Audrey Truschke, *The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Muslim Pasts*. New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2021, pp 354.

ANUSMITA BHATTACHARJEE
Department of History, University of Delhi

Audrey Truschke's daunting endeavour of analysing outlandish Sanskrit texts, from the 1190s uptill 1721, dealing with Indo-Persian political events, parturiated her third book titled *The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Muslim Pasts*. By focussing more on historiography rather than political history, Truschke claims her book to be one of a kind as it seeks, "for the first time, to collect, analyse and theorise Sanskrit histories of Muslim-led rule and, later, as Muslims became an integral part of the Indian cultural and political worlds, Indo-Muslim rule as a body of historical materials."[1]

The book is divided into seven chapters, each engaging with Sanskrit texts composed in distinct spatio-temporal contexts. Besides, the appendix of the book contains English translations of some selected Sanskrit histories discussed by the author in the preceding seven chapters. The first chapter of the book deals with Sanskrit epigraphs and other forms of texts from the 8th century CE, composed to mark Muslim presence in the subcontinent. Truschke has divided these Sanskrit materials into two groups: Sanskrit inscriptions in which religion did not serve as the marker of identity of allies or foes and seldom sought to otherise Muslims;[2] and 11th century esoteric Buddhist materials, part of the *Kalachakra* tradition, that described Islam negatively as a religion of violence (*himsadharma*) in order to justify its own existence. Truschke, through these two sets of examples, has concluded that such endeavours showcase how indigenous learned elite chose to selectively

[1] Audrey Truschke, *The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Muslim Pasts* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd., 2021), xxii.

[2] Ibid., 5.

portray the Muslim community with respect to different contexts and for different audiences.[3]

Following Prithviraj Chauhan's (r. 1177-1192) defeat by Muiz ud-Din Ghori (r. 1173-1206) in 1192, the Ghurids introduced new languages (Persian, Turkish and Arabic), an 'unfamiliar' religion – Islam, and unfamiliar styles of rulership to the Indian subcontinent. In the second chapter, Truschke's narrative deals with how the Sanskrit intelligentsia of that era perceived such differences. By citing the reference of Jayanaka's *Pṛthvirajavijaya*, Truschke has pointed out that its author gives no indication of looking down upon the Ghurids due to their religious affiliation, and he was only concerned with the Ghurids' inability to speak Sanskrit, which reflected a major flaw.[4]

In the third chapter, Truschke has emphatically shed light on the phrase *Hindurayasuratrana*, which was used by Bukka[5] to proclaim himself as a sultan (*suratrana*) who stood out among Hindu kings (*hinduraya*). In this context, 'Hindu' does not denote a religious identity but rather a royal claim to authority, therefore the features defining these terminologies appear to be largely cultural, instead of religious.[6] Philip B. Wagoner situates this process of cultural change within a broader theoretical model of what he calls "Islamicisation," wherein indigenous elites boosted their political status and authority by engaging with the more "universal" culture of Islam, without compromising indigenous cultural traditions.[7] As far as the Muslim rulers were concerned, they were highly influenced by these cultural innovations and used the Sanskrit title *Hammira* for expressing their political ambitions. Truschke has cited examples of the coins of Muhammad Ghori (d. 1206) bearing, in Devanagari script, the Sanskrit titles *srihammira* and *srimad hammira* (Glorious *Hammira*). Delhi Sultan Iltutmish (r. 1210–36), too, issued coins proclaiming himself as *suratana srisamsadina* (Glorious Sultan Shamsuddin).[8]

[3] Ibid., 17.

[4] Ibid., 24-33.

[5] One of the founders of Vijayanagara Empire.

[6] Truschke, *Language of History,* 43-45.

[7] Philip B. Wagoner, ""Sultan among Hindu Kings": Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 4 (1996): 853-854.

[8] Truschke, *Language of History,* 46.

