

SMASHING STATUES, DANCING SIVAS:

TWO TALES OF INDIAN ICONS

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In this essay I draw upon two previously published essays that I wrote widely apart in time, but which are thematically linked.¹ The two halves of this essay are both concerned with icons. They are also concerned with the ways in which we 'think' the difference represented by the non-western world. The most common and significant way in which that difference has been thought has been to view the non-western world as 'backward'. Politically and ethically, this has served to sanction various attempts (Marxist and liberal) at social engineering; intellectually, it has meant that 'difference' has been conceived such that the fact of difference does not call the categories and conceptual schemes through which we view the world as in need of substantial emendation or rethinking. For the Scottish Enlightenment thinkers as for Hegel and Marx and Weber, it is only with the advent of the modern that the 'pre-modern' becomes fully comprehensible and rationally explicable; the modern, the concepts to which it gives rise and through which it is thought and understood, is also the key to all that which preceded it and led to it. It is this historicism, a historicism that undergirds much of our politics and our intellectual endeavours, that I seek to question in this essay. It so happens that this questioning proceeds through an encounter

with icons—through an examination of the destruction of nationalist icons during a Maoist 'cultural revolution' in Calcutta in 1970, and consideration of a legal case involving a Nataraja, or dancing Siva, more than a decade later. At the end of this essay I will suggest that while the fact that my argument against historicism proceeds through icons is fortuitous (that is, an argument about difference and against historicist domestications of it does not have to proceed through icons), nonetheless the concept of 'icon', if we are sufficiently attentive to it, is itself the site of difference.

The first part of this essay offers a reading of an episode in the history of Marxism in India. Marxism shares in the historicism that underpins distinctions between the modern and the backward; indeed, in one understanding of it Marxism perfects this historicism. However, I suggest that the much-debated 'cultural revolution' unleashed by Maoist students in Calcutta in 1970 represented a more-or-less unwitting auto-critique of the distinction between modern and backward, and of the privileging of the former over the latter. In so doing, it offered a way of engaging with 'non-moderns' that did not simply consign them to a past-present which needed to be transformed and overcome.

I say 'unwitting' because a rejection of the language of backwardness can occur without calling into question the historicism that enables it in the first place. In the second part of the essay it is the master category of 'history' itself that I seek to problematise. Here I ask whether the ethical need (or so I conceive it) to attend to the self-understandings of those whose histories we write obliges us to conceive of history-writing in different ways; whether it is possible and necessary for Clio, the muse of history-writing, to make a place for Siva, the Hindu god of creation and destruction.

SMASHING STATUES

In 1970, at the tail end of a failing rural insurgency which had for a period created small 'liberated zones' in a few parts of rural India, Maoist students in Calcutta began a 'cultural revolution', comprised principally of attacks on educational institutions and on icons. The first attacks on educational institutions and on the statues and portraits of national heroes began in mid-April 1970. From then, there were almost daily attacks: statues of prominent figures were decapitated, blackened and otherwise vandalised, and their portraits were torn and trampled upon. 'Victims' included Gandhi, Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Rammohan Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda, Ashutosh Mukherjee and others. These were a diverse array of figures, drawn from the nationalist pantheon as well as from amongst eminent nineteenth and twentieth century Bengali reformers and literati, especially from the period of the 'Bengal renaissance'. With heads falling all around, the government placed a twenty-four hour guard around Gandhi's statue in Park Street.

The whole campaign was something

of a surprise, for it had not been presaged in any party document or any pronouncement by a party leader. The Naxalite movement had split off from one of the two existing Indian communist parties in part precisely because its Maoist inspiration led it to insist upon agrarian struggle as the first and necessary step of any revolution. The smashing of statues in the name of Maoism was then an unexpected and spontaneous development, originating from amongst students. Nor was this student 'movement' possessed of any organisational centre; indeed, the actions were performed quite spontaneously by small local groups without anyone addressing the rationale behind their acts. All this meant that the import of the statue smashing was never made fully clear. To take a stand on it – to praise or denounce it – required interpreting the meaning of these iconoclastic acts.

And interpreted they were: the students' actions immediately became the subject of endless discussion in the bars, coffee houses and homes of Calcutta. One of the most common readings was that the Naxalite actions were, quite simply, devoid of any meaning: that they were silly, pointless, juvenile, 'uncivilised'², even 'perverted'³, vandalism rather than politics. This interpretation was advanced not only by the bourgeois press and Congress politicians, but also by many on the Left, who regarded the actions with bewilderment and opposed them as juvenile and counter-productive.

