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MĪMĀṂSĀ AND THE PROBLEM OF HISTORY IN TRADITIONAL INDIA

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The long-held view concerning the absence of a historical understanding in traditional India merits reconsideration on the basis of recent scholarship on the notion of history as such, the rhetorical foundations of historiography, the nature of narrativity, the character of historiography in classical antiquity, and the actual historical documents that are available from premodern India. Yet the absence of a historical-referential dimension of Sanskrit discourse remains a serious problem, one that Mīmāṃsā views on the referential sphere of the Veda may help us to understand. Mīmāṃsā makes the authority of the Veda dependent on its timelessness, and thus must empty the Veda of its historical referentiality. Since learned discourse (*śāstra*) in general is subject to a process of "vedicization," it adopts the Veda's putative ahistoricality; and the same set of concerns comes to inform the understanding of the genre *itihāsa* ("history") and the interpretation of *itihāsa* texts. History, consequently, seems not so much to be unknown in Sanskritic India as to be denied.[1]

The beast lives *unhistorically* . . . but man
is always resisting the great and continually
increasing weight of the past.—Nietzsche

INTRODUCTION

PERHAPS NO ISSUE IN INDIAN intellectual history has been as frequently commented upon and as univocally adjudicated as the tradition's presumed lack of historical awareness. When a contemporary Indologist writes that "[History is] a category which has no demonstrable place within any South Asian 'indigenous conceptual system' (at least prior to the middle of the nineteenth century). . . . South Asians themselves seldom if ever used [a historical] explanation. . . . In a South Asian environment, historical interpretation is no interpretation. It is a zero-category," we are being confronted, not with an extreme formulation, but with a virtually unchallenged axiom.[2] How far this axiom has entered into the more general Western discourse of historiography is illustrated by Georges Lefebvre, who remarks in his influential book, *La Naissance de l'historiographie moderne*:

> Une seule civilisation en est restée, et encore, à ses premiers pas, sur la route longue de l'histoire, celle de l'Inde. . . . D'ailleurs, il faudrait, pour observer l'histoire des hommes, que l'esprit indien ait été moins obsédé par de larges visions cycliques de destin du monde (qui rejettent les humains vers une attitude de patience ou de résignation), ou par les impératifs esthétiques qui relèguent l'histoire dans le monde merveilleux des légendes. 'Rien d'étonnant,' disait déjà Max Weber, 'que l'Inde n'ait pas développé une historiographie digne de mention.' Pourtant, ce problème difficile serait à reprendre à la lumière des études historiques. . . . Mais laissons l'Inde, ici comme si souvent, cas difficile.[3]

[1] This paper is a revised version of a presentation made to the Seventh World Sanskrit Conference (Leiden, 1987). I want to thank Bimal Matilal for his comments on that occasion. Paul Greenough helpfully commented on an earlier draft.

[2] The quote comes from Gerald Larson, "Karma as a 'Sociology of Knowledge' or 'Social Psychology' of Process/Praxis," in *Karma and Rebirth*, ed. W. O'Flaherty (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1980), 305. The complaints begin with (the incessantly quoted) Alberuni in the eleventh century (*Alberuni's India*, trans. E. C. Sachau [London: K. Paul, 1910], 10), and are consolidated in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Indology. Representative for the latter is, say, A. A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (repr. New York: Haskell, 1966; original edition 1900), 10–11.

[3] Georges Lefebvre, *La Naissance de l'historiographie moderne* (Paris: Flammarion, 1971), 46.

Lefebvre is wise to conclude his remarks with a note of caution. I believe the received view about Indian historical consciousness is constructed out of a set of ideas whose truth can no longer be taken for granted: ideas about history and narrativity as such, about ancient historiography in general and Indian intellectual history in particular. Moreover, even if we grant that there are idiosyncratic features about the traditional Indian response to historical experience, the characteristics of this idiosyncrasy have never been adequately described or convincingly explained.

It will not be possible to develop all these ideas in the space available here. But as my offering in honor of the humane scholarship of Ernest Bender and his long dedication to Indology, I would like to try to delineate programmatically if very briefly a range of questions worth pursuing. Then I will go on to examine in a little more detail what I think could be viewed as a confrontation with history on the part of Mīmāṃsā, and the resulting limiting conditions on historiography imposed by the valuation of knowledge in general that Mīmāṃsā, the dominant orthodox discourse of traditional India, articulated.

