Guest Column

Censoring the *Rāmāyaṇa*

VINAY DHARWADKER

BY THE LAWS OF ACADEMIC OBSOLESCENCE, A. K. RAMANUJAN'S essay "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation" should have been outmoded by the turn of this decade. Its earliest portion was a short conference presentation in 1968, its full text evolved as a workshop draft in 1985–86, and its penultimate version became a position paper in 1987. It first appeared in print in *Many* Rāmāyaṇa*s* (1991), edited by Paula Richman, and then reappeared in its definitive version, with editorial commentary, in Ramanujan's *Collected Essays* (1999). Since it has been in circulation for so long, it ought to be of interest now primarily for its historical significance in the narrow field of *Rāmāyaṇa* studies. Some sixteen years after initial publication, however, it suddenly became the improbable target of attack by religious fundamentalists and, equally surprising, of suppression by its Indian publisher. And in the final months of 2011 it turned into the eye of a storm that swept several thousand scholars, teachers, students, writers, readers, and politicians into its orbit on three continents.[1]

How could a thirty-page essay, written modestly, containing more quotation and summary than expression of opinion, and displaying routine scholarly credentials, have such an effect? Why has a piece composed like a poem and filled with memorable stories, which—more than any other modern essay on the subject—makes its readers fall in love with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, been vilified violently by people who claim to be the epic's ardent guardians? And why does the essay's implicit pursuit of Walter Benjamin's dream of "hiding behind a phalanx of quotations which, like highwaymen, would ambush the passing reader and rob him of his convictions" seem to foreshadow its recent fate?[2]

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Events and Contexts

A. K. Ramanujan (1929–93) was an interdisciplinary scholar of India and a major Indian writer of the second half of the twentieth century. A superb poet in English and poet and fiction writer in Kannada, he was also a linguist and folklorist and a multilingual teacher and interpreter of Indian literatures and religions. Besides, he was the world's leading modern translator of Indian poetry and narrative, chiefly from Tamil and Kannada into English and from English into Kannada. He was a member of the faculty of the University of Chicago for most of his career (1961–93) and was among the earliest winners of a MacArthur fellowship (1983) and a recipient of India's Padma Shri (1985). At the invitation of his estate, I served as a principal editor of his *Collected Poems* (1995) and as the general editor of his *Collected Essays* (1999), both published, along with his other posthumous works, by Oxford University Press.[3]

The events leading up to the suppression of "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" began around 2005, when the history department of Delhi University selected it from his *Collected Essays* as a required reading for a new undergraduate curriculum (modeled on the British system) that went into effect the following year. An imaginative choice emphasizing the interdisciplinarity of historical studies, the essay was meant to help sophomores understand "the depth and diversity of the cultural heritage of ancient India" (Singh). More than a year into the university's 2006–12 curricular cycle, however, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)—the student wing of a thrice-banned Hindu-fundamentalist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)—launched a campus agitation against the essay and its prescription on the curriculum. The ABVP's initiative was supported by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the national political arm of the RSS, and was coordinated by the Sangh Parivar, which serves as an umbrella for the whole "family" of organizations affiliated with the RSS.[4] On 25 February 2008, the campaign's first phase culminated in physical violence, orchestrated for media coverage, in which the office of Delhi University's history department was vandalized and its head, S. Z. H. Jafri, assaulted in front of a television camera.[5]

Subsequently, a Sangh Parivar activist filed a lawsuit before the subdivisional magistrate of Dera Bassi (a small town near Chandigarh) against the Indian branch of Oxford University Press (OUP), alleging that Ramanujan's essay caused him "distress and concern" as a practicing Hindu. Even though the case involved freedom of expression, a matter of constitutional law that can be adjudicated only by a high court or the Supreme Court of India, the magistrate exceeded his jurisdiction and accepted the case—without objection from OUP India's lawyers. Out of sight of Delhi and the university in 2008 and 2009, this lowest of courts ruled illegitimately in the plaintiff's favor, requiring that the press not only apologize in writing for publishing the essay but also promise to withdraw it from circulation.[6]

In the meantime, following the attack on the history department, the university administration decided, in March 2008, to appoint a committee of experts to evaluate Ramanujan's essay and to recommend whether it should continue on the curriculum (Singh). About two months later, a new action committee launched by the RSS, called the Shiksha Bachao Andolan Samiti ("Committee for the Campaign to Save Education"), petitioned the Delhi high court to prevent the university from requiring students to read "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" for examinations in the 2006–12 cycle. But the court determined that, since Delhi University is an "autonomous" institution, this was an "internal matter" that the petitioners ought to resolve with its administration (Gohain, "Ramanujan Essay"). The *samiti* then appealed to the Supreme

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Court of India, which directed the university's expert committee to take the petitioners' views into account while preparing its report and also asked the petitioners "to approach the court again if the report fails to address their concerns" ("Textbook Controversy").

In its report, completed by September 2011, the expert committee unanimously praised "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" for its scholarship but returned a 3-1 opinion to retain it on the curriculum for the cycle commencing in 2012. The sole dissenting member—identified only as Member D, for security reasons—observed that, although Ramanujan's text is "an excellent piece of research," it is "a little objectionable" in places and is "bound to affect the sensibilities of impressionable minds." On the basis of pure speculation, he doubted "whether undergraduate students would 'tolerate' [its] portrayal of divine characters." He further cast doubt on whether teachers at Delhi University's colleges are sufficiently "well-equipped" to explain "the background to these versions" of the *Rāmāyaṇa* discussed by Ramanujan and whether "non-Hindu" teachers are equipped at all "to handle the situation" (Thilak, "Can Students" and "Can't Give Names"). Skillfully confounding the task of teaching Ramanujan's essay with the completely different task of teaching the *Rāmāyaṇa*, this member proposed that there is only one proper way to explain the epic contextually, that only practicing Hindus are qualified to explain it, and that non-Hindus are inherently disqualified by their religious affiliations.