A second reading offered was that the meaning of the Naxalite activities lay precisely in their random and seemingly pointless character. The eminent academic and Naxalite sympathiser Ashok Rudra described them as absurdist actions, the symbolic value of which lay in the fact that, intentionally or otherwise, they revealed the absurdity of

Indian society, and in so doing kept alive the possibility of revolt.⁴

Yet another reading was offered by the leadership of the Naxalite party (the Communist Party of India, Marxist-Leninist) which though it did not instigate the campaign and indeed seems to have been as surprised by it as everyone else, soon endorsed it, interpreting it as the product of a 'hatred' which was revolutionary in its origins and in its effects. This hatred, declared party leaders, was not simply destructive, but rather the necessary prelude to the birth of the new: 'This is not a negative action. They are destroying statues to build new statues. They are demolishing Gandhi's statue to put up the statue of the Rani of Jhansi.'⁵

Another sympathetic interpretation declared that statue smashing was a protest against a political culture in which the nationalist and cultural achievements of the past were valued indiscriminately. It was a feature of this political culture that, from the Bengal Renaissance of the nineteenth century to independence in 1947, it presented the history of India, and especially of Indian nationalism, as an almost bloodless tale. This 'official' version of history excised the betrayals of the nationalist cause and of the peasantry which were, in fact, so important a feature of the true story. Statue smashing 'was undoubtedly a protest, though unconscious and primitive',⁶ against this tendency. The Naxalite students were entirely right to protest, for there was all the difference in the world between those literary and religious figures of the nineteenth century who had made a virtue of India's backwardness and stagnation, and the social reformers and modernisers of that period. The former, whatever their contributions to literature and the like, were 'reactionary'. By contrast, those who sought to reform

antiquated and oppressive Hindu social practices 'became rebels against all obsolete feudal-patriarchal social vices and traditions, became fervent Westernised modernists', and hence were progressive.⁷ A refusal or failure to make such distinctions was anti-revolutionary in its deliberate blurring over of essential distinctions. The politics of statue smashing was by contrast a revolutionary politics, for in opposition to the prevailing tendency it insisted, however unconsciously, that such distinctions be made and preserved.

The problem with this reading, the one undeniable fact upon which it foundered, was that the iconoclasm of the Naxalites did not spare 'modernisers' any more than traditionalists. Not only Vivekananda and Gandhi, but also Rammohan Roy and Vidyasagar, were amongst its targets. Nor was any other principle of selection apparent: targets included nineteenth century British loyalists as also twentieth century nationalists, such as Nehru and Bose. It was this—the sweeping nature of the Naxalite's targets, their apparent failure to distinguish and discriminate—which perturbed even many of those who otherwise were sympathetic to the Naxalites.

Yet the significance of Naxalite statue smashing lay, I wish to suggest, *precisely* in its failure or refusal to attempt to distinguish and discriminate between the 'progressive' and 'reactionary' elements of Indian culture. To claim this in no way involves ascribing great subtlety and forethought to the Naxalite students; it is not my argument that the Naxalites shared my interpretation of the significance of their actions, and that they were motivated by such an understanding. It simply involves claiming that even where the motivation and reasoning behind an act might be unthought or juvenile, the

actions may nonetheless be pregnant with meaning, because actions derive their significance from their context rather than simply from the intentions of actors.

In this case, I wish to draw attention to two contexts. The first, a cultural and political context, one in which the leading elements of the Left were drawn from the *bhadralok* (middle-class, gentle-folk) class, a class associated with the nineteenth century efflorescence of Bengali literature and culture known as the Bengal Renaissance. Members of the *bhadralok* belonging to Left parties saw themselves as heirs to this great tradition and took pride in its achievements just as they took pleasure and pride in the fact that India's only Nobel laureate was a Bengali, Rabindranath Tagore. *Bhadralok* leftists, in other words, were no different from other *bhadralok* in these regards. This was also a period when the Indian state was itself claiming to be on the Left; by the late 1960s, Indira Gandhi's need for Left support in the course of her inner-party struggle against the 'old guard' of the Congress had seen a definite shift to the left on some domestic issues, as well as closer relations with the USSR in the international arena. The chumminess between the USSR and Indian ruling circles seemed to affirm the identity of interests between the two; seemed, that is, to suggest that in India many political differences were only differences *within* the ranks of 'progressives'. Indeed, in 1970 the Indian state was actively promoting Lenin centenary celebrations, while the bourgeois press sang the praises of Lenin and urged that ways be explored to make 'Leninism a part of our political heritage'!