RETHINKING THE QUESTION OF HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

On the face of it the reduction of historical consciousness to a "zero-category" for traditional India is improbable; from the viewpoint of phenomenology, which offers us the most sustained analysis of such consciousness, it is impossible. Historicality (*Geschichtlichkeit*) is constitutive of human existence, even in "cool" societies where "all generations become as it were contemporaneous."[4] For as Dilthey puts it, and Heidegger argues out at length, "The historical world is always there, and the individual not only observes it from the outside but is intertwined with it." And we are aware of our historicality even before we thematize it.[5] I cannot in this sketch detail the evidence for the consciousness of such historicality necessitated by, or reflected in, the temporal structures of the Sanskrit language,[6] and the elaboration on these structures in the philosophical systems; or follow through the implications of the popular images of an entropic process in the universe (the *yuga* theories), of the *karma* doctrine, of the kingly and spiritual genealogies, all of which map in their own ways causal sequences of events. I want to call attention to something perhaps more fundamental: the implications of the narrativity itself of Sanskrit literature. Much is to be learned from contemporary reflections on the significance of the narrative moment. Consistent with Heidegger's claim that the structure of discourse manifests the historicality of human existence, Ricoeur reasons cogently that narrative itself is the linguistic form of human temporal experience. This includes a sense of historical causality, which emerges from the particular *configuration* in which narrativized events are grasped together.[7] How Sanskrit texts figure this temporality, and what causal structures are erected in the process, are questions whose answers would, I think, enable us to recover evidence of a profound, if culturally specific, understanding of historicity in traditional India.

I believe this line of investigation is pertinent because of the deeply problematic character of history in and of itself. What, for example, are the precise requirements or characteristics of that "historical" discourse which India is said to lack? Leaving aside the questions raised by identifying history as an "objective investigation of facts" (in view of the now very uncertain status of both "objectivity" and "facts" themselves), we may concentrate on the degree to which historiographical narrative distances itself from other sorts of narrative, particularly literary narrative. In fact, this distance has been very nearly obliterated in contemporary thinking. It has been cogently argued that upon inspection "history" turns out to have unsettlingly close affinities with other types of story-telling; it too perforce makes use of emplotment via rhetorical tropes (e.g., metaphor, metonymy) and modes (e.g., the tragical, the romanesque) such as "suggest a relation of similitude between [historical] events and processes and the story types that we

[4] These are Tocqueville's words used in reference to feudal Europe (cited in André Béteille, *The Idea of Natural Inequality and Other Essays* [Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983], 40).

[5] See David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986). For "pre-thematized awareness" see especially p. 3; Dilthey is quoted on p. 4.

[6] I mean this in both a general sense and with specific reference to such modulations (e.g., "mythic time") as Renou detected in the Vedic imperfect (see *La Valeur du parfait dans les hymnes védiques* [Paris: Champion, 1925]).

[7] I do not pretend to have mastered the abstruse texts on this question, the most important of which are those of Paul Ricoeur, especially *Temps et récit* (Eng. translation, *Time and Narrative* [Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1984]). An encapsulation of Ricoeur's views may be found in his "The Human Experience of Time and Narrative," *Research in Phenomenology* 9 (1979): 17–34. I wish to thank my colleague David Klemm for helping me to understand and formulate the implications of Ricoeur's work.

conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings."[8] Indeed, for an event to become historical at all, it must be seen to contribute to the development of a plot. Moreover, when history becomes a form of fiction, fiction through its various orders of mimesis begins to recover its form as historical representation.[9] All this should lead us to ponder anew the historical consciousness operative in a wide variety of Sanskrit literary works, and especially in such texts as Kālidāsa's *Raghuvaṃśa*. No doubt the "historical" poem differs in respects from the "fictional" history of Thucydides (though exactly how has never been spelled out), yet it remains decidedly and meaningfully a form of historical configuration.

The rhetorical dimension of history was acknowledged in the West as early as Longinus, who in *On the Sublime* writes about historians no differently from the way he writes about dramatists. *Historia* was scarcely considered, and in some ways scarcely was more than another genre of literature. This suggests that a third, if subordinate area for reconsidering the question of Indian history would be to assess anew the precise differences between traditional Indian texts and the classical models against which these texts are implicitly judged.[10] Recent work on Greek and Latin historiography shows, for example, that, contrary to accepted belief, the idea of history did not constitute in itself an important philosophical, religious, or cultural question in antiquity, and that history was largely marginalized in both philosophical and popular thought. We are reminded, moreover, that, while accurate information may have been history's defining characteristic in Greco-Roman antiquity, the gods and their acts remained a permissible and important part of its subject matter.[11] The confusion of legend and history with which even Kalhaṇa is repeatedly charged is a criticism of Greek historiography enunciated already in antiquity.[12] Finally, the common notion of a Greek sense of history as such has come under forceful challenge. MacIntyre, for example, writes persuasively about "the absence of any sense of the specifically historical—in our sense—in Aristotle, as in other Greek thinkers," the absence of any sense of "historicity in general."[13]

The "history" that forms the yardstick of India's inadequacy, then, may not be an altogether useful measure, no better than the stories that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries dreamed to be history. Upon reflection we might find ourselves, as we so often and no doubt inevitably have done, looking vainly in ancient India for a category constructed in modern Europe, and a self-deluding category at that.

