription records the appointment of the chief priest of the Somanātha temple, Bhāva Bṛhaspati.[33] He claims to have come from Kannauj, from a family of Pāśupata Śaiva brāhmaṇas and, as the inscriptions show, initiated a succession of powerful priests at the Somanātha temple. He states that he was sent by Śiva himself to rehabilitate the temple. This was required because it was an old structure, much neglected by the officers and because temples in any case deteriorate in the Kaliyuga. Bhāva

31 Praci Inscription, Poona Orientalist, 1937, 1.4.39–46.
32 Epigraphia Indica, II, 437 ff.
33 Prabhaspattana Inscription, BPSI, 186.

Brhaspati claims that it was he who persuaded Kumārapāla to replace the older wooden temple with a stone temple.

Again no mention is made of the raid of Mahmūd. Was this out of embarrassment, that a powerful icon of Śiva had been desecrated? Or was the looting of a temple not such an extraordinary event? The Turko-Persian chronicles may well have been indulging in exaggeration. Yet the looting of the pilgrims by the local *rājās* is repeatedly mentioned. Was Kumārapāla's renovation both an act of veneration of Śiva but also a seeking of legitimation? Was this in a sense an inversion of Mahmūd seeking legitimation through raiding the temple? Are these then counter-points of legitimation in viewing the past?

In 1264, a long legal document was issued in the form of an inscription with both a Sanskrit and an Arabic version and concerns the acquisition of land and the building of a mosque by a trader from Hormuz.[34] Being a legal document it was dated in four current dating systems — Hijri, Saṃvat, Siṃha and Valabhi. The Sanskrit version begins with the usual formulaic symbol — the *siddham* — and continues with invoking Viśvanātha, a name for Śiva. But there is also a suggestion that it was a rendering into Sanskrit of Allah, the Lord of the Universe. The parallelism is striking at more than one place in the inscription and can be viewed as yet another example of cultural translation. We are told that Khoja Noradina Piroja/Nuruddin Feruz, the son of Khoja Nau Abu Brahima of Hurmujadeśa/Hormuz, a *nakhuda* or commander of a ship, a *sadr*/chief and evidently a respected trader — as his title Khoja/Khwajah, would indicate — acquired land in Mahājanapāli on the outskirts of the town of Somanātha, to build a mosque, which is referred to as a *mijigiti/masjid*, and described as a *dharmasthāna*. The land was acquired from the local *rājā*, Sri

34 *Somanathapatana Veraval Inscription, Epigraphia Indica,* XXXIV, 141 ff.

Chāḍa, son of Nānasiṃha, and reference is also made to the governor of Kathiawar, the *mahāmātya* Maladeva, and the Caulukya-Vaghela king, Arjunadeva.

The acquisition of this land has the approval of two local bodies — the *pañcakulas* and the association of the *jamātha*. The *pañcakulas* were powerful administrative and local committees, well-established by this period, consisting of recognized authorities such as priests, officers, merchants, local dignitaries. This particular *pañcakula* was headed by the Para/*purohita* Vīrabhadra, the Śaiva Pāśupata *ācārya* most likely of the Somanātha temple, and among its members was the merchant Abhyasiṃha. From other inscriptions it would seem that Para Vīrabhadra was related to Bhāva Brhaspati in a line of succession. The witnesses to this agreement of granting land for the building of the mosque are mentioned by name and described as the *brhat-puruṣa*, literally 'the big men'. They were the *Thakkuras, Rāṇakas, Rājās* and merchants, many from the Mahājanapāli. Some of these dignitaries were functionaries of the estates of the Somanātha and other temples. The land given for the mosque in Mahājanapāli was part of these estates.

The other committee endorsing the agreement was the *jamātha*, consisting of ship-owners, artisans, sailors and religious teachers, probably from Hormuz. Also mentioned are the oil-millers, masons and Musalmāna horse-handlers, all referred to by what appear to be occupational or caste names, such as *cūnākāra* and *ghaṃcika*. Were these local converts to Islam? Since the *jamātha* was to ensure these endowments for the maintenance of the mosque, it was necessary to indicate its membership.