In this cosy political and cultural atmosphere, the Naxalite campaign was like a slap in the face. Its very refusal to

make distinctions signified a wholesale rejection; through their actions *bhadralok* youth, many of them from an elite college of Calcutta University, seemed to be pouring scorn on the idea that there were any 'progressive' aspects to a cultural tradition born of and sustained in privilege. Their rejection reverberated with all the more meaning when read in a second context, that of the Marxist tradition in the colonies. In the colonies, where bourgeois society had not yet established itself, Marxists championed both modernisation and revolution. This meant that they sought to identify, and where possible ally with, trends, classes, parties and movements which were 'historically progressive', that is, which furthered progress towards the modern. The assumption was that such movements and trends would also be politically progressive. The rationale for Marxists supporting nationalism in the colonies was exactly this, that in colonial conditions nationalism embodied progress towards the modern in a two-fold sense: the 'national-democratic' revolution would be a *historical* step forward, as well as being *politically* progressive, inasmuch as it undermined imperialism.⁸ In this understanding of it, Marxism appeared as the theory which provided the criteria by which one could distinguish 'between the modern and the traditional, the secular and the religious, the progressive and the obscurantist, the advanced and the backward',⁹ and socialism appeared as the fulfilment, the culmination, of modernity.

A great deal of Marxist theorising in the colonies thus consisted of identifying what classes and parties were progressive, and which not. The task was rendered immensely complex by the fact that there was, in reality, no necessary coincidence between that which

was seen as 'historically progressive', and that which was politically radical. Classes that seemed bearers of modern ideas, ideals and social relations, such as the bourgeoisie, were sometimes less than plausibly cast in the role of agents of revolutionary change; and politically 'radical' (e.g., nationalist) groups were frequently not credibly cast as bearers of historical progress. Nonetheless, it was an article of faith amongst most Marxists that what was politically revolutionary had perforce to be historically 'advanced', and great energy and ingenuity was exercised in trying to show this to be the case. To refuse to engage in this exercise, a refusal embodied in the indiscriminate character of the Naxalite students' statue smashing, was in effect to declare that such distinctions—between modernisers and traditionalists, ardent nationalists and half-hearted ones—were politically irrelevant, for both were part and parcel of the same history and politics.

The refusal to make distinctions is, from a historical point of view, no doubt somewhat naive. However the consternation this aroused, including—perhaps especially—in Left circles, was not simply due to the naivete of these actions, for naivete, even if politically damaging, can be easily dismissed. The Naxalite actions, even if the understanding and intentions which motivated them were simplistic, had a political significance far beyond the intentions of their young authors. In the context of the history of the Indian Left, they represented a rejection of a whole history and understanding of what it meant to be on and of the Left. This was one in which Marxism appeared as the culmination of the past rather than as a break with it, and where therefore 'intimations of modernity', in India's past and present were hunted down in order that they might be praised. It was one

where, given that the 'modern' was not always politically progressive and the pre-modern reactionary, the essence of Marxist theorising was often an almost scholastic aptitude for fine discriminations. Finally, it was one where the search for the more modern and *therefore* more progressive inevitably led to privileging the city over the countryside and the worker over the peasant.

By contrast, the refusal to make such distinctions, and make them central to one's analysis, had the effect of delinking what was politically revolutionary from the question of what was more modern. This pointed in the direction of a re-evaluation of Indian culture and history, one in which it was no longer necessary to treat the Indian past and present as an arena in which two contending tendencies, the one 'modern' and historically progressive, and the other 'medieval' and hence reactionary, were engaged in constant battle.

I have offered a reading of Maoism in India that sees it as having denied the distinctions—between modern and pre-modern, and progressive and reactionary—which serve to make Marxism a strongly historicist and teleological tradition. However, as I observed at the beginning of this essay, the rejection of such distinctions can occur without explicitly calling into question the historicism that enables them in the first place. In the second part of this essay I address questions of historicism and history writing.