The decision to remove Ramanujan's essay from the curriculum was taken, in principle, by Delhi University's Academic Council. The council had 173 members in 2011–12, the majority being ex officio members (such as heads of departments) or members in statutory categories appointed by the vice-chancellor, the university's chief operating officer (University of Delhi). With only a week's notice in writing, the current vice-chancellor, Dinesh Singh, called for an emergency meeting of the council on a *Sunday*, 9 October 2011, and announced that approval of curricula for various degree programs would be the "main agenda." On the day before the meeting, council members were informed by telephone about a "supplementary" item involving a vote on the removal of "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s." Copies of the essay and of the committee's report were distributed at the last minute, at the meeting itself; 120 members attended, and the debate on Ramanujan's essay, by various accounts, lasted about three hours. The vote, too, did not follow parliamentary procedure: only those *opposed* to the essay's removal were asked for a show of hands. Although there were no ballots and no count of those for the motion or those abstaining, the official tally recorded 111-9 in favor of striking "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" from the curriculum (Pushkarna; "'I'"; Aiyar). As presiding officer, the vice-chancellor procedurally ensured that the Academic Council would override the majority opinion of its own committee and hence would legitimize the bigotry brought into play by a single individual.

Over the next few weeks, Dinesh Singh spoke to handpicked journalists to quash rumors and allegations. Responding to accusations that he had deliberately delayed the agenda and the materials in order to short-circuit discussion, he took the position that "[t]he issue was debated for several hours. Yes, I admit that the topic was introduced at the meeting at . . . very short notice, but that was just to allow people to come fresh, unprepared and with their own opinions." Concerning his attempts to influence the outcome, he chose to "categorically state that I did not express an opinion for or against the removal of the essay. The intelligence of the 111 members of the council who voted for the removal of the essay has to be respected." Confronted with the rumor that he is a vindictive administrator, under whom "any insubordination is usually punished—either indirectly, or . . . by

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a direct reprimand," he resorted to charming anecdotes about his friendly presence on campus. Not swayed by the spin, Indian newspapers concluded that Singh "won favor with the ABVP," which thanked him publicly after the vote—with posters splashed around the campus ("'I'"; Parashar and Mukherjee; Gohain, "Ramanujan Essay").

In the days following the council's decision, a public furor erupted in India over this instance of "academic censorship"—a label that Salman Rushdie put on it in a *Twitter* message. There were large protest marches and public debates by students and faculty members at Delhi University (supported by colleagues from Jamia Milia University and Jawaharlal Nehru University), as well as extensive media coverage and analysis.[7] Despite the turbulence around it, the history department—former and current home to some of India's preeminent postcolonial historians, including original members of the subaltern studies collective—maintained its position without compromise. Responding to the ABVP's violent attack on 25 February 2008 with a press conference three days later, it had stated that the curriculum that included "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" had been "formulated in discussion with college teachers" and had been "approved by the Academic Council in 2005" for implementation the following year, "after several levels of discussion in various committees." It had also stated unequivocally that "everyone has the right to differ" on intellectual issues, "but the use of violence to derail the academic process [is] not acceptable at all" ("Baseless Charges"; "ABVP Action"; "'PM's Daughter'"). Now, three and a half years later, it upheld its "earlier argument on academic grounds (as to) why the essay should be included in the syllabus" (Thilak, "DU History Dept"), and it "unanimously passed a resolution protesting against" the Academic Council's indefensible decision of 9 October 2011. By noting that "the decision was non-academic and the people who decided to remove the essay from the syllabus are not subject experts," it reasserted its mandated responsibility to determine how history is taught at Delhi University (Gohain, "History Dept").

Within a month, the controversy had spilled over into the academy in Europe and North America, focusing as much on Delhi University's "betrayal" of academic freedom and integrity as on OUP India's capitulation to local institutions and political parties. Drawing on the momentum of the negative reaction in the United States over Thanksgiving week, Sheldon Pollock (Columbia Univ.), Paula Richman (Oberlin Coll.), and I wrote to Nigel Portwood, OUP's chief executive at Oxford, strongly protesting the press's unwarranted suppression of "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" and its two print sources. Our letter, dated 28 November 2011, had 453 cosignatories from India, continental Europe, England, Canada, and the United States, who were galvanized by a remarkable signature campaign that Pollock organized and completed in just twenty-four hours (Howard, "Questions"; Jaschik; Suroor, "Oxford University Press" and "No 'Censorship'").

Over the next ten days, OUP Oxford conducted an internal inquiry into the Ramanujan case, as well as other instances of editorial censorship—at its Indian offices and in its South Asian studies list—that we documented for it. We had written our protest letter explicitly in solidarity with a student and faculty movement at Oxford University, the London School of Economics, and elsewhere and with the organizers of a protest in Oxford planned for 30 November. The events that unfolded rapidly in England at this time included an intervention by the historian Romila Thapar with the delegates of Oxford University Press, a standing-room-only symposium (on censorship by nonstate actors) led by the historian and environmentalist Ramachandra Guha, and an Oxford-based signature campaign involving another fourteen hundred signatories.

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Responding swiftly to this combination of pressures but not with full transparency, OUP announced on 9 December that it was immediately reprinting Ramanujan's *Collected Essays*, along with Richman's *Many* Rāmāyaṇa*s* (and another companion volume, *Questioning* Rāmāyaṇa*s*)—thus meeting one of our principal demands (Howard, "Bowing"; Guha). OUP's action brought one series of events to a close but left many other issues open.

The Object of Censorship

The target of attack in all this, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s," is a thirty-page scholarly essay that reviews the dissemination of the *Rāma-kathā* ("the story of Rāma"), across the subcontinent and Southeast Asia over about twenty-five hundred years. The essay is a conspectus of the spread of the story of Rāma in time, space, and discursive form after Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, its earliest narration in India, was composed in the epic style of Sanskrit, commencing perhaps as early as 600 BCE but closing textually, most likely with late innovations and revisions, just before the Common Era.[8] Ramanujan focuses on the numerous "tellings" that such a dispersion is bound to produce: offering minimally intrusive commentary, he synthesizes the most important scholarly findings of several decades about the *Rāma-kathā* in languages as far apart as Balinese, Bengali, Cambodian, Chinese, Gujarati, Javanese, Kannada, Kashmiri, Khotanese, Laotian, Malaysian, Marathi, Oriya, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Santali, Sinhalese, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, and Tibetan, in societies that identify themselves broadly as Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, or Muslim, among others. His goal is "to sort out . . . how these hundreds of tellings of a story in different cultures, languages, and religious traditions relate to each other: what gets translated, transplanted, transposed" (134).