The inscription lists the endowments for the mosque. These included two large measures of land which were part of the temple property from adjoining temples situated in Somanātha-pattana; land from a *matha*; income from two shops in the vicinity; and an

oil mill. The measures of land were bought from the *purohita* and the chief priests of the temples and the sales were attested by the men of rank. The shops and the oil-mill were purchased from the local people. One of the chief priests, Tripurāntaka, seems to appear again, twenty-three years later, in a number of inscriptions as a wealthy and powerful Pāśupata Śaiva priest who built many temples in the vicinity.[35] As with many Sanskrit votive inscriptions, it ends with the hope that the terms and conditions of the agreement may last as long as the moon and sun endure

The tone and sentiment of the inscription is amicable and clearly the settlement had been agreed to on all sides. The building of a substantial mosque in association with some of the properties of the Somanātha temple, not by a conqueror but by a trader through a legal agreement, was obviously not objected to, neither by the local governor and dignitaries nor by the priests, all of whom were party to the decision. The mosque is thus closely linked to the erstwhile properties and the functionaries of the Somanātha temple.

This raises many questions. Did this transaction, two hundred or so years after the raid of Maḥmūd, not interfere with the remembrance of the raid as handed down, in the minds of the priests and the local 'big men'? Were memories short or was the event relatively unimportant?

Nuruddin Feroz used Sanskrit and Arabic for the agreement, Sanskrit as the local formal language and Arabic probably as the language of incoming traders. The two texts are by and large similar but not identical. The Arabic version carries the hope that the people of Somanātha will convert to Islam — a statement which is wisely deleted in the Sanskrit version. The use of Arabic points to a specific identity distinct from the use of Persian in

[35] The Cintra *Prakasti*, Epigraphia Indica, I, 271 ff.

connection with Maḥmūd. Did the local people make a distinction between the Arab and west Asian traders on the one hand — often referred to as Tājikas, and Turks or Turuṣkas on the other? And were the former acceptable and the Turks much less so? Clearly they were not all homogenized and identified as 'Muslims', as we would do today. Should we not sift the reactions to the event by examining the responses of particular social groups and situations? Hormuz was crucial to the horse trade, therefore Nuruddin was welcomed. Did the profits of trade over-rule other considerations? Were the temples and their administrators also investing in horse trading and making handsome profits?

In the fifteenth century a number of short inscriptions from Gujarat refer the battles against the Turks. One very moving inscription in Sanskrit comes from Somanātha itself.[36] Although written in Sanskrit, it begins with the Islamic formulaic blessing — *bismillah rahman-i-rahim*. It gives details of the family of the Vohara/Bohra Farīd and the Bohras were of Arab descent. We are told that the town of Somanātha was attacked by the Turuṣkas, the Turks, and Vohara Farīd who was the son of Vohara Muhammad, joined in the defence of the town, fighting against the Turuṣkas on behalf of the local ruler Brahmadeva. Farīd was killed and the inscription is a memorial to him.

It would seem from the sources that I have tried to place before you, that the aftermath of the raid of Maḥmūd on the temple of Somanātha took the form of varying perceptions of the event, and different from what we have assumed. There are no simplistic explanations that would emerge from any or all of these narratives. How then have we arrived today at the rather simplistic historical

[36] D.B. Disalkar, 'Inscriptions of Kathiawad', New Indian Antiquary, 1939, I, 591.

theory that the raid of Mahmūd created a trauma in the Hindu consciousness which has been at the root of Hindu–Muslim relations ever since. Or to put it in the words of K.M. Munshi, 'For a thousand years Mahmūd's destruction of the shrine has been burnt into the collective subconscious of the [Hindu] race as an unforgettable national disaster.' [37]

Interestingly, what appears to be the earliest mention of a 'Hindu trauma' in connection with Mahmūd's raid on Somanātha, comes from the debate in the House of Commons in London in 1843, on the question of the gates of the Somanātha temple. [38] In 1842, Lord Ellenborough issued his famous 'Proclamation of the Gates' in which he ordered General Nott, in charge of the British Army in Afghanistan, to return via Ghazni and bring back to India the sandalwood gates from the tomb of Mahmūd. There were believed to have been looted by Mahmūd from Somanātha. It was claimed that the intention was to return what was looted from India, an act which would symbolize British control over Afghanistan despite their poor showing in the Anglo–Afghan wars. It was also presented as an attempt to reverse Indian subjugation to Afghanistan in the pre-British period. Was this an appeal to Hindu sentiment, as some maintained?