CLIO AND THE DANCING SIVA

Everyone, we moderns believe(d), has a history, though not everyone has historiography. The West developed a tradition of history writing, but most cultures had myths and religious epics instead of history writing, even if they sometimes

confused the former for the latter. But because everyone nonetheless had a history, that history could be narrated in the terms of a rational historiography which would redescribe this past in terms alien to those whose past it was. Their own forms of recording and relating to the past—be they myths, legends, religious epics or other—could serve, at best, as (rather unreliable) raw materials in the reconstruction of this past. This did not occasion any discomfort, for these indigenous intellectual traditions were held to have demonstrated that they were unequal to the task of recording and narrating their history by mixing myth with reality, wish with fact, gods with men. And the epistemic commitments which suggested that these were people incapable of representing their own past were the same as those which further suggested that these people were ‘backward’. Or vice versa: that these people still belonged to the past was indicated, amongst other things, by their inability to properly represent their past.

Let us call this complex of attitudes Reason, or more accurately, the commitment to an idea of a Reason which is singular and universal. Let us note that although this Reason has not been dethroned, under the combined but variegated assaults of feminism, queer theory, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and other intellectual currents, it is nonetheless (to switch metaphors) tottering on its pedestal. But the nature of the challenges raised by these currents, and the movements which have often provided their conditions of emergence, differ. It is an important argument (if by now a commonplace one) that the very idea of Reason was constituted in part through a series of exclusions (of woman, nature, emotion, madness...). One strategy for problematising Reason is therefore to

demonstrate the contingencies and exclusions which went into its making.

The case of the non-West is somewhat different, for unlike Woman, say, the ‘savage’ and the Oriental were not so much the excluded but enabling Other of Reason as something *that fell short of it*. Dipesh Chakrabarty reminds us that it was historicism, the idea that the ‘savage’ and the Oriental were ‘backward’ and belonged to a time past, even as they inhabited the present, was the main mode by and through which the reason of non-West was declared to be lesser.¹⁰ Suppose ‘we’¹¹ were to reject such historicism intellectually in the same way as we have come to reject it politically: reject the notion that different intellectual traditions and the ways of being which sustain them can be plotted on the same (temporal) grid, such that non-western intellectual traditions are revealed to be inadequate approximations of Reason. Reason would no longer appear as singular; it would become pluralised, and there would be no easy way of comparing intellectual traditions, let alone declaring one superior to all others. If we had to learn to think not of Reason in the upper case, but rather in terms of *traditions of reasoning*, this would have great implications for history writing. It would mean, for one thing, that we would have to find a place for the interpretive schemes of peasants and others in our own interpretive schemes.

For instance, there have always been many, quite possibly a majority, of the world’s population whose world is peopled by gods who acted in and on the world and whose agency must be registered in any account of the world, just as there are people whose temporality as it is lived allows for their dead ancestors to directly intervene in their affairs. That is, there have always been people

with 'beliefs' which historiography can register but not accommodate, because gods and dead ancestors do not populate the world of history. Historicism once allowed all this to be explained as part of the past which survived – just as in Europe's past such beliefs had existed, so too in Asia and Africa's present they existed, testifying to the fact that Asia and Africa occupied a time different to our own. In the writing of history, the peasant's gods, who for him/her were active presences in the world, figured only as the peasant's 'beliefs' (note that to call it a belief is already to exorcise the world of gods), a belief which testified to the peasant's non-contemporaneity, to the fact that he/she was of our time and yet not of our time. But if that 'denial of coevalness'¹² which anthropology and historicism presumed and authorised is now (or should be) deeply problematic, and if we can no longer relegate the peasant's time to a time-past, we have to find a place in our history for the peasant's gods.

But how do we do so, how can we find a place for gods and spirits in modern historical consciousness and history writing? And should we bother to do so? If we are to take the pluralisation of Reason seriously, if we are to write history without any a priori claim to epistemic privilege, the effort must be made. It is intellectually incoherent (not to mention ethically unsustainable) to have abandoned the idea that peasants (or Aborigines) belong to a time past, while refusing in our intellectual practices to make them part of our present. A recognition of this has prompted a growing number of historians to find ways of re-writing history in order (in my way of putting it, which may not be theirs) to find a place for the gods in it. But the question remains: how does one go about writing such a history? Since I



Figure: 1 Dancing Siva. Courtesy of Debjani Ganguly.

pose this as a question to which I have no instant solution, I will end with a story – one of how contemporary British law found a place for the Indian god, Siva.