Shifting her focus onto two literary sources, Gangadevi's *Madhuravijaya* (c. 1380)[9] and Nayachandra's *Hammiramahakavya* (c.1410),[10] Truschke has shown how both these texts articulate the victory of a 'Hindu' power over a 'Muslim' one, and vice versa, in a contrasting manner. However, in both these cases, there is a discernible anxiety to connect with the recent past for claiming political legitimacy.[11]

In the fourth chapter, Audrey Truschke has put forward a comparative analysis of two regional traditions belonging to the 14th and 15th centuries, respectively – Gujarati *Prabandhas* composed by Shvetambara Jains, and Kashmiri *Rajataranginis* composed by Kashmiri Brahmins. Truschke, through several examples, demonstrates how the composers of Jain *Prabandhas* did not intend to project Muslims as their primary foes, responsible for fomenting unfortunate circumstances in the prevailing political milieu.[12]

While defining the Kashmiri *Rajatangini* tradition, Truschke focuses on the works by Kalhana, Jonaraja and Shrivar composed in 1149, 1459, 1486 respectively. According to Truschke, Kalhana's endeavours do not reflect any intention of otherising the Muslims; Jonaraja's Muslim patron, Sultan Zain al-Abidin, was often praised as being superior to other rulers of Kashmir and was likened to Vishnu. Truschke argues that Jonaraja, therefore, employed the term '*mleccha*' to distinguish tyrannical kings from virtuous ones. Further, in Shrivar's narrative, Zain al-Abidin is identified as Shiva, and we also find a robust presence of Muslims.[13]

In the fifth chapter, Truschke has studied the texts on Jain-Mughal ties, authored by Jain monks from the *Tapa Gaccha* and the *Kharatara Gaccha*, two Shvetambara branches largely based in Gujarat. In their narratives, Jain

[9] This Sanskrit text deals with the overthrow of the Sultanate of Madurai in 1371 (Sultanate of Malabar according to Persian and Arabic sources) by Kumara Kampana, prince of the Vijayanagara Empire and son of Bukka I. The author, Gangadevi, was his wife.

[10] It narrates the history of the Chauhan dynasty's conflict with Muslim and Indo-Muslim rulers, leading to Hammira Chauhan's futile attempt(s) to resist Alauddin Khalji's assault on Ranthambore Fort in Rajasthan in 1301.

[11] R. Mahalakshmi, "Review Article," review of *The Language of History: Sanskrit Narratives of Muslim Pasts,* by Audrey Truschke. *Studies in People's History* 9, no. 1 (2022): 87.

[12] Truschke, *Language of History,* 83.

[13] Ibid., 86-107.

authors located the loci of Mughal imperial interest and Jain religious ideologies, both concurrently and interdependently. Truschke then draws our attention to Siddhichandra's *Bhanuchandraganicharita,* in which he equates Akbar with Rama, Krishna, Indra and other deities, followed by Jahangir whose activities are compared to that of Indra, in addition to Nur Jahan being compared to Lakshmi. Besides, Abul Fazl is represented as "a paradigm of Sanskrit learning."[14] Truschke takes note of Siddhichandra's ironical endeavour to project Jains as the "Mughal Other," and conversely, the Mughals as indistinguishable from traditional Indian kings. In her opinion, the *Bhanuchandraganicharita* is arguably the earliest Sanskrit text to focus primarily on cross-cultural interactions with Indo-Persian political elites. [15]

In the sixth chapter, Truschke discusses Rajput and Maratha Sanskrit histories, which reveal that the identities associated with 'Rajput' and 'Maratha' were not "timeless" but fluid, such that "they fought on all sides."[16] The author has attempted to investigate how this aspect of "fluid alliances" was received among the contemporary Sanskrit literati, for which she sought to study two texts parallelly, Chandrashekhara's *Surjanacharita* (composed in the 1590s in Benares) and Rudrakavi's *Rastraudhavamsamahakavya* (composed in 1596 in Baglan). The former text accepts the Mughals as the superior political counterpart with respect to its patron, and the author considers his patron's alliance with the Mughals as a positive development. The latter text is dedicated primarily to the exploits of its patron, Narayan Shah, the Baglan king in 1596, whose political affiliation(s) used to be quite fluid with no obsession for loyalty. Truschke then shifts her focus onto Sanskrit works composed for the Maratha Bhonsle clan - *Suryavamsa* (c. 1675), *Sambhurajacharita* (c. 1685) and *Rajaramacharita* (c. 1690), patronised by Shivaji (d. 1680), Sambhaji (r. 1680–89) and Rajaram (r. 1689–1700) respectively. She then shed light on two additional texts on Shivaji and Sambhaji - Jayarama's *Parnlaparvatagrahankhyna* and *Paramanandakavya* composed by Paramananda (or somebody using his name). Truschke has asserted that in such Maratha-sponsored histories, a strong sense of "Us versus Them" is often fostered such