The Proclamation raised a storm in the House of Commons and became a major issue in the cross-fire between the Government and the Opposition. The question was asked whether Ellenborough was catering to religious prejudices by appeasing the Hindus or was he appealing to national sympathies. It was

[37] Munshi, op. cit., 89.
[38] The United Kingdom House of Commons Debate, March 9, 1843, on, The Somnath [Prabhās Patan] Proclamation, Junagadh 1948, 584–602, 620, 630–2, 656, 674.

defended by those who maintained that the gates were a 'national trophy' and not a religious icon. In this connection the request of Ranjit Singh, the ruler of the Punjab, to the king of Afghanistan, Shah Shujah, for the return of the gates, was quoted. But on examining the letter making this request, it was discovered that Ranjit Singh had confused the Somanātha temple with the Jagannātha temple. It was also argued that no historian mentions the gates in the various accounts of Mahmūd's raid, therefore the story of the gates could only be an invention of folk tradition.

The historians referred to were Gibbon who wrote on the Roman empire, Firdausī and Sa'dī — both Persian poets, and Firishta. The last of these was the only one who, in the seventeenth century had written on Indian history. Firishta was well-known because Alexander Dow had translated his history into English in the late eighteenth century. Firishta's account of the sack of Somanātha was as fanciful as the earlier accounts, with obvious exaggerations such as the huge size of the idol and the quantity of jewels that poured out when Mahmūd pierced its belly. Members of the House of Commons were using their perceptions of Indian history as ammunition in their own political and party hostilities.

Those critical of Ellenborough were fearful of the consequences; they saw the fetching of the gates as supporting a native religion, and that too, the monstrous 'Linga-ism' as they called it; and they felt that its political consequences would be violent indignation among the Mohammadans. Those supporting Ellenborough, in the House of Commons, argued equally vehemently, that he was removing the feeling of degradation from the minds of the Hindus. It would, '. . . relieve that country, which had been overrun by the Mohammadan conqueror, from the painful feelings which had been rankling amongst the people for nearly a thousand years'. And that, '. . . the memory of the gates [has been] preserved

by the Hindus as a painful memorial of the most devastating invasions that had ever desolated Hindustan.'

Ellenborough saw Mahmūd's raid on Somanātha as embedded in the Hindu psyche and the return of the gates he felt would avenge the insult of eight hundred years.[39] Did this debate fan an anti-Muslim Hindu sentiment among Hindus in India, which, judging from the earlier sources, had either not existed, or been marginal and localized? The absence in earlier times of an articulation of a trauma, remains enigmatic.

The gates were uprooted and brought back in triumph. But on arrival they were found to be of Egyptian workmanship and not associated in any way with India. So they were placed in a storeroom in the Agra Fort and possibly by now have been eaten by white ants.

From this point on, the arguments of the debate in the House of Commons come to be reflected in the writing on Somanātha. Mahmūd's raid was made into the central point in Hindu–Muslim relations. K.M. Munshi led the demand for the restoration of the Somanātha temple. His obsession with restoring the glories of Hindu history, began in a general way with his writing historical novels, inspired by reading Walter Scot. But the deeper imprint came from his familiarity with Bankim Chandra Chatterji's sentiments in *Ānandamatha*,[40] as is evident from his novel, *Jaya Somanātha*, published in 1927. And as one historian, R.C. Majumdar puts it, Bankim Chandra's nationalism was Hindu rather than Indian. 'This is made crystal clear from his other writings which contain passionate outbursts against the subjugation of India by

39 R.H. Davis, op. cit., 202.
40 Pers. com. U. Joshi.

the Muslims'.[41] Bankim Chandra was not alone in being hostile to both British and Muslim rule. Munshi was concerned with restoring the Hindu Aryan glory of the pre-Islamic past. Muslim rule was viewed as the major disjuncture in Indian history. Munshi's comments often echo the statements made in the House of Commons debate as is evident from his book, *Somanatha — The Shrine Eternal*.