Richard Davis recounts the story in his *Lives of Indian Images*.¹³ In 1976 a landless labourer in the south Indian state of Tamil Nadu discovered a number of buried icons. One of these was a twelfth-century bronze Nataraja, an image of the god Siva in his pose as Lord of Dance, alternately dancing the cosmos into creation and into destruction. The finder sold the statue, which, through the operations of the international market in 'art-objects' (how an iconic figure which houses the spirit of a god becomes an 'art-object' perhaps parallels the process by which gods become, in history and anthropology, 'beliefs') eventually ended up in London in the British Museum. Concerned at the large numbers of such objects which were being smuggled out

of India, the Indian government made this a test case, engaging in a lengthy and expensive legal battle in British courts which eventually resulted in the statue being repatriated to India. The Indian government funded the case (*India vs Bumper*), but for technical reasons, it did not qualify as a plaintiff. The Indian side therefore nominated as plaintiffs the state of Tamil Nadu, the Visvanathasvami temple where the Siva statue had once resided, the executive officer of the temple, and later added a fourth plaintiff – the god Siva, who laid claim to the icon which had originally resided in his temple. The British judge accepted the claim that as a ‘juristic personality’ the god Siva was party to the case (the defence argued in appeal that as the U.K. was a Christian kingdom, this should have precluded foreign gods from bringing suit). Siva and the other plaintiffs won the case, which caused some consternation in international art markets, with one dealer warning that potential buyers would have to consider the risk of a ‘writ from Siva’. The god returned to India (accompanied by the Indian High Commissioner to the U.K.), where he was to be restored to his temple and resume his life as an image of worship. (Postscript – sadly, his crumbling temple was not fit to receive him, and plans to rebuild and reconsecrate it never materialised; the Nataraja ended up in the government maintained Icon Centre at Tiruvarur, safe from art thieves, but unworshipped, and ‘in danger of suffocation and heatstroke’).¹⁴

I am aware that recognising Siva as a ‘juristic personality’ is not quite the same thing as treating him as a historical actor. I am also aware that the law provides only limited parallels with, and thus guidance for, the writing of history. But I do find this little episode instruc-

tive, nonetheless. If a British court could make room for Siva, can we not find a place for him in the tribunal of history? Is it not possible for Clio to dance with Siva? Or alternatively, should we think not in terms of ‘history’, as something everyone has and which can be represented more or less accurately, but rather in terms of different and multiple *pasts* which do not exist independently of various ways of representing them – and which authorise different and multiple ways of being in the present?

ON ICONS

The critique of historicism I have offered here encountered icons all along the way. The fact that icons figure so prominently in this essay is, however, simply coincidental. They figure in the first part because the protagonists of my account, Maoist students, smashed statues; and in the second part because I use the story of a Nataraja to illustrate and develop my argument. But whilst icons are not in any way a privileged pathway into asking questions about difference (if by privileged we mean that the asking of such questions must necessarily proceed through a consideration of icons), the term/concept ‘icon’ can itself be made a site where we register difference, and I will conclude with a discussion of how this can be done.

When Christian missionaries encountered India, they were invariably struck by the profusion of religious icons in Hinduism, of which the Nataraja is only one. They were struck not only by the bewildering variety of icons, but also by the Hindus’ relation to their icons, which was unfamiliar to them. Reverend Sherring, for instance, was moved to write, ‘idolatry is a charm, a fascination, to the Hindu. It is, so to speak, the air he

