

## RESEARCH OF NOTE

*Editors' Note: The following article is a transcription of Professor Asher's keynote address to the ASIANetwork Conference in Lisle, Illinois, March 2009.*

### **Belief and Contestation in India: The Case of the Taj Mahal**

Catherine B. Asher  
University of Minnesota

Of all the buildings in the world, the Taj Mahal is one of the most famous. It is renowned for its beauty, and, for many, it is a symbol of romantic love. Yet surprisingly the Taj Mahal is increasingly becoming a highly contested site. Recent challenges include questioning its Muslim Mughal patronage, its function as a royal tomb, and even its 17<sup>th</sup>-century date of construction. This probably sounds to you like scholarship as usual, but before I address the uncritical nature of these claims, I'd like to think about the larger issue of religious belief and contestation of



*The Taj Mahal  
17th century  
Agra, India*

religious sites in South Asia. That may help contextualize the case of the Taj Mahal.

Let me make a few observations. Contested religious space is not a notion new to India, despite a tendency to see it as a legacy of colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Let's start in eastern India at Bodhgaya's Mahabodhi temple because it suggests multiple fields of contestation. This is the site of the Buddha's Enlightenment, a place that has been both shared and contested through its history.<sup>2</sup> The future Buddha went to Bodhgaya because it was and remains a place of considerable importance for Hindus. That is, Hindus come to the city of Gaya, on whose outskirts Bodhgaya lies, to propitiate recently-deceased relatives so that their souls might go to heaven as they engage in a ceremony, which, like the Buddha's final meditation, concludes under a great pipul tree. While presently we distinguish between the two towns, Gaya and Bodhgaya, that distinction is largely artificial; but it is one that neatly identifies the Buddhists' space as distinct from that of the Hindus. Bodhgaya, however, has not been without contestation. For example, a seventh-century Hindu king, as an act of war, uprooted the sacred Bodhi tree,<sup>3</sup> the very tree beneath which the Buddha had sat and obtained Enlightenment. Until the time of its desecration, this tree formed the central ritual focus of the Mahabodhi temple, as shown in ancient sculptures. This king's uprooting of the tree is one of many acts of religious violence in time of war, ones that need to be problematized rather than simply dismissed as acts of bigotry or iconoclasm. The Bodhgaya temple site, by the way, continues to be contested, though now in an on-going court case. The issue is quite clear: Does the temple belong to the Mahabodhi Society, a Buddhist administrative group that claims it, or is it the property of Bodhgaya's Hindu priest in charge of Shiva worship there?<sup>4</sup> And like a lot of claims, the arguments invoke history, often an invented history, since the Society is relatively new, and the Priest's lineage cannot be traced back much farther.

My concern with contested and shared space was triggered by the momentous destruction of the so-called Babri Masjid at

a place in northeastern India called Ayodhya in 1992. This was an act that profoundly changed the way that I and others think and teach about Indian art—a field that is so often divided into specific religious categories according to historical time frames, all of which are colonial constructions. Erasing this colonial understanding of the rigidity of South Asian linear history, and replacing it with a grasp of the multiplicity of Indian cultures through diverse time frames would perhaps end such violent acts.

While most believe this mosque was constructed by the first Mughal emperor Babur, inscriptions show it was built by one of his nobles in 1528.<sup>5</sup> In fact we have no proof that the Mughal emperor Babur had ever visited Ayodhya. Many Hindus claimed that the mosque had been constructed on the site of the birthplace of the god Rama, where they believe a temple commemorating the precise locus of his birth stood prior to the mosque's construction. These Hindus, mostly instigated by right-wing Hindu political parties, had for some time threatened to demolish the mosque and replace it with a temple rededicated to Rama. The stand-off became a charged political one, debated in both state and federal legislatures. It pitted a well-organized and wealthy group of Hindus more against police who had been ordered to protect the mosque than against any organized Muslim community. As tension mounted, a mob finally stormed the police lines on December 6, 1992 and demolished the mosque, while the police themselves did little to stop its desecrators. Following the mosque's destruction, riots involving the killing of Hindus and Muslims broke out across India; the most massive violence was witnessed in Bombay, known today as Mumbai, where at least a thousand people were killed.

Following the mosque's destruction, the debate has centered and continues to do so, much more on whether a temple had been demolished in order to make way for the mosque than on any other issue. Virtually never debated was the ethics of righting one wrong—if indeed a temple had been demolished—by perpetrating another, in fact, seeking retribution more than 450 years after the event; nor was there any debate over the notion of sacred space itself.

## The Case of Katra Buddha

Let me move to a situation quite comparable to the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya. My starting point here, however, is not a temple but rather a famous image called the Katra Buddha because it was found at the Katra Mound in Mathura—a city about 100 miles south of Delhi and only about 50 miles from the



*Katra Buddha*  
*2nd C CE*  
*Mathura, India*

Taj Mahal. Few scholars ask precisely where this Buddha image comes from, yet its find spot tells a story of present-day importance.