His insistence that the temple be restored led to the excavation of the site in 1950, the results of which contradicted much of what he maintained. The reconstruction through archaeology and architectural history indicated an original temple of the ninth or tenth century, more likely the latter, with some signs of desecration.[42] An eleventh century temple was rebuilt on the earlier plan and this structure was replaced in about the twelfth century. There is little evidence of later structures of importance or major reconstructions.

Munshi made the Somanātha temple into the most important symbol of Muslim iconoclasm in India. But prior to this, its significance appears to have been largely regional. Consistent references to it as a symbol of Muslim iconoclasm are to be found largely only in the Turko-Persian chronicles. Possibly the fact that Munshi was himself from Gujarat may have had some role in his projection of Somanātha. In other parts of the country the symbols of iconoclasm, where they existed, were places of local importance and knowledge of the raid on Somanātha was of marginal interest.

On the rebuilding of the Somanātha temple in 1951, Munshi, by then a minister of the central government had this to say:
'. . . the collective subconscious of India today is happier with the

41 R.C. Majumdar, *British Paramountcy and Indian Renaissance*, Part II, History and Culture of the Indian People, 1965, Bombay, 478.
42 B.K. Thapar, op. cit.

scheme of the reconstruction of Somanātha, sponsored by the Government of India, than with many other things we have done or are doing.'[43] Nehru objected strongly to the Government of India being associated with the project and insisted on its being restored as a private venture.[44] That the President of India, Rajendra Prasad was to perform the consecration ceremony was even more unacceptable to him. He was further irritated by Munshi writing to Indian ambassadors in various parts of the world, asking for jars of water from the rivers of the countries to which they were accredited as also a variety of plants, to be sent to India — presumably via the diplomatic bag — and all of which were said to be necessary to the consecration ceremony of the reconstructed temple. The ceremony itself was attended by a few stalwart nationalists some associated with the government, thus providing a hint of some of their substratum concerns. This introduces a further dimension to the reading of the event, involving the secular credentials of society and state.

The received opinion is that events such as the raid on Somanātha created what has been called, two antagonistic categories of epic: the 'epic of conquest' and the 'counter-epic of resistance'.[45] It has also been thought of as epitomizing in later Turko-Persian narratives 'the archetypal encounter of Islam with Hindu idolatry'.[46] We may well ask how and when did this dichotomy crystallize? Did it emerge with modern historians reading too literally from just one set of narratives, without juxtaposing these with the other

[43] Munshi, op. cit., 184.
[44] S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 16, Part I, Delhi, 1994, 270 ff.
[45] Aziz Ahmed, 'Epic and Counter-Epic in Medieval India', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 83, 1963, 470–6.
[46] Davis, op. cit., 93.

narratives? If narratives are read without being placed in a historiographical context, the reading is, to put it mildly, incomplete and therefore distorted. Firishta's version for example, was repeated endlessly in recent times, without considering its historiography: neither was this done within the tradition of the Turko-Persian chronicles nor in the context of other narratives which can be said to impinge on the same event. Or, has the dichotomy becomes such a mind set that we are unable to comprehend the complexities and nuances of the representations of an event, and its aftermath, however familiar they may be?