breathes. It is the food of his soul. He is subdued, enslaved, befooled by it.¹⁵ The intensity with which Hindus related with their idols was not in accordance with the Christian understanding and defence of idols, namely that they were representations of god which served the function of instructing the unlettered and exciting religious awe.¹⁶ This was because for most Hindus idols or *murtis* are not, in fact, 'representations' of gods that reside elsewhere.¹⁷ At the very least, the idol or image or *murti*, once its eyes have been pierced and appropriate ceremonies observed,¹⁸ partakes of the *shakti* [power] of the god; for most Hindus, it is a god. As Diana Eck explains, 'the *murti* is more than a likeness; it is the deity itself taken 'form'. The uses of the word *murti* in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita suggest that the form is its essence. The flame is the *murti* of the fire...or the year is the *murti* of time... the *murti* is a body-taking, a manifestation, and is not different from the reality itself.'¹⁹ Thus Hindus did not 'believe' in their 'mind' that gods exist, and then 'represent' them as idols; they knew that their gods exist because they manifest themselves as icons, aniconic figures, spirits and ghosts, and in so doing form part of the everyday world of humans. Ashis Nandy writes, 'Deities in everyday Hinduism...are not entities outside everyday life, nor do they preside over life from outside; they constitute a significant part of it...Gods are above and beyond humans but they are, paradoxically, not outside the human fraternity'.²⁰ And there is, as C.J. Fuller notes, no sharp separation between a sacred realm inhabited by gods and a mundane one of men, for popular Hinduism is 'premised on the lack of any absolute divide between them...human beings can be divine forms under many and various

conditions, and the claim to divinity is unsensational, even banal, in a way that it could never be in a monotheistic religion lacking 330 million deities.²¹

Most observers have found it difficult to concede that Hindus may actually regard their religious icons as gods. Some have sought to translate Hindu religious icons into more familiar terms—such idol worship was a corruption of a purer Hinduism, which knew the difference between the image and the god; and/or, these were (as per Christian understandings) devices necessary to render the supreme God of Hinduism 'intelligible to the vulgar'.²² Others saw this identification of god with his image, and other examples of Hindu intellectual 'inconsistency', as the mere absence of logic,²³ rather than as reading it as evidence that Hindus might have a different way of conceiving and being in the world. Such resistance to accepting that many Hindus see their religious icons as gods is a sign of the fact that terms/categories like 'religion' and 'icon' are not neutral descriptors, but rather come as part of a more general understanding or metaphysic. When the thing we designate by this term does not accord with this general understanding, we then either ignore its difference and force it into this understanding, or else we find in this difference not another logic at work, but the absence of any logic.

'Religion', for instance, is a category which already has built into it the idea that certain 'beliefs' pertaining to the 'sacred' are of its essence; different religions are then distinguished by their differing belief-systems and different conceptions of the sacred. But this understanding of religion, far from being universal and trans-historical, in fact is itself a product of a history, as some scholars of religion have come to recognise. Peter Harrison

argues that in England in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ‘“religion” was constructed along essentially rationalist lines, for it was created in the image of the prevailing rationalist methods of investigation...inquiry into the religion of a people became a matter of asking what was believed...’²⁴ ‘Religion’ and ‘belief’ emerged as mutually constitutive categories. Thus the very notion of ‘religion’ is itself ‘a Christian theological category’²⁵, ‘a modern invention which the West, during the last two hundred years or so, has exported to the rest of the world.’²⁶ But it may not be a useful export. For not all ‘religions’ have undergone the same history, one that rendered them into systems of belief; and thus ‘religion’ may not be a useful mode for approaching what we have come to call Hinduism.

The same is true of ‘icon’; it is tied up with a metaphysics of consciousness where humans subjects encounter a ‘real’ that they represent to themselves. To be able to even recognise that figures of their gods may not have had the same meaning for Hindus, entails recognising that the concept ‘icon’ has certain presumptions and conceptions built into it, and that these may be an obstacle to understanding. From this perspective, ‘icon’ becomes not the name of something we all recognise when we see it, but the site of difference to be explored by problematising our categories, rather than applying them. And the investigation of cultural politics and iconography becomes a mode of enquiry which brings its own thought into question by bringing it into contact with that which reveals its limits.