[14] Ibid., 132-133.
[15] Ibid., 135.
[16] Ibid., 139.

that identities of "Us" and "Them" were carved out in relation to military and political terms.[17]

According to Truschke, this "textured vocabulary"[18] must not be analysed as something associated with the modern construct of Hindu-Muslim dichotomy, which had been in circulation since the mid-19th century, finding legitimate voice in the works of Jadunath Sarkar.[19] Sarkar, who projected Shivaji as "a new hope, the protector of Hindus and a saviour of Brahmans from the atrocities of Aurangzeb,"[20] set the stage for popular contestation orbiting around the Aurangzeb-Shivaji binary. Truschke has argued that the Maratha sponsored Sanskrit histories, and conversely, put forward a more nuanced understanding of the early modern ways of seeing the world.

In the seventh chapter, Truschke has undertaken the study of four texts: Padmasagara's *Jagadgurukavya*, a Sanskrit translation of part of Abul Fazl's *Akbarnama* and Lakshmipati's pair of texts - *Nripatinitigarbhitavritta* and *Abdullacharita*.

Colonial historians like James Mill and Vincent Smith framed the medieval period as a dark age,[21] a characterisation that prompted secular scholars to put forward a counter-narrative which often downplayed the role of religion in public life, a tendency described by Neeladri Bhattacharya as the "predicament of secular history."[22] The author in discussion, Audrey Truschke, has also aligned herself with this secular approach over the years. It

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[17] Ibid., 155.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb,* vols. I–V (Calcutta: M.C. Sarkar and Sons, 1912-1924), cited in Anas Zaman, "The Reign of Emperor Aurangzeb: Some Historiographical Considerations." MPhil Dissertation, Department of History, University of Delhi (2022): 90 (refer fn. 108).

[20] Quoted from Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Aurangzeb* Vol IV (New Delhi: Orient Longman Limited, 1919), 188 in Ibid., 91 (refer fn. 115).

[21] Ibid., 109. Also see, Cynthia Talbot, *Precolonial India in Practice: Society, Religion and Identity in Medieval Andhra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1-2.

[22] Neeladri Bhattacharya, "Predicaments of Secular Histories." *Public Culture* 20, no. 1 (2008): 57-73, cited in Raziuddin Aquil, *History in the Public Domain* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2023), 25. Also see, Raziuddin Aquil, "Introduction: Early Modern Bengal" in *An Earthly Paradise: Trade, Politics and Culture in Early Modern Bengal*, eds. Raziuddin Aquil and Tilottama Mukherjee (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2019), 24-26.

is important to note that Hindu-Muslim identities emerged through mutual interaction, not isolation.[23] According to Cynthia Talbot, with the advent of the Muslims in South Asia, "a broader, more inclusive, Indic identity began to develop" among the non-Muslim inhabitants.[24] It is, therefore, necessary to deconstruct the modern understanding of Hindu-Muslim dichotomy and then reconstruct the history of Hindu-Muslim interactions with reference to the space and time they belong to. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence have argued for moving beyond narrow Hindu-Muslim categories by using broader terms like *Islamicate* and *Indic*, that reflect expansive worldviews rather than rigid religious groups.[25] Truschke's efforts appear to be less promising in this regard as she has preferred to limit herself strictly within the precincts of the Muslim-Non Muslim dichotomy in general, and the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy in particular, trying to blur boundaries between the two ethno-religio-cultural categories, and contribute generously to the broader scholarship on secular history. Although no scholarly work is beyond criticism, this book opens access to a thought-provoking archive of an "under-studied phase of Sanskrit literary history."[26]

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[23] Cynthia Talbot, "Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 4 (1995): 694.

[24] Ibid., 700.

[25] David Gilmartin and Bruce B Lawrence, "Introduction" in *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, eds. David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 1-2.

[26] Mahalakshmi, "Review Article," 91.

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