Rather than reduce his survey to a mind-numbing catalog of "versions" or "variants"—terms that he rejects because they "imply that there is an invariant" (134)—he prefers to represent it by synecdoche, analyzing five texts that define common narrative



An episode in the *Rāmāyaṇa*: the battle between Rāma's army of monkeys and the king of Lānkā's army of demons. Watercolor by Sahib Din. Udaipur, 1649–53. British Library Add. MS 15297 (1), f. 91.

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paradigms across Asia. His examples are Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, which signifies the categories of Sanskrit, the canonical, and the northern Indian; Kampaṉ's *Irāmāvatāram* (Tamil, twelfth cent.), which stands for the southern Indian as well as the postclassical and regionalized mother tongue; Vimalāsūri's *Paumachariya* (Prakrit, traditionally ascribed to the first cent.), a Jain work representative of the non-Hindu in India; an oral-folk narrative (Kannada, recorded in the twentieth cent.), which is conventionally sung by an "untouchable" bard and hence speaks for the nonliterate, the anticanonical, and the subaltern; and the *Ramkien* (Thai, eighteenth cent.), the national epic of Thailand, composed by its kings, which represents not only the Buddhist and the non-Hindu but also the category of the non-Indian.[9] In exploring these limited yet representative paradigms, Ramanujan adopts a method that lets each type of text "speak for itself," in order to show how different tellings interact with one another and how they "translate" the core story iconically, indexically, and symbolically, as defined by C. S. Peirce's semiotics (Dharwadker, Introd. to Sec. 2 127–28).

The bulk of "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" then charts the manifold differences that spread outward from the numerous permutations of the story of Rāma across South and Southeast Asia. Ramanujan's discoveries are nuanced, but some are startling. The most significant one is that Vālmīki's Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* is evidently "the earliest and the most prestigious" but that, as a matter of hard empirical fact, its narrative is not always "carried from one language to another" across Asia or even within India (134). At the same time, in some measure, "all later *Rāmāyaṇas* play on the knowledge of previous tellings"; they respond imaginatively to much more than their Sanskrit precursor and hence constitute themselves as "meta-*Rāmāyaṇas*" (143). As a result, "not only do we have one story told by Vālmīki," but we also have "a variety of Rāma tales told by others, with radical differences among them" (150).

Kampaṉ's twelfth-century Tamil poem, for instance, utilizes Vālmīki's northern Indian materials but "folds in many regional folk traditions" distinctive to southern India, and it is also "more dramatic" (141). Most important, while the Sanskrit epic portrays Rāma as an ambivalent mixture of god and man, "a god-man who has to live within the limits of a human form with all its vicissitudes," Kampaṉ's narrative takes it for granted that "he is clearly a god" (142). The Tamil poet's transformation of the *Rāmakathā* then "generates its own offspring": Tulsīdās's *Rāmcharitmānas* (Avadhi [a literary language in the cluster known as Hindi], sixteenth cent.), the Malaysian *Hikayat Seri Ram* (completed by the seventeenth cent.), and the Thai *Ramkien* (eighteenth cent.) "owe many details to . . . Kampaṉ," perhaps as transmitted by intermediary works and networks (143).[10] What becomes evident in such a textual proliferation in the *longue durée* is that in any set of tellings "the structure and sequence of events may be the same, but the style, details, tone, and texture—and therefore the import—may be vastly different." This reflects the "distinction between *kathā* (story) and *kāvya* (poem)" in classical Sanskrit poetics, which prefigures the modern distinctions between *sujet* and *récit* (French), story and discourse (English), and even sentence and speech act (linguistics [134]).[11]

For Ramanujan this "pattern of difference" replicates itself many times over as we broaden our perspective historically, geographically, and culturally. At the level of particulars, Vimalāsūri's Jain *Paumachariya*, explicitly antithetical to Vālmīki on several levels, develops a point of view sympathetic to Rāvaṇa as a tragic hero, projects Lakshmaṇa and Rāvaṇa as each other's perpetual moral antagonists, and characterizes Rāma as an "evolved Jain soul" (144–45). In contrast, the "untouchable" Kannada oral-folk poem focal-

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izes its narrative on Sītā—"her life, her birth, her adoption, her wedding, her abduction and recovery" (147). Furthermore, even as the Thai *Ramkien* absorbs elements from Vālmīki and Kampaṉ, it thematizes its narrative differently: Rāma is still an incarnation of Vishṇu, but now he is subordinate to Shiva, and the ethical emphasis "is not on family values and spirituality" (149). Unlike audiences in India, "Thai audiences are more fond of Hanumān than of Rāma. Neither celibate nor devout, as in the Hindu *Rāmāyaṇa*, here Hanumān is quite a ladies' man, who doesn't at all mind looking into the bedrooms of Lanka and doesn't consider seeing another man's sleeping wife anything immoral, as Vālmīki's or Kampaṉ's Hanumān does" (149–50).[12]

Ramanujan then shows that such divergences among particular tellings can also be understood in relation to three more general transcultural variables. The first is the variable of *different beginnings*: the story of Rāma can be launched from disparate starting points and underlying assumptions, each of which "sets into motion the harmonics of the whole poem" (152). A second parameter defines a choice between *two different endings*, each of which "gives the whole work a different cast" (150). One ending is happy, culminating in the "golden age" of Rāma's divine rule on earth (*Rāma-rājya*) after the destruction of Rāvaṇa's regime, and the other is "tragic," marred by his cruel banishment of a pregnant Sītā to the forest and his recognition of their twin sons only after many years of neglect. The third is the variable of *different focalizations*, which permits freedom of point of view and narrative emphasis, as reflected in the "untouchable" bard's decision to concentrate on Sītā, noted above. The tellings in this array of possibilities reveal "radical differences" in "the conception of every major character." Each figure may appear "so different" in different cultures that "one conception is quite abhorrent to those who hold another" (155)—as exemplified in the treatments of Hanumān in Sanskrit, Tamil, and Thai. All these analytic trajectories leave Ramanujan with more questions and aporias than answers or certainties:

> [I]s there a common core to the Rāma stories, except the most skeletal set of relations like that of Rāma, his brother, his wife and the antagonist Rāvaṇa who abducts her? Are the stories bound together only by certain family resemblances, as Wittgenstein might say? Or is it like Aristotle's jack-knife? When the philosopher asked an old carpenter how long he had had his knife, the latter said, "Oh, I've had it for thirty years. I've changed the blade a few times and the handle a few times, but it's the same knife." Some shadow of a relational structure claims the name of *Rāmāyaṇa* for all these tellings, but on a closer look one is not necessarily all that like another. Like a collection of people with the same proper name, they make a class in name alone. (156)[13]