From a considerably less theoretical perspective, the revision of our view of Indian historical consciousness has already in fact begun. I do not need here to repeat the arguments of Hermann Kulke, who has usefully reviewed the "beachtliche Anzahl von Geschichtsquellen, die durchaus auf ein ausgeprägtes Geschichtsbewusstsein schliessen lassen."[14] What

[8] Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978), 88. A provocative analysis of how history "awakes in the nineteenth century surprised and even horrified to see how closely it is coupled with fiction," is offered by Linda Orr, "The Revenge of Literature: A History of History" (*New Literary History* 18 [1986]: 1–22).

[9] Compare White, op. cit., 122. See also Ricoeur's chapters on the "historicality of fiction and fictionality of history" in *Temps et récit*, vol. III: *Le Temps raconté* (Paris: Seuil, 1985), 264–79. That events become *historical* only when emplotted is argued by Ricoeur also in "The Human Experience," 24.

[10] Sometimes explicitly: "In the large and varied literatures of the Brahmans, Jains, and Buddhists there is not to be found a single work which can be compared to the *Histories* in which Herodotus recounts . . . or to the *Annals* in which Livy traces . . ." (E. J. Rapson, ed., *The Cambridge History of India*, vol. 1 [New York: Macmillan, 1922], 57).

[11] Gerald A. Press, "History and the Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity," *History and Theory* 16 (1977): 280–96 (arguments enlarged upon in *The Development of the Idea of History in Antiquity* [Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's U. Press, 1982]); M. I. Finley, "Myth, Memory, and History," *History and Theory* 4 (1965): 281–302 (reprinted in *The Use and Abuse of History* [New York: Viking, 1975]). See also W. Den Boer, "Graeco-Roman Historiography in its Relation to Biblical and Modern Thinking" (*History and Theory* 7 [1968]: 60–75), who argues that "Myth was also, even primarily, history" to the Greeks: "It is not that gods appear in myth and men in history, but they both appear *in time* and in history" (p. 61).

[12] Compare most recently Stietencron, "Selbst in der einzigen vielzitierten Ausnahme, [the *Rājatarangiṇī*] . . . werden die geschilderten historischen Ereignnisse von Fabeln und Legenden förmlich überwuchert" ("Das Kunstwerk als politisches Manifest," *Saeculum* 28 [1977]: 366) and Cicero, ". . . quamquam et apud Herodoteum patrem historiae et apud Theopompum sunt innumerabiles fabulae" (*De Legibus* 1.1.5).

[13] A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, second ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 147, 159.

[14] Hermann Kulke, "Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbild im hinduistischen Mittelalter," *Saeculum* 30 (1979): 100–113, especially p. 111.

becomes evident from all this is that the historicity of human existence was cognized, appropriated, and processed in traditional India as elsewhere. But this took place according to a special modality, and subject to categories, ideas, and constraints peculiar to traditional India, with the result that the "historiographical" end-products often differ from what we encounter elsewhere in antiquity. A telling example of this is provided by H. von Stietencron's acute analysis of the new type of Śiva Gaṅgādhara motif that suddenly appears in Pallava sculpture in the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, which commemorates—in a way, writes—the history of the Pallava defeat of the Gaṅgas.[15]

The belief in a thoroughly ahistorical Indian culture previously made it impossible to recognize what in the Pallava case are historically meaningful cultural products, and the special sort of historical products these are, telling us both more and less about Indian history and what was historically significant to traditional Indians than we learn, say, about Romans from Roman political statuary. Concrete events are perceived and recorded, while at the same time they are located in a parallel context—the divine—that offers an interpretation of their ultimate meaning.[16]

THE PROBLEM OF REFERENTIALITY AND THE POSTULATES OF MĪMĀṂSĀ

The example of Śiva Gaṅgādhara and the essentially historical context of much Pallava sculpture, while it provides a model of how we might recover the dimension of history in traditional Indian culture, yet reminds us of something that as a rule we do in fact miss. It is what Ricoeur, in order to avoid the total submerging of history in fiction which rhetorical analysis risks, calls "the *incitements* to redescription that come from the past itself," that is, the "referential intention."[17] At the level of ontology (and in the practice of contemporary "eventless" historiography) this concrete historical referentiality, the realm of "facts," is admittedly problematic, but it remains certainly one element of traditional historical discourse.[18] And it is precisely what the products of Sanskritic culture generally speaking lack, and almost completely lack.