The Katra mound is in Mathura, an ancient city and one associated with several of India's religions, most prominently with the Hindu god Krishna. Mathura's Katra mound is located close to another mound, where extensive Buddhist remains were excavated, and less than a mile from a site associated with the Jain religion, which is similar to both Hindu and Buddhist traditions.<sup>6</sup> This suggests

that it was a site used by several religions. In addition to the Jain and Buddhist images were also Hindu ones.<sup>7</sup> We also know that Katra was the location of a large Hindu temple, built in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, which was dismantled under the orders of a Muslim emperor who replaced it with a great mosque that still occupies the space.

That last change was clearly intentional and sequential, that is, a Hindu temple was replaced by a mosque. But should we assume that during the entire history of the Katra mound, there was a sequential occupation, that is, first by Buddhists, then Hindus and finally Muslims?<sup>8</sup> This assertion, following and reinforcing commonly held beliefs, assumes exclusive propriety of a sacred site and changes, when they occur, coming in

sequential order. That is a notion that fits well with the assumptions of art history, a field that is committed to sequences. But is that notion, we must ask, more a construct of a present-day world in which territory is more often contested on religious grounds than simply shared?

Let me add one important piece here before moving on to the site today and its precarious situation. The temple that was destroyed in order to construct the mosque there had been built at the beginning of the seventeenth century by a Hindu Raja Bir Singh and subsequently supported by imperial Mughal grants, that is, grants for this Hindu temple from a dynasty of Muslim monarchs. The Hindu Raja who had provided this temple was much admired by a Mughal emperor, and, at the emperor's behest, he killed the confidant of his predecessor on the throne. The temple was only about 50 years old when it was destroyed in 1669. Moreover, it was specifically associated with a person whose memory remained alive at the time when the temple was destroyed in retaliation for political uprisings in the area around Mathura. Mughal losses were massive.<sup>9</sup> What was destroyed, in a very real sense, was the Mughal's own temple, and it was replaced by a very large mosque.

That's not the end of the story, for the site of the temple and mosque has been imbued with a new meaning. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the site became identified as the precise locus of the god Krishna's birth-place, and now, immediately abutting the mosque, a large temple complex has been



*Mughal Mosque (17th century) and modern Hindu Temple dedicated to Krishna*

constructed. Both mosque and temple are heavily guarded by police and security is tight. The space is not just contested; it is

highly charged. While few visit the mosque, which is surrounded by armed police and barbed wire, thousands every day descend upon the new temple dedicated to the birthplace of the god Krishna. The mosque remains, although photography is now prohibited, but the same right wing Hindu groups responsible for destroying the Babri mosque remain intent on its demolition. All the same, here we have a situation of a shared but highly contested space.

### **Shared, Yet Uncontested Spaces**

In contrast to the example above, there are many conventional instances of shared yet uncontested space. Insofar as religious space can be defined by procession and ceremonial, we might note examples in the past where Hindu rulers participated in processions during a Muslim commemorative festival, and Muslims took part in Hindu celebrations.”<sup>10</sup> One of most sacred sites of Islam in all South Asia, the Shrine of Muin ud-Din Chishti in Ajmer, is venerated and visited by Hindus as well as Muslims and other Indians, irrespective of their religion.”<sup>11</sup> Hindus still visit a number of Muslim shrines and ask for intercession from the saints buried there for children, health, and other favors. An excellent case in point is the shrine of Shahul Hamid, a mystic saint who lived during the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> It’s located in Nagore in south India.

Shahul Hamid’s shrine is unusual not in that Muslims, Hindus, and Christians come in equal numbers from considerable distances to pay homage, but rather in that customs practiced at the shrine have embraced the sort of ritual usually only found at Hindu temples. Hagiographies describing Shahul Hamid give him the powers typically associated with a Muslim saint, but what is less common are references to the saint that are usually associated with Hindu gods, offering clues not to the saint as a historical figure but to his legend and the traditions that have built up around his shrine.

Visiting the Nagore shrine is like the visit to many crowded holy sites; it is an experience that engages the senses of sight, smell, taste, and sound. This experience is close to that of a visit to a large Hindu temple. As scholars have noted, Islam in

south India, especially in the context of a Muslim shrine, is much more likely to embrace Indic traditions than Islam in north India. This is not to suggest that south Indian Islam is a watered-down version of standard Islam, for many scholars of classical Islam have flourished in these very communities, but rather that long-standing Indic traditions have been widely embraced by south India's Muslims.

The Nagore shrine is visited equally by Muslims and Hindus, most of whom are seeking cures for ailments, an end to barrenness, and safety in travel. Those who wish to be healed or to secure safe journeys purchase plaques with an image of the afflicted body part or a ship, a car, or even an airplane, which they offer to the shrine. Not far from Nagore is the Church of Our Lady of Health, a pan-Indian pilgrimage site for Christians, where nearly identical offerings are made. My sense is that while these sites are separate, multiple religious communities happily visit all of them.