Critique and Countercritique

If this is what "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" intends and accomplishes, how and why do Hindu fundamentalists attack it? Indian media reports going back to 2008 indicate that its alleged offenses have two distinct sources: the contents of the essay as such and the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition at large. So far as the essay is concerned, fundamentalist spokesmen have claimed that it has four objectionable features. One is its supposed irreverence for the gods represented in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. As the *Organiser*, the Sangh Parivar's online weekly magazine, puts it, "Rama is worshipped by all believing Hindus. For us, he is God. . . . Hence it hurts the sentiments of Hindus when Rama is spoken of with anything but reverence"; and, as the editorial continues, any text on a university curriculum that refers to Rāma and Sītā in a "demeaning" way is therefore to be "abhorred" (Balashankar; see also Thapa). A second objection is that the essay is "almost blasphemous" or "blasphemous" outright (Editorial; Parashar and Mukherjee).

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Arpit Parashar and Vishwajoy Mukherjee of *Tehelka* observe that the supposed blasphemy is twofold: Ramanujan's text "details the several 'tellings' of the Ramayana across and beyond the Indian subcontinent and questions the assumption that *Valmiki's Ramayana* is the original or authentic one," and it "speaks of versions of the *Ramayana* in which Rama and Sita are siblings and . . . Sita was Ravana's daughter." A third objection is that Ramanujan's account is contrafactual; the *Organiser*'s editorial asserts that "major" versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* "have stuck to a single story line." The fourth objection is that "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" deviates from the Sanskrit narrative and hence is nonnormative. In the words of an anonymous BJP source: "Our party and its ideology over the past 25 years have been built on the values imbibed in the original (Valmiki) *Ramayana*, which has the most number of followers. . . . It is hurtful to devout Hindus if the story is said in any other way" (Parashar and Mukherjee).

Anyone who has read the essay can confirm that it does not contain a single expression of irreverence to the gods; the closest instance the fundamentalists have insinuated is the phrase "a ladies' man," in the passage about the Thai Hanumān reproduced earlier. The charge of blasphemy is equally untenable; as devout Hindus surely know, blasphemy is "[p]rofane talk of something supposed to be sacred," or an expression of "impious irreverence." Ramanujan's essay—a peer-reviewed scholarly piece published by two preeminent university presses—does not contain a single term that can be deemed obscene, abusive, or calumnious. Fundamentalist spokesmen have been unable to pinpoint any phrasing in the essay in which Ramanujan blasphemes against any telling of the *Rāma-kathā*, in any sense of the term. What they muster as blasphemous (or, tellingly, as almost blasphemous) is that the essay "speaks of versions . . . in which Rama and Sita are siblings and . . . Sita was Ravana's daughter" (Parashar and Mukherjee) and that Ramanujan makes the point that many tellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* do not transmit Vālmīki's story. But both these presumed offenses of "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" stem strictly from empirical facts: as Renu Bala, one of the nine members of the Academic Council who voted to retain the essay, emphasized to a commentator, Ragini Bhuyan, "Ramanujan has not concocted these stories but merely presented his findings."

The accusation that Ramanujan somehow "questions" the status of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* as "original or authentic" arises from the fundamentalists' own befuddlement. While Ramanujan meticulously distinguishes issues of Vālmīki's authenticity from those concerning his canonicity and normativity (without resorting to such jargon) and is at pains to maintain that the Sanskrit narrative is "the earliest and the most prestigious," the fundamentalists constantly conflate all three concepts into fuzzy innuendos about authenticity (Parashar and Mukherjee). Furthermore, the *Organiser* asserts the predominance of "a single story line" but is unable to name any "major works" for which this may be true. The whole point of "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" is precisely that if we proceed rationally and empirically, no single story line, no one beginning or ending of the narrative, and no specific characterization or narrative point of view prove normative: every element in the *fabula* is susceptible to inventive transformation, and the set of elements of the *muthos*, as a whole, constantly undergoes unpredictable permutations, defining an enormous surplus of human creativity that has been at work at the heart of the *Rāmāyaṇa* "tradition" for the past twenty-five hundred years. It is not Ramanujan but the barely literate editorial writer of the *Organiser* who is contrafactual. An extended analysis would easily show that, ultimately, the Sangh Parivar—like any authoritarian, fascist, or archconservative organization or regime—finds human creativity sacrilegious, because freedom of the imagina-

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tion and freedom of thought and expression are threats to its ideology and power.

Likewise, every part of the BJP's claim that it has built itself "on the values imbibed in the original (Valmiki) *Ramayana*, which has the most number of followers," and that any deviation from the story in Sanskrit "is hurtful to devout Hindus" is contrary to historical, cultural, and contemporary fact. As Ramanujan demonstrates factually, devout Hindus—along with equally devout Jains, Buddhists, and Muslims, among others—have lovingly imagined and reimagined the story of Rāma over and over to create the hundreds of marvelous narratives that speak to and for them, as no other story can. If stories by devout Hindus are hurtful to devout Hindus, then the BJP must explain who are the devout Hindus—and what their devoutness and Hinduism consist of—who are so self-righteously hurt by the stories told by devout Hindus whose devoutness and Hinduism cannot be called into question. The *Rāmāyaṇa* has a history spanning an enormous length of time, much of Asia, and many other parts of the globe. The RSS and the political organizations that it has spawned have been around for no more than eighty-seven years—and they have contributed nothing to that creative history and have no place in it. The *parivār*'s atrocious offense against the *Rāmāyaṇa* and against well-meaning Hindus in general is that its falsehoods make a mockery of all true faith.