To an astonishing degree Sanskrit texts are anonymous or pseudonymous, or might just as well be. The strategy of eliminating from the text—whatever sort of text it might be—the personality of the author and anything else that could help us situate the text in time is a formal correlate of a content invariably marked by ahistoricality. Works on statecraft, for example, describe their subject without specific reference to a single historically existing state. Books on law expatiate on such crucial questions as the relationship between local practices and general codes of conduct without adducing any particularized events or cases. Belles-lettres seem virtually without date or place, or indeed, author. Literary criticism prior to the tenth century (Ānandavardhana) neither mentions the name nor cites the work of any poet, the *ālaṃkārika*s themselves supplying all examples. Philosophical disputation takes place without the oppositional interlocutor ever being named and doxographies make no attempt to ascribe the religious-philosophical doctrines they review to anyone, unless a mythological personage. Even in those texts whose historical vision I suggest merits particular reconsideration—*Raghuvaṃśa*, for instance—referentiality remains somehow unanchored: We are indeed told that it is the Bengalis that Raghu uproots (4.36), the Kalingas he attacks, (38), the Pandyas he scorches (49), the hair of the Kerala women upon which he sprinkles the dust of his army (54), and so on, but if the *digvijaya* has local contours, it remains essentially timeless. In short, we can read thousands of pages of Sanskrit on any imaginable subject and not encounter a single passing reference to a historical person, place, or event—or at least to any that, historically speaking, matters.

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[15] H. von Stietencron, op. cit.; see also his "Political Aspects of Indian Religious Art," in *Visible Religion* 4-5 (1985-86): 16-36. Nicholas Dirks's "The Pasts of a Pāḷaiyakārar: The Ethnohistory of a South Indian Little King" (*Journal of Asian Studies* 41 [1982]: 655-83), which argues for a "culturally sensitive analytic framework" to unpack the historical freight of Indian culture, usefully supplements Stietencron (I thank Paul Greenough for this reference).

[16] Kulke seems to me on the right track when he speaks of the tendency of medieval India "gerade Höhepunkte historischen Geschehens ebenso wie jene des täglichen Lebens aus der 'ewigen' Geschichte herauszulösen um durch 'In-Beziehung-Setzen' mit dem goldenen Zeitalter und seinen mythischen Heroen [or rather, gods] zu *erhöhen*, um sie dem Prozess irdischen Vergessens zu entreissen . . ." (Kulke, op. cit., 112; see also pp. 106-7).

[17] Paul Ricoeur, *The Reality of the Historical Past* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984), 34.

[18] For a still useful statement of the problem, see Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History" *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981; originally published 1967), esp. pp. 15-18.

Now, regardless how far we problematize "history" by uncovering its rhetorical foundations, eliminating it from premodern culture, and reducing it to an epiphenomenon of European positivism—still, the general absence of historical referentiality in traditional Sanskritic culture remains an arresting, problematic, and possibly unparalleled phenomenon.

What would count as an adequate explanation for such a phenomenon is hard to see. Those that have been offered range from Macdonell's deduction (widely shared despite its circularity) that "early India wrote no history because it never made any," to Kulke's tentative suggestion that the division of labor between brahmans, who controlled the intellectual tools, and *kāyasthas*, who controlled the archives, made serious historigraphy impossible.[19] Most explanations, however, reduce in one way or another to Lefebvre's account of the Indians' "obsession with large cyclical visions of the destiny of the world" and "aesthetic imperatives that relegate history to the miraculous world of legends."[20] I find this common view unsatisfying because it explains nothing. Besides being static and undialectical (and unwarranted extensions of merely sectional obsessions), it seems to replace one problem with another, or simply to restate or defer it.

Our suspicions are justifiably aroused by any explanation with pretensions to total adequacy; a mentality of this fundamental nature is constructed out of complex of factors. One of these is the context of the production of culture in Sanskritic India and the constraints on what is culturally sanctioned for reproduction in discourse. I would like to explore this context by examining a set of notions developed by Mīmāṁsā—the pedagogically and thus culturally normative discipline of Brahmanical learning—which may not only have contributed to discouraging the kind of referentiality we are concerned with, but more, may be said to have sought to deny the category of history altogether as irrelevant, or even antithetical, to real knowledge.