ENDNOTES

- 1 The two essays in question are A. Dirlik, N. Knight and P. Healey, eds., ‘Indian Maoism: The Significance of Naxalbari’, in *Critical Perspectives on Mao Zedong’s Thought* (New Jersey: Humanities Press), 1997, and ‘Reason or Reasoning? Clío or Siva?’, *Social Text*, No. 78, 2004.
- 2 The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* darkly warned that the fact that the people of Calcutta acted as either ‘helpless spectators or worse, willing abettors’ in the face of such ‘uncivilized act and attitude’ was ‘a phenomenon which needs a close study by all interested in the mental health of the nation’, April 18, 1970.
- 3 Congress politicians and other declared enemies of the Naxalites had a field day, condemning them for their ‘unpatriotic’ attacks on national heroes. For instance, Y.B. Chavan, Home Minister in the central government, condemned the ‘perversion of those who have insulted the Father of the Nation [Gandhi]’, *The Statesman*, April 18, 1970.
- 4 Asok Rudra, ‘Naxalite Fireworks’, *Frontier*, May 30, 1970.
- 5 Quoted in Asok Rudra, ‘Naxalite Fireworks’. (The Rani of Jhansi fought fierce battles against the British during the so-called ‘Indian Mutiny’ of the mid-nineteenth century).
- 6 Moni Guha, ‘The Politics of Statues’, *Frontier*, November 28, 1970, 11.
- 7 Moni Guha, ‘The Politics of Statues’, 10.
- 8 On this see my *Marxist Theory and Nationalist Politics: The Case of Colonial India* (New Delhi: Sage), 1995.
- 9 Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought in the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books), 1986, 140.

- 10 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2000.
- 11 This 'we' is never an essentialist 'we', and certainly not a particular race or peoples.
- 12 The phrase is taken from Johannes Fabian's *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1983
- 13 Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1997, chapter 7.
- 14 Davis, 259.
- 15 Quoted in S.N. Balagangadhara, *The Heathen in his Blindness : Asia, the West and the Dynamic of Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 1994, 118.
- 16 This, for instance, was the defense of religious icons offered by St Thomas — see Daniel Freedberg, *The Power of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1989, 162.
- 17 After quoting Thomas Aquinas as I have done, Davis goes on to draw the following contrast between the role of icons in medieval Christianity and medieval Hinduism: 'Medieval Christian images...are instrumental and representational. Aquinas and Bonaventure locate them within a semiotic aesthetics, where the image is seen as conveying a message separate from the image itself.' By contrast, 'Vaisnava and Saiva theologians locate their holy icons within an aesthetics of presence. As an instantiation of the godhead, the image is ultimately the message.', Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1997, 32–33.
- 18 On these see, amongst others, Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, esp. chapter 1; and the essays in Joanne P. Waghorne and Norman Cutler, eds. *Gods of Flesh Gods of Stone: The Embodiment of Divinity in India* (Anima), 1985.
- 19 Diana L. Eck, *Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (New York: Columbia University Press), 3rd edition, 1998, 38.
- 20 Ashis Nandy, 'A report on the present state of health of the gods and goddesses in South Asia', *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 2, July 2001, 126.
- 21 C.J. Fuller, *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 1992, 31.
- 22 This was a common interpretation, see for instance: L.S.S. O'Malley, *Popular Hinduism: The Religion of the Masses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1935.
- 23 The Principal of a missionary college in the nineteenth century attributed Indian inconsistency to absence of any tradition of Aristotelian logic, and thus to knowledge of the law of noncontradiction: 'The mind of the South Indian student works paratactically rather than hypotactically; opinions formed on different grounds remain side by side within their consciousness without mental contact, and there is little effort at combination.' Cited in Eleanor McDougall, *Lamps in the Wind: South Indian College Women and their Problems* (London: Edinburgh House Press), 1943, first published 1940, 80, 79. In Hegel's view Hindu ontology displayed a cavalier disregard for the categories of logic: he told the students attending his lectures on religion, 'there is here no category of being. They [Hindus] have no category for what we call the independence of things, for what we articulate by the phrase "there are" or "there is" '. Hegel also refers to the 'shocking inconsistency' of a religion which has a concept of totality, of a singular god, but which at the same time particularises that Oneness into numerous gods, 'a wild particularity in which there is no

- system...no understandable totality or systematisation, much less a rational one': Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* [The Lectures of 1827], ed. Peter C. Hodgson, (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1988, 272, 289.
- 24 Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1990, 2. See also Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1993, Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (London and New York: Routledge), 1989, David A. Pailin, *Attitudes to Other Religions: Comparative Religion in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester University Press), 1984, Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1972, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1979, and Jean Puillon, 'Remarks on the Verb "To Believe"' (trans. John Leavitt) in Michael IZard and P. Smith, eds. *Between Belief and Transgression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1982.
- 25 Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (London: Routledge), 1999, 40.
- 26 John Hick, 'Foreword' to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 1991. See also. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1982, xi.