A broader fundamentalist position, in this context, goes beyond the features of Ramanujan's essay to impute a second level of offense. On 24 October 2011 the ABVP and the National Democratic Teachers' Front (NDTF, affiliated with the Sangh Parivar) "held a press conference to explain their position," at which Avnijesh Awasthy (NDTF president) and Rohit Chahal (ABVP state president, Delhi) responded to a large rally on the Delhi University campus that had protested the removal of "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s." The spokesmen argued that the essay recounts two episodes that are objectionable on rather different grounds: in the "untouchable" Kannada oral-folk narrative, the male Rāvaṇa becomes pregnant with Sītā and gives birth to her from his nose when he sneezes, and in the Thai *Ramkien* Hanumān is "[n]either celibate nor devout," as in the passage quoted earlier. Awasthy, a faculty member in the Hindi department of PGDAV College in Delhi, asked of the former episode, "Is this scientific, can this be true that a man can get pregnant and give birth to a daughter by sneezing? How can this be taught at the college level?" Chahal, one of the seven student activists arrested for violence and vandalism at the history department in 2008, criticized the latter episode because "[w]e worship Hanuman in our daily life. But a student who reads this"—Ramanujan's statement that the Thai Hanumān is "quite a ladies' man"—"will be led to believe that this was Hanuman's character!" (Bhuyan).

This press conference, as reported, reveals what is only incipient in the objections to "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" discussed earlier and pushes us to the core of the problem. Awasthy is troubled, not by Ramanujan's ideas, but by the very existence of a narrative in which a male—a "demon" who ought to be cast unambiguously as a villain—gives birth to the divine Sītā from a bodily orifice not anatomically associated with human childbirth. In a similar vein, Chahal is offended by the very existence of a narrative in which Hanumān's character contrasts with what he uncritically takes to be the natural or normative character of the monkey god. If Awasthy, though a teacher of Hindi literature, does not seem to understand imaginative fiction, history, myth, and epic at the most elementary level and does not grasp the rationale for including Ramanujan's essay on the history curriculum, Chahal seems obtuse to the fact that people different from him, who do not share his beliefs, also inhabit the human world. Awasthy and Chahal articulate the ideological delusion that the story of Rāma is

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the property of a homogenous society whose values must be, ipso facto, universal. In the perspective the two of them adopt, diversity and cultural difference are the greatest blasphemy. While campus activists, starting with their campaign in 2007–08, tried to blame Ramanujan for desecrating their holy book, what Hindu ultraconservatives, as a community, find offensive is the actual history of the story of Rāma in the world.

Devotion to the *Rāmāyaṇa*

Like fundamentalists in other parts of the world, the Sangh Parivar pushes itself into the retrograde position of having to censor its own holy book, because the book's history offends the values its pages supposedly embody. The political parties of the Sangh cartel would have us believe that they are "built on the values imbibed in the original (Valmiki) *Ramayana*," and yet they repeatedly betray the fact that today even party functionaries—let alone the masses who follow them—do not know Sanskrit, cannot read Vālmīki, and remain unaware of the epic's actual content. This reduces the members of the *parivār*, in their own parlance, to pseudo Hindus. The historian and novelist Mukul Kesavan is right to surmise that what really triggered the attack on Ramanujan was his translation, early in his essay, of the famous Ahalyā episode, which appears in *sarga*s (cantos) 47–48 of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, the opening book of the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* (Goldman 1: 214–18). As believers misled by secondhand accounts and bowdlerized retellings of the epic—and hence as the first casualties of their own censorship—fundamentalists were probably taken aback to discover how Vālmīki narrates this story. Indra, chief of the Vedic gods, seduces a willing and curious Ahalyā, beautiful wife of the sage Gautama, in the latter's ashram in a forest. When Gautama catches Indra slinking away after the tryst, in a towering rage he curses both errant god and errant wife. Indra is condemned to lose his testicles, which fall to the ground immediately, and Ahalyā is doomed to live on in the ashram, in a state of suspended animation, for "many thousands of years, eating the air / without food, rolling in ash / and burning invisible to all creatures," waiting to be purified and released when Rāma (unaware of his own divinity) visits that wilderness. "Emasculated Indra"—"his terror showing in his face" (Goldman 1: 217)—begs the other gods to help restore his virility, and they arrange for a ram's testicles to be grafted onto him (Ramanujan, "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" 135–38). In Kesavan's view, when conservative readers encountered this episode in the essay before them, they were most likely "embarrassed and appalled."

Sheo Dutt, of Bhagat Singh College and among the nine in the Academic Council who voted to retain the essay on the curriculum, also discounts the cartel's claims about adhering to the Sanskrit text, but on the grounds that "[t]hese right-wing organisations usually follow [Tulsīdās's] Ramcharitmanas version because it portrays Ram as a God and not human" (qtd. in Parashar and Mukherjee). But how well the fundamentalists know the canonical texts of any tellings of the story of Rāma in the postclassical Indian languages is an open question. To demonstrate the depth and extent of the transformations of the story, as it travels in space and time from Sanskrit (a "father tongue") to languages such as Tamil and Hindi ("mother tongues"), Ramanujan juxtaposes his rendering of Vālmīki with his translation of the Ahalyā episode in Kampaṉ's twelfth-century Tamil poem. There Gautama does not emasculate Indra but curses him to be "covered / by the vaginas / of a thousand women," with immediate effect, and he curses Ahalyā to "turn to stone," instantly reducing her to a "rough thing / of black rock." Ahalyā pleads with Gautama to put a limit on his curse, which he does: he presages that Rāma, as Vishṇu's self-conscious avatar and hence as a fully divine agent, will visit that spot one

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day, and "when the dust of his feet falls on you / you will be released from the body of stone." Indra, "[c]overed with shame, / laughingstock of the world," runs to his fellow gods, who send a delegation to Gautama, begging him to relent: having cooled off, the sage changes "the marks on Indra to a thousand eyes" (138–41). Writing about half a millennium later, Tulsīdās belongs with Kampaṉ rather than Vālmīki: in his Avadhi text, too, Ahalyā is transformed into a rock, to await the touch of the dust off Rāma's divine feet.

In the light of Kesavan's suggestion, it seems probable that most of Delhi University's Academic Council members do not know *Rāma-kathā* texts in their mother tongues at first hand. In any case, a working knowledge of a language in its modern form does not automatically confer verbal or intellectual access to its premodern texts, and most council members, not being literary scholars, are not trained to deal with the classical hardness of such works. Encountering Ramanujan's essay for the first time at the emergency meeting of 9 October and forced to skim it for lack of time, they—like their Sangh counterparts—must have been alarmed by the mention of testicles and vaginas in the translations displayed prominently in its early pages. Writing from Delhi, Romila Thapar trenchantly sums up the consequences of the council's capitulation: the fundamentalists who first objected to Ramanujan's essay were unfamiliar with the *Rāma-kathā* texts and with the subject as such, "*to the point of being virtually illiterate* in the study of these texts. This is the case every time a piece of writing is attacked. But what is truly appalling is that academics should fall into the same category. The reaction of the Academic Council has made us feel so ashamed that as scholars we can no longer say that the battle is between scholars and non-scholars" (Message; emphasis added).