The purpose of Mīmāṁsā is to develop principles of interpretation for the sources of our knowledge of *dharma*, that which constitutes the good (*artha*) in human existence (*PMS* 1.1.1-2). It is the burden of the first chapter of the *Pūrvamīmāṁsāsūtra*s to demonstrate that it is only through texts, and only certain sorts of texts, that we are able to cognize *dharma*. The long and complex argument need not concern us in detail, but there are two key points that need to be mentioned (which are in fact an elaboration of the Mīmāṁsā formula, *codanaiva pramāṇam, codanā pramāṇam eva*). First—this is where we encounter the essential a priori of Mīmāṁsā—*dharma* is stipulatively defined, or rather posited without argument, as a transcendent entity, and so is unknowable by any form of knowledge not itself transcendent. Second—and this is the basic epistemological position of Mīmāṁsā—all cognitions must be accepted as true unless and until they are falsified by other cognitions. The first principle eliminates as sources of knowledge of *dharma* perception and any cognitive act based on perception (verbal communication, inference, and the like). The commitment to falsifiability (without Popper's corollary that what is not falsifiable cannot count as true) renders the truth claims of a transcendent source of knowledge—revelation—inviolable.[21]

All that remains to the Mīmāṁsakas to prove is that the texts in which the rules of *dharma* are encoded are in fact transcendent. A substantial obstacle here, of course, is to establish the possibility of language itself existing outside of social time and space, and it is largely to solve this general problem—by arguing the eternality of the significans, the significandum, the relationship between these two, and that between the words of a sentence and its signification—that a large part of the philosophical portions of Mīmāṁsā texts is devoted.[22] The specific question of the transcendent character (*apauruṣeyatva*, "existing beyond the human") of the Vedas themselves, which is determinative for the entire system of Mīmāṁsā, may be reduced to basically two arguments, the first of less, the second of greater, significance for our discussion.[23]

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[19] Macdonell, op. cit., 11; Kulke, op. cit., 112.

[20] The literature on this subject is quite large. I cite here as an example only U. Schneider, "Indisches Denken und sein Verhältnis zur Geschichte," *Saeculum* 9 (1958): 156–62 (who speaks of the "überschwengliche Phantasie" of the "Indian mind," and attributes Indian ahistoricality to a "starken Hang zum Abstrahieren und zum Theoretisieren").

[21] *Pūrvamīmāṁsāsūtras* (Poona: Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, rep. 1976), 1.1.1-5; on *svataḥprāmāṇya* see especially *Mīmāṁsāślokavārttika* (Varanasi: Tārā Press, 1978), 41ff. (*codanāsūtra*, 33ff.).

[22] Especially *PMS* 1.1.6-26. and 1.3.30-35. For a recent discussion, see Francis X. D'Sa, *Śabdaprāmāṇyam in Śabara and Kumārila* (Vienna: De Nobili Research Library, 1980).

[23] Other arguments are offered, such as those based on the language and style of the Vedas (*Tantravārttika*, vol. 1 [Poona: Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, repr. 1970], 164ff.). Despite the importance of the subject for Mīmāṁsā, *vedāpauruṣeyatva* is not proven with the consistency and cogency

Mīmāṃsā holds on empirical grounds that the tradition of the recitation of the Vedas must be beginningless (*uktaṃ tu śabdapūrvatvam, PMS* 1.1.29; cf. *Ślokavārttika, Vākyādhikaraṇa*, vs. 366). But that is not sufficient to prove its transcendence and thus infallibility (something false can be beginningless, the *jātyandhaparaṃparānyāya*). It is therefore argued that the Vedas are transcendent by reason of their anonymity. Had they been composed by men, albeit long ago, there is no reason why the memory of these composers should not have been preserved to us. Those men who are named in association with particular recensions, books, hymns of the Vedas—Kaṭhaka, for example, or Paippalādaka—are not to be regarded as the authors but simply as scholars specializing in the transmission or exposition of the texts in question (*ākhyā pravacanāt*, 1.1.30; *pūrvapakṣa* ad 1.1.27). Texts for which no authors can be identified *have* no authors, and this applies to the Vedas and to the Vedas alone (which are thus presumably the only authentically anonymous texts in Indian cultural history).[24]