We continue to see such situations as a binary projection of Hindu and Muslim. Yet what should be evident from the sources which I have discussed is that there are multiple groups with varying agendas, involved in the way in which the event and Somanātha are represented. There are differentiations in the attitudes of the Persian chronicles towards the Arabs and the Turks. Within the Persian sources, the earlier fantasy of Manāt gradually gives way to a more political concern with the legitimacy of Islamic rule in India through the Sultans. Was there, on the part of the Persian chroniclers, a deliberate down-playing of the Arab intervention in India? Were the politics of heresy and revolt in the history of Islam at this period, linked to these attitudes? The hostility between the Bohras and the Turks, technically both Muslims, may have also been part of this confrontation since the Bohras had some Arab ancestry and probably saw themselves as among the settled communities of Gujarat and saw the Turks as invaders.

Biographies and histories from Jaina authors, discussing matters pertaining to the royal court and to the religion of the elite, focus on attempts to show Mahāvīra in a better light than Śiva and the agenda becomes that of the competing rivalry between the Jainas and the Śaivas. But the sources which focus on a different

social group, that of the Jaina merchants, seem to be conciliatory towards the confrontation with Maḥmūd, perhaps because the trading community would have suffered heavy disruptions in periods of raids and campaigns.

From the Veraval inscription of 1264, co-operation in the building of the mosque came from a range of social groups, from the most orthodox ritual specialists to those wielding secular authority and from the highest property holders to those with lesser property. Interestingly, the local members of the *jamātha*, if they were all Muslims — as is likely — were largely from occupations at the lower end of the social scale. As such, their responsibility for the maintenance of the mosque would have required the goodwill of the Somanātha elite. Did the elite see themselves as patrons of a new kind of control over property?

These relationships were not determined by the general category of what have been called Hindu interests and Muslim interests. They varied in accordance with more particular interests and these drew on identities of ethnicity, economic concerns, religious sectarianism and social status.

Let me conclude by briefly returning to my initial comments on narrative and history. There are those who argue that narrative speaks for itself and does not require historians to interpret it. But narrative does not speak, it is spoken. The historian in giving a voice to the narrative invests it with nuances, emphases and interpretations. This is inevitably a different voice from that of the poet, the dramatist, the chronicler, although there may be points of fusion. The recognition of differences, it seems to me enriches the reading. We need to understand why there are variants and what is their individual agenda. Even in fictionalized accounts there is a politics in the telling and the retelling, as I have tried to

show in the first lecture. This becomes more evident where diverse narratives are wrapped around what might relate to the same event.

Different narratives reconstitute events in different ways. Narratives involve an interface with the historical moment and encapsulate ideological structures. All narrative representations do not have an equal validity even if a single, authentic, foundational narrative cannot be identified. Merely to analyse fragments cannot be the end purpose of writing history. The priorities used by the historian in explaining the narratives becomes relevant and can suggest the inter-links and patterns emerging from the fragments. The narrative can also stretch its presuppositions over a long duration of time and move across this duration; as indeed each narrative can present a different image.

In the retelling of an event, there may be a claim that it encapsulates memory or a succession of memories: so too the question of whether or why there may be an amnesia. Memory is sometimes claimed in order to create an identity, and history based on such claims is used to legitimize the identity. Establishing a fuller understanding of the event is crucial in both instances, for otherwise the identity and its legitimation, can be historically invalid.

I have tried to show how each set of narratives turn the focus of what Somanātha symbolizes: the occasion for the projection of an iconoclast and champion of Islam; the assertion of the superiority of Jainism over Śaivism; the inequities of the Kaliyuga; the centrality of the profits of trade subordinating other considerations; colonial perceptions of Indian society as having always been an antagonistic duality of Hindu and Muslim; Hindu nationalism and the restoration of a particular view of the past contesting the secularizing of modern Indian society. But these are not discrete foci. Even when juxtaposed, a pattern emerges; a pattern which

requires that the understanding of the event should be historically contextual, multi-faceted, and aware of the ideological structures implicit in the narratives.

I would argue that Mahmūd of Ghazni's raid on the Somanātha temple, did not create a dichotomy, because each of the many facets involved in the perception of the event, consciously or sub-consciously, was enveloped in a multiplicity of other contexts as well. These direct our attention to varying representations, both overt and hidden, and lead us to explore the statements implicit in these representations. The assessment of these facets may provide us with more sensitive insights into our past.

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