This bleak scenario is compelling because in postcolonial times the average Indian has acquired the story of Rāma not from texts (other than comic books) but from a variety of oral, performance, and media sources, such as domestic tales for children; ritual recitations, narrations, and readings at temples and community gatherings; annual *Rāmalīlā* performances; films; television series; and commercial videos—all of which are sanitized (Lutgendorf, *Life*; Doniger, ch. 24 [654–86]). But in the past two decades these modes of transmission have undergone an attenuation that is no longer limited to urban India. An unnamed young ABVP activist unwittingly exposed this fact and the sanctimoniousness of the party line that accompanies it when he asserted publicly that "I grew up watching the *Ramayana* as shown on the TV. . . . *There can be no other version of it*" (Parashar and Mukherjee; emphasis added). He referred to Ramanand Sagar's mammoth seventy-eight-part series, aired on state-owned national television over one and a half years' worth of Sundays between January 1987 and July 1988 and sold commercially ever since to the niche market of devout Hindus. The young man's dogmatism indicated that for the Hindu fundamentalists who constitute the BJP's "most number of followers" today, Sagar's pop culture travesty of the *Rāmāyaṇa*—which could not be farther removed from Vālmīki—actually defines the norm, the canon, and the authentic core of the story of Rāma. As Wendy Doniger already suggested in 2009, most Hindus "now know only one single *Rāmāyaṇa*": the gaudy television version (668).

In short, no matter what the Sangh Parivar claims, its movement is not "built on the values imbibed in the original (Valmiki) *Ramayana*." Not only is the cartel unable to deal with the *Rāma-kathā*'s actual history in the world, but what it asserts to be the foundation of its faith and its politics is not the foundation of its faith or politics (Sharma, esp. ch. 5 [124–72]). What can be more blasphemous than the *parivār*'s own immoral manipulation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*? The cartel has no investment in the epic, except as an instrument

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of political advantage: that is why, in the final analysis, the attack on Ramanujan has nothing to do with his essay's date, content, style, or scholarship. In Sheldon Pollock's words, "the essay was as much an occasion as a cause," and, given its instrumental value on this occasion, "[w]hat the essay actually argues is" from the fundamentalist point of view "unimportant" (Message).

But no amount of rational remonstration against the Sangh Parivar's vast, unconscionable deception and self-deception seems to matter. It does not matter to the *parivār* that, in the eyes of the world, it embodies the "permanent immaturity" that Immanuel Kant excoriated in 1784 (55) or that its existence in the twenty-first century only reaffirms Jürgen Habermas's argument for "the unfinished project of modernity," which demands more—not less—"enlightenment" (44–46). Any attempts to persuade the cartel or to expose the self-contradictions and bogus claims that riddle its ideology are bound to founder on its cadres' absolute commitment to its cause. This "brigade," as Parashar and Mukherjee report, "justifies" its attack on Ramanujan's "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" by comparing its campus violence to the violence in India's "freedom struggle" against British colonial rule:

> "We had to protest against the blasphemous content of the essay, and as for our method of protest, even the great Bhagat Singh once said, 'You need an explosion to make the deaf listen to you,'" says Abhineet Gaurav, ex-ABVP member who was part of the mob that vandalised the History Department in 2008. Gaurav now has several cases pending in court following his arrest, but he says he was "defending Sita's honour" and that he would go to any length to fight for his principles. "*I am prepared to kill or be killed*," he says. (emphasis added)

Stop, Don't End

Paul Muldoon, when young, used to remark at his readings that his poems "stop but don't end." Let me stop—with a poem. It is by Kunwar Narayan (b. 1926), one of the two most important living poets writing in Hindi, who has spent some sixty years meticulously mapping the landscape in which Hindu fundamentalists coexist with us, as they take advantage of a modernity that they can neither ingest nor disgorge and thrive in the institutions of a secular democracy without which they would not exist but that they hate sufficiently to destroy.[14]

Narayan wrote his poem in response to the political events of 1990–92, which enabled the Sangh Parivar and its political arm, the BJP, to ascend to national power. The events included a *ratha-yātrā* ("journey of Rāma's chariot") across India between September 1990 and December 1992, masterminded and managed by Lal Krishna Advani, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Murali Manohar Joshi, and others and joined by crowds in the tens of thousands. The *yātrā* culminated in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 with the destruction of the Babri Masjid by the cartel's *kar-sevak*s ("servants who toil by hand") and with their "reclamation" of the *Rāma-janmabhūmī* ("the land of Rāma's birth"), said to lie underneath the mosque. The mayhem in Ayodhya triggered riots in India over several weeks, as well as retaliations in Pakistan and Bangladesh, resulting in the deaths of at least two thousand people—followed by the deaths of at least another thousand in the related Mumbai riots of 1992–93 and the Godhra massacres of 2002 ("Ayodhya Dispute"; Doniger, ch. 24 [654–86]; Brass).

When the Liberhan Commission, investigating the events of that day in Ayodhya, finally submitted its report in June 2009—after seventeen years and 399 sessions, with in-depth testimony from one hundred prominent witnesses—it inferred that what had occurred was "neither spontaneous nor unplanned nor an unforeseen overflowing of the people's emotion, nor the result of a foreign conspiracy." The Sangh Parivar, it