Signally important is the second argument. The transcendent character of the Vedas, which is proved by the fact of their having no beginning in time and no author, is confirmed by their contents: the Vedas show no dimension whatever of historical referentiality. Allusions to historical persons or to historical sequentiality are only apparently so. For instance, the Vedic sentence "Babara Prāvāhaṇi [son of Pravāha] once desired . . ." [*TS* 7.1.5.4]—which might establish a *terminus post quem* for the composition of the text (i.e., after Pravāha begot Babara)—contains merely phonemic resemblances to the names of historical persons (*paraṃ tu śrutisāmānyamātram* 1.1.31; *pūrvapakṣa* ad 1.1.28). "Etymological" analysis shows that the references are in fact to eternally existing entities (in the case in question, to the "howling wind").[25]

The significance of the Mīmāṃsā conviction that, existing as the Vedas do out of time (the fact that alone authenticates their claim to truth and authority), they can have no dimension of historical referentiality, seems to me to lie in two different directions. One is the past and the past tradition that was thereby called into question, and the other is the future and the expectations for Sanskrit discourse that were thereby stimulated and the constraints thereby imposed.

The Mīmāṃsā view of what the Vedas can mean challenged and supplanted an important alternative conception. The *nairukta* or etymological analysis of the Vedas, which we find to be a central argument in the *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra*s and is later set forth in detail in the *Śābarabhāṣya*, had been only one of several interpretative modes in early India. Another was that of the *aitihāsika*s, who sought to explain the Vedic texts on the basis of the things that have "actually happened" (*itihāsa*).[26] No textbook of *aitihāsika* interpretation has been preserved to us, in contrast to the *nairukta* tradition about which we are informed in detail by the *Nirukta*. The scraps of information about it have had to be laboriously collected, and there are disputes about what such a textbook might have contained, had it ever existed.[27] We learn something about the conceptions of the

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the system elsewhere evinces. For example, in answer to a *pūrvapakṣa* averring that (whereas words may be eternal) sentences can only be composed by men, Śabara claims the argument has been refuted by the anonymity of the Vedic texts, when that has yet to be proven (*Śābarabhāṣya* [Poona: Ānandāśrama Sanskrit Series, 1976], 119.3). The claim for the beginninglessness of vedic recitation is nowhere clearly sustained in the *Bhāṣya* (for a late statement, see *Śāstradīpikā* [Bombay: Nirṇaya Sāgar Press, 1915], 162.17ff. A final example is the argument advanced by Śabara, ibid., 119.4 (repeated by Prabhākara [*Bṛhatī* ad loc. (Madras: University of Madras, 1934), 399] but suppressed by Kumārila) that I find to be patently circular: The truth of the content of the Vedas depends on their being *apauruṣeya; apauruṣeyatva*, however, is made to depend on the fact that they discuss metaphysical matters—i.e., to depend on the truth of their content.

[24] However uncompelling we may find this argument, Kumārila clearly did not, for he reverts to it elsewhere (cf., for example, *Tantravārttika*, 1:166.25–26).

[25] It is a principle of Mīmāṃsā interpretation, consequently, that there can be no connection in *mantra*s or *arthavāda*s with noneternal entities (what Kumārila refers to as the *mantrārthavādānityasaṃyogaparihāranyāya* (*Tantravārttika*, 188.14ff.). I am not sure I altogether understand Kumārila's paradox in *Ślokavārttika* (*Vedanityatā*, vss. 13–14, p. 672): If the Veda is eternal, it cannot communicate information about non-eternal things; nor can it do so even if it is not eternal, for then no absolute authority (would attach to any of its communications?).

[26] Such a bifurcation in interpretation between the "historical" and the allegorical is familiar from the early Christian tradition, see Press, op. cit., 286.

[27] E. Sieg, *Die Sagenstoffe des Ṛgveda und die indische Itihāsatradition* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1902), esp. pp. 7–35; P. Horsch, *Die vedische Gāthā- und Śloka-Literatur* (Bern: Franke, 1966), passim.

*aitihāsika*s from the *Nirukta* itself,[28] but thereafter Vedic commentators seem to become increasingly indifferent to citing them. From the materials that we do have, however, it is clear that this mode of interpretation consisted in providing the mythological and historical background—the deeds of gods and of praiseworthy men—to which the Vedic hymns were thought to make allusion.[29]

Whatever the scholarly value to us of *aitihāsika* interpretation itself—an old controversy of no relevance to the present discussion—it is significant in reexamining the question of Indian historical consciousness to know that such interpretation existed. In a large but still meaningful sense, this was historical explanation—as Durga defines it, "*itihāsa* concerns causal events, it is 'what actually happened'" (*nidānabhūtam iti haivam āsīd iti ya ucyate sa itihāsaḥ*)[30]—and explanation of texts that were viewed as what they are, historical-cultural products. Moreover, it should now be clear that in the classical period, crucial postulates about the Vedas, as paradigms of truthful and authoritative discourse, that were developed by those who came to be regarded as their true guardians—the Mīmāṃsakas—rendered such a mode of understanding impossible, with *nirukta* or etymological allegoresis eventually becoming the dominant hermeneutic.[31]