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observed, "is a highly successful and corporatised model of a political party," and while its structure and methods "may neither be illegal nor strictly objectionable, the use of this gargantuan whole [in] . . . the Ayodhya campaign was clearly against the letter and spirit of Indian law." Among its visible national leaders, Advani, Vajpayee, and Joshi, in particular, "cannot . . . be given the benefit of the doubt and exonerated of culpability," because they "have violated the trust of the people." In a democracy, the report asserted, "[t]here can be no greater betrayal or crime . . . and the Commission has no hesitation in condemning these pseudo-moderates. . . ." Indicting sixty-eight individuals in all, the commission concluded that the "top leadership" of the RSS, the BJP, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Shiv Sena, and the Bajrang Dal—the organizations that constitute "the inner core of the Parivar"—bears the "primary responsibility" for the events in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 ("Babri Masjid Demolition"; see also "Liberhan Commission" and "India"). Tabled in Parliament in November 2009 and subsequently released to the public, the commission's 1,029-page report uses judicial procedures for its determinations but strikes a note similar to that of Narayan's short poem, published in 1993. I finished my translation of the poem on 5 January 2005, oblivious of its future resonance with the commission's findings and unaware that Delhi University's history department, around that time, was selecting "Three Hundred *Rāmāyaṇa*s" from my edition of Ramanujan's *Collected Essays* for an imaginative new course on the cultural history of ancient India.[15]

Ayodhya, 1992

Life is a bitter reality, O Rāma,
while you remain an epic.
    This victory of follies
    that now possesses
    not ten or twenty
    but hundreds of thousands
        of heads—and hands—
    is no longer under your control—
    and, besides,
    who knows on which side
    Vibhīshaṇa is fighting now.

What can be
a greater misfortune for us
than to have your sovereign power
        cut down to the size
        of a piece of contested ground?

Ayodhya today
is not the Ayodhya of your day
but a Laṅkā of warriors;
the *Mānas* of Tulsīdās
is not a song of your deeds
        but a drumbeat for an election.

What times are these, O Rāma,
        where is your golden age,
where are you, most honorable man—and why
        this age of Machiavellians?

We humbly beg you, Lord,
to retreat into an ancient book—
some great religious tome—
        with wife and good fortune in tow. . . .
The jungle out there today
is not the forest
Vālmīki used to roam. (ellipsis in orig.)

Notes

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The essay uses terms from several languages, many of them transcribed with diacritical marks. For Sanskrit I have followed the system in the Goldman translation of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* (1: xix–xx); for Avadhi and modern standard Hindi, the systems in Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale* (xiii–xiv), and my *Kabir* (254–56); and for Tamil, the system in *The Interior Landscape*, as

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reproduced in Ramanujan, *Oxford India Ramanujan* (12–14). In the interests of readability for readers unfamiliar with these languages, I have simplified the standard transcription systems wherever possible.

1. The evolution of the controversy, from early 2008 to late 2011, can be reconstructed from the news reports in the *Hindu* ("ABVP Activists Vandalise" [26 Feb. 2008]; "ABVP Leaders" [27 Feb. 2008]; "Baseless Charges" [28 Feb. 2008]; "ABVP Action" [29 Feb. 2008]; "'PM's Daughter'" [29 Feb. 2008]; "Bail" [2 Mar. 2008]; "ABVP Activists Surrender" [8 Mar. 2008]; "Outrage" [9 Nov. 2011]; Suroor, "Oxford University Press" [27 Nov. 2011]; "'I'" [28 Nov. 2011]; Suroor, "No 'Censorship'" [1 Dec. 2011]; Suroor, "OUP India" [4 Dec. 2011]), in the *Indian Express* ("Textbook Controversy" [20 Sept. 2008]; Thilak, "Can Students" [17 Oct. 2011]; Thilak, "DU History Dept" [18 Oct. 2011]; Thilak, "DU Protests Removal" [25 Oct. 2011]; Thilak, "Can't Give Names" [11 Nov. 2011]; Thapa [24 Nov. 2011]), in the *Statesman* (Editorial [5 Nov. 2011]), in the *Sunday Guardian* (Bhuyan [30 Oct. 2011]), in *Tehelka* (Parashar and Mukherjee [24 Nov. 2011]), and in the *Times of India* (Gohain, "History Dept" [18 Oct. 2011]; Gohain, "Ramanujan Essay" [25 Oct. 2011]; Pushkarna [3 Dec. 2011]). Essential commentary on the events appears in Advani; Aiyar; Daniel; Guha; Howard, "Bowing" and "Questions"; Jaschik; Kesavan; Pannikar; and Shah.

2. The Benjaminian model is defined in the epigraph to another influential piece by Ramanujan, "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" On the characteristics of a Ramanujan essay, see my general editor's preface ix–x.

3. For biographical information, see my "A. K. Ramanujan"; Dimock and Ramanujan; Singer. For bibliographic information, see the chronology of select books and essays in *Collected Essays* 597–600, which covers published and unpublished works in various genres in English and Kannada between 1955 and 1995. The omnibus *Oxford India Ramanujan* reproduces *Collected Poems* (1995) and *Uncollected Poems* (2001), as well as four books of translation: *The Interior Landscape* (1967), *Speaking of Śiva* (1973), *Hymns for the Drowning* (1981), and *Poems of Love and War* (1985); it also lists posthumous publications until 2004. Ramanujan's scholarship on literature and folklore is discussed by Wendy Doniger (3–5), John B. Carman (263–69), Stuart Blackburn and Alan Dundes (347–51), and myself (127–30) in separate section introductions in *Collected Essays*. On Ramanujan's poetry in English, consult my introduction to *Collected Poems*; on his translations, see my "A. K. Ramanujan's Theory and Practice." My "Constructions" relates Ramanujan's theoretical criticism to that of Rabindranath Tagore and Salman Rushdie.

4. The RSS was founded in 1925 and the Sangh Parivar the following year; the ABVP was established in 1948. The RSS does not define itself as a political party; after India's independence, in 1947, the organization's political arm was the Jana Sangh (founded 1951), which was replaced in 1980 by the BJP. The BJP became a national party in the early 1990s and formed India's national government from 1998 to 2004. The RSS has no formal membership but has several million volunteers (*sevak*s ["servants"]); it is estimated to have more than forty thousand active centers or branches (*shākhā*s) all over the country, where volunteers participate in a range of grassroots social, economic, cultural, religious, and political initiatives. The RSS has been banned thrice: in 1948, after a "former" member assassinated Mahatma Gandhi; in 1975, following Indira Gandhi's invocation of emergency powers; and in 1992, after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, in Ayodhya. The Sangh *parivār* ("family") consists of two dozen or more organizations and affiliates, including several political parties, the most important of which are mentioned in the final section of this essay. "Ayodhya Dispute" and "Liberhan Commission" are accounts on the Web relevant to my discussion; Brass provides a recent, far-reaching scholarly analysis.

5. The ABVP's attack on the history department and its aftermath are recorded in the *Hindu*'s reports between 26 February and 8 March 2008 ("ABVP Activists Vandalise" [26 Feb. 2008]; "ABVP Leaders" [27 Feb. 2008]; "Baseless Charges" [28 Feb. 2008]; "ABVP Action" [29 Feb. 2008]; "'PM's Daughter'" [29 Feb. 2008]; "Bail" [2 Mar. 2008]; "ABVP Activists Surrender" [8 Mar. 2008]). Doniger recounts the events and responses to them from the vantage point of 2009 (670–71).

6. The complaint filed in Dera Bassi is quoted and analyzed at length by Kesavan and satirized by Advani. In December 2011 OUP's headquarters at Oxford refused to confirm or deny that OUP India made an apology and a promise in writing. Instead, it asserted that OUP did not "censor" Ramanujan's essay or its two print sources and that any action by OUP India resembling an apology was "misinterpreted" (Howard, "Questions" and "Bowing"; Suroor, "No 'Censorship'").

7. Responses to and protests against the Academic Council's decision are reported in the *Hindu* ("Outrage" [9 Nov. 2011]; Suroor, "OUP India" [4 Dec. 2011]), in the *Indian Express* (Thilak, "DU History Dept" [18 Oct. 2011] and "DU Protests Removal" [25 Oct. 2011]), and in the *Times of India* (Gohain, "Ramanujan Essay" [25 Oct. 2011]). For subsequent discussion in India, see Kesavan; Guha. For select international coverage, see Jaschik; Daniel; Howard, "Questions" and "Bowing." I have excluded sources such as *The Huffington Post* and blogs linked to *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*; I have also omitted languages other than English. Web search terms such as "Ramanujan essay controversy" and "Ramanujan 300 Ramayanas" yield several hundred other responses to the decision.

8. For the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* attributed to Vālmīki, see the Goldman translation, now near completion. Each of the six volumes discusses textual issues in depth. In vol. 1 Goldman situates poet and epic between about 750 and 500 BCE. In vol. 2 Pollock inclines toward the final

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centuries before the Common Era; his fuller argument for a late date, after the invention of Indian writing by Emperor Ashoka's chancery, is developed in his "Sanskrit Culture," whereas his comprehensive account of Sanskrit is laid out in his *Language*. Also see essays on the Sanskrit *Rāmāyaṇa* and several related topics in Thapar, *Cultural Pasts*. These materials are vital because the Hindu fundamentalist position on the "authenticity" of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* is based on naive assumptions about the epic's authorship, composition, dating, and transmission—and also about its canonicity and normativity.

9. Ramanujan's sources for these works are detailed in his notes and bibliography (*Collected Essays* 561–64). For additional, independent accounts of the spread of the *Rāma-kathā* across India and Asia and beyond, see Richman, *Many* Rāmāyaṇas and *Questioning* Rāmāyaṇas. Useful information can be found in Raghavan and in Iyengar, though they are uneven and sometimes unreliable. Doniger offers a comprehensive but discontinuous account, which can be pieced together through her excellent index. Rajurkar is an earlier Indian-language scholarly study; Saran and Khanna provide a recent in-depth study of a culture outside India. Ramanujan alludes to the story of Rāma in South and Southeast Asian theater, performance, ritual, and popular culture; these arts and practices, including dance, dance drama, puppet theater, and shadow-puppet theater, are mapped out in concrete detail in various chapters of Xu and Dharwadker.

10. Tulsīdās's *Rāmcharitmānas* plays a central role, as symbol and point of reference, in Hindu fundamentalist politics across northern India. On this multifaceted textual and performance tradition and related phenomena, see Lutgendorf, *Life*, and Richman, *Many* Rāmāyaṇas, chs. 11–12 (217–55), and *Questioning* Rāmāyaṇas, chs. 2, 6–7, 14 (25–47, 119–58, 285–308). On Avadhi and its literary culture since the sixteenth century, see Lutgendorf, *Life*, ch. 1 (1–52). On Hindi as a "hyper-language" that was "constructed retroactively in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at the complex ideological juncture of linguistics, politics, ethnicity, religion and culture" and that now subsumes seventeen main regionally distributed "dialects," including Avadhi, see my *Kabir* 269–71. This book also provides a broader picture of the northern Indian world from the fifteenth century onward, complementing Lutgendorf's study. For an analysis of the *Ramkien*, in Thailand and in Theravada Buddhism, complementary to Ramanujan's, see Richman, *Many* Rāmāyaṇas, ch. 3 (50–63).

11. The significance of these paired distinctions for Ramanujan's analysis of the story of Rāma is spelled out in Dharwadker, Introd. to Sec. 2 127–28.

12. Hanumān, the earliest full-fledged trickster figure in world literature, acquires a life of his own in the Common Era, traveling across South, Southeast, and East Asia. Lutgendorf, *Hanuman's Tale*, provides a rich interdisciplinary account. An unusual instance of the impact of the mythology of Hanumān on the europhone and Latin American modernist imagination appears in Paz.

13. Ramanujan's invocation of Wittgenstein's concept of family resemblance has important consequences for the story of Rāma and the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself, as a genre rather than a text or work. On the role of family resemblances in genre theory, which contextualize Ramanujan's remarks in this key passage, see Fowler, ch. 3 (37–53).

14. For biographical information on Narayan, several poems in translation, and Hindi texts of poems with facing translations, see my "Twenty-Nine Modern Indian Poems," "Four Hindi Poets," and "No Other Tongue." The poem translated here, titled "Ayodhyā, 1992" in Hindi, appears in Narayan 70–71.

15. On 20 March 2012, about two weeks after I had finished this essay, Delhi University's Academic Council approved the minutes of its meeting of 9 October 2011, at which it had voted to remove Ramanujan's essay from the history curriculum. Several members demanded that the council revisit the issue and that "at least their dissent be recorded," but the chair rejected the demands because the case was not on the agenda (Vijetha). With the approval of the October minutes, the university's "academic censorship" (Rushdie) ironically became a fait accompli on a procedural technicality. Besides the works mentioned in this essay, readers should consult Amin; Sarkar and Sarkar; and Thapar, "Controversy," which further probe the politics and the contexts of the Ramanujan affair.

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