The second, or prospective, direction of significance of the Mīmāṃsā conception of the Vedas has considerably more importance for Indian intellectual history. My hypothesis in essence is that, when the Vedas were emptied of their "referential intention," other sorts of Brahmanical intellectual practices seeking to legitimate their truth-claims had perforce to conform to this special model of what counts as knowledge, and so to suppress the evidence of their own historical existence—a suppression that took place in the case of *itihāsa*, "history," itself.

I have argued elsewhere at length that virtually all Sanskrit learning in classical and medieval India comes to view itself in one way or another as genetically linked to the Vedas (a process, which we may call vedicization, that is in fact culture-wide). As "knowledge" *tout court*, and as the *śāstra* par excellence, as the "ominiscient" (*ManuSm.* 2.7) and "infinite" (*TS* 3.10.11.4 etc.) text, Veda is the general rubric under which every sort of partial knowledge—the various individual *śāstras*—are ultimately subsumed. There are several routes to establishing this consanguinity: through some formal convention embodied in the text—a *śāstra* will explicitly claim status as a Veda, or establish for itself a *paraṃparā* reverting to God, or present itself as the outcome of divine revelation directly to the author or of successive abridgements from an all-comprehensive Veda; through incorporation into a taxonomy (such as the *vidyāsthāna*s) of what constitutes authentic knowledge of *dharma, dharma* itself having come in the meantime to connote merely the social sanction of a given cultural practice; or through the argument that *all* traditional Brahmanical learning—*smṛti*—is derived from lost Vedic texts.[32] There is, in the last analysis, hardly any branch of learning whose texts do not claim authority by asserting a quasi-vedic status in one way or

[28] See for example *Nirukta* (Bombay: Nirṇaya Sāgar Press, 1930), 10.3.26 (p. 450).

[29] Sieg characterizes *aitihāsika* interpretation as "mythologisch-historische" (op. cit., 7, 19), or "historisch-antiquarische" (p. 35); Horsch remarks that *itihāsa* "[darf] ohne Bedenken als Vorlauferin des Heldenepos betrachtet werden und wird deshalb schon in vedischer Zeit Sagenmotive und heroische Taten von Menschen in ihre Darstellung verflochten haben" (op. cit., 13).

[30] Durga on *Nirukta* 2.10 (p. 81) (cited Sieg, op. cit., 28).

[31] I expect to deal elsewhere with the Mīmāṃsā treatment of [*parakṛtipurākalparūpa-*]*arthavāda*.

[32] "The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory in Indian Intellectual History," *JAOS* 105 (1985): 499–519; "The Idea of Śāstra in Traditional India," *Beiträge Zur Indienforschung* (forthcoming). The *vidyāsthāna*s become so capacious, even in Kumārila (who includes *gandharvaveda, āyurveda, arthaśāstra*, see *Tantravārttika* 1: 122), as to embrace virtually every significant intellectual practice. It is Kumārila again who articulates the argument that all Brahmanical *smṛti* is vedically derived, and so inerrant. Such is his final position in his comment on *PMS* 1.3.4, although his views seem often contradictory (hence the contradiction with my earlier note, "Theory of Practice," n. 85). Such, in fact, is what I believe to be the original implication of the term *smṛti*, see "'Tradition' as 'Revelation': Smṛti, Śruti, and the Sanskrit Discourse of Power," in *Lex et Litterae* (Festschrift Botto), forthcoming. While Kumārila, to be sure, distinguishes in this literature between texts (and even segments of texts) that are transcendent and independently authoritative and those that are not (i.e., between the *adṛṣṭārtha* and the *dṛṣṭārtha*, see "'Tradition' as 'Revelation'," passim), this was not a distinction that was properly followed. The Purāṇas, which number themselves among the Vedas and generally assert a divine origin, are often *dṛṣṭārtha*, and encyclopedically so, in their interests (as, for example, the *Agnipurāṇa*).

another. For such a claim to be sustained, it was essential to conform with the putative referential sphere of the Veda.

As for the texts of "history," *itihāsa* itself—the great epics, for example, which were early viewed as authoritative social codes and yet like all epics are self-professedly "historical" and referential—how were they dealt with in respect to this process of "vedicization"? In precisely the same manner as any other sort of Sanskrit discourse. They not only come to be numbered among the *vidyāsthāna*s, the sources of our knowledge of *dharma*, but are fitted into a genealogy similar to that of the Vedas: The "great being" that breathes forth the Vedas likewise breathes forth *itihāsa* (*BĀU* 2.4.10). As is well known, the *Mahābhārata*, the text consistently viewed throughout the classical and medieval period as the principal representative of the genre *itihāsa*,[33] proclaims itself the "fifth Veda," as in fact *itihāsa* and *purāṇa* had been identified in the latest stratum of the Veda itself (indeed, they are the "Veda of the Vedas," *ChU* 7.1.2), while the study of *itihāsa* is conjoined with the study of the Vedas properly speaking as a cognate activity (ibid.; cf. *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* 1.39–45, esp. last verse; *Artha Śāstra* 1.3). Altogether representative of the learned assessment of the character of *itihāsa* for classical and medieval India is the *Nyāyabhāṣya*. After asserting that the authority of *itihāsa* is established by the Veda itself (he cites a Brāhmaṇa passage that calls *itihāsapurāṇa* "the fifth Veda, the Veda of the Vedas"), Vātsyāyana strengthens his argument by adding, "precisely the same men who saw and expounded the *mantra*s and *brāhmaṇa*s saw and expounded *itihāsa* . . . " (*NB* 4.1.61). So *itihāsa* itself, "what has actually taken place," has become merely another textualization of eternity, an always-already given discourse. Like language itself, which in the Mīmāṃsā view expresses in the first instance the general (*ākṛti*) and not the particular (*vyakti*), the primary reference of *itihāsa*, "history," is now the eternally repeated and no longer the contingent, the localized, the individual— that is, the historical.

In brief, given the Mīmāṃsā propositions about the nature of the Veda, the ascription to other intellectual disciplines, including *itihāsa*, of Vedic or Veda-like status can only have provoked an accommodation with those propositions. There were two vectors of force in this accommodation. When the dominant hermeneutic of the Vedas eliminated the possibility of historical referentiality, any text seeking recognition of its truth claims—any text seeking to participate in brahmanical discourse at all—was required to exclude precisely this referential sphere. Discursive texts that came to be composed under the sign of the Veda eliminated historical referentiality and with it all possibility of historiography. As for the *itihāsa* portions of Vedic literature and such works as the *Mahābhārata* or *Rāmāyaṇa*, these came to be interpreted in ways that ignore or occlude their constitutive historicality.[34]

History, one might thus conclude, is not simply absent from or unknown to Sanskritic India; rather it is denied in favor of a model of "truth" that accorded history no epistemological value or social significance. The denial of history, for its part, raises an entirely new set of questions. To answer these we would want to explore the complex ideological formation of traditional Indian society that privileges system over process—the structure of the social order over the creative role of man in history—and that, by denying the historical transformations of the past, deny them for the future and thus serve to naturalize the present and its asymmetrical relations of power.[35]

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[33] See for example Sieg, op. cit., 30.

[34] I am thinking here particularly of the type of allegorical (or better, anagogical) interpretation of the *Mahābhārata-Harivaṃśa* and *Rāmāyaṇa* that we find occasionally in Nīlakaṇṭha for the former (who regards the entire epic as nothing other than an "illustration of the essential meaning of all fourteen *vidyāsthāna*s" [ad *MBh* 1.1.1]), and consistently in the Śrīvaiṣṇava commentators (Maheśvaratīrtha and Govindarāja, in particular) for the latter. A similar development might have occurred in belles-lettres. It is of interest that the old distinction between *ākhyāyikā* and *kathā*, "historical" and fictional stories, which we find still in Bhāmaha (*Kāvyālaṃkāra* 1.17: *vṛttadevādicaritaśaṃsi* as opposed to *utpādyavastu*) is obliterated in Daṇḍin, who can no longer perceive the fundamental distinction between the two (they form *ekā jātiḥ*: *Kāvyādarśa* 1.23–28).

[35] The intractable antinomy of process and system is well described by Andrew Feenberg, *Lukács, Marx and the Sources of Critical Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 172–239. My basic conclusion about the denial of history is at odds with the thesis of Claude Lefort ("Outline of the Genesis of Ideology in Modern Societies," in *The Political Forms of Modern Society*, ed. John Thompson [Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986], 181–236), which seeks to restrict such a denial to modern society. My work has been much influenced, however, by his characterization of ideology as a "sequence of representations which have the function of re-establishing the dimension of 'society without history'. . . ."