Scholarly literature and popular images dwell on the ecumenical nature of south Indian society. On the road between Nagore and the church is a free-standing gate, dedicated to the cooperation of religions, featuring centrally placed Hindu temple flanked on either side by images of the Church of Our Lady of



*Gateway in south India  
21st century*

Health and the Nagore shrine. I also observed an illustration on the back of a bus that featured a similar scenario, with an image of a Hindu god replacing the temple. Although in each case, the Hindu image is the largest and is centrally placed, I'm not suggesting an absence of inter-community harmony. What I am suggesting is that in spite of this harmony, the tendency is to respect the existence of other religious traditions, but at the same time believe your own is the proper path.

### **Rethinking Religious Identity**

But we need to ask—is it only Hindus who are willing in the modern era to cross into Muslim domains? I myself have observed—with a degree of wonder that was probably unnecessary—a burka-clad (that is, completely veiled), and thus obviously Muslim woman, at a famous south Indian Hindu temple. This observation underscores the need to consider with care the meaning of religious identity in South Asia. To what extent is that sense of identity with a religion, as opposed to identity with a community, a colonial legacy, perhaps most closely associated with the census, which mandated counting individuals by religious affiliation that fit British-conceived categories? Certainly we know cases of communities, including of course the individuals who comprise those communities, which identify as *both* Hindu and Muslim.<sup>13</sup> But even in cases such as those, I wonder if the members of these communities imagine a dual identity, as we might construe it, rather than simply an identity with the community and its culturally instilled practices.<sup>14</sup>

There are many other examples of shared space in India, and perhaps I should stress this before turning to one last example of contested space—one which you might not tend to think of as a contested—that is the Taj Mahal. The situations of contested space I've spoken about at the outset of this essay are well known. The destruction of the Babri mosque commanded international attention. The Mathura situation is well publicized in India. Information about them is easily accessed on the web and in hard print format. Less known are more insidious attempts to rewrite Indian history. Perhaps the best example for our purposes is India's most famous monument,



the Taj Mahal, built in the mid-17th century by the Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan (r. 1628-58).

### **The Case of the Taj Mahal**

This garden complex was built as a tomb for Shah Jahan's favorite wife who died in 1631 while giving birth to her fourteenth child; thus one common association with the Taj Mahal is a notion of romantic love. But we must consider that the emperor Shah Jahan was buried in the Taj Mahal as well after being imprisoned for the last years of his life.<sup>15</sup> The Taj's official name, the Illumined Tomb, an epithet shared with the Prophet Muhammad's tomb in Medina, suggests that Shah Jahan always intended the Taj Mahal to be his tomb as well. He perceived himself, like the Prophet Muhammad, to conform to the Islamic theological concept of a Perfect Man. In this same manner, the tomb's interior is designed so that the centrally placed royal cenotaphs can be circumambulated as is done at saints' shrines in India, thus suggesting a link between royalty and sanctity. In addition, chapters from the Quran, the holiest text in Islam and believed to be divinely revealed, were chanted 24 hours a day in the complex, underscoring its religious nature. So, too, the enormous garden in which the Taj Mahal sits is intended to represent paradise on earth. Paradise in the Muslim tradition is the reward for all true believers on the Day of Judgment. In essence the tomb was built as a shrine in which the deceased royals are given a semi-divine status. For many Muslims in India, it indeed is a shrine. Other communities, however, perceive the Taj differently, but are far from unanimous in their perceptions.

The Taj Mahal today enjoys fame far beyond its religious importance. True, it was admired by the Mughal family, members of the nobility and European travelers throughout the Mughal period and beyond, but it essentially marks the end of the tradition of building large-scale tombs. But today it, more than any other building in the world, is equated with excellence. Over the last twenty years advertisements featuring the Taj Mahal have been associated with fine china, aged spirits, luxury cruises and more. Even the Government of India features this

garden tomb in glossy page advertisements inviting tourists to the ultimate experience—paradise on earth. Others wish to emulate the Taj Mahal. The inlay on the Taj Mahal was the inspiration for the multi-millionaire Doris Duke's bathroom on her estate, Shangri La in Hawaii. Today a wealthy filmmaker in Bangladesh is making a so-called replica of the Taj to the tune of \$58 million dollars outside of Dhaka.

The association of Shah Jahan's white marble mausoleum with high quality products is harmless—perhaps the proud emperor would have been delighted with this universal acclamation of his architectural output. But understanding how this attitude came about is instructive to understanding the mausoleum's visual appeal as well as to its increasingly contested nature.

Much historical information is known about the Taj Mahal, but scholars disagree on its symbolism. One scholar has argued that the Taj is a representation of the Throne of God as envisioned on the Day of Judgment, while others disagree strongly.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting that those who know relatively little about the Mughal Empire and its architectural tradition admire this essay, while scholars of Mughal Indian art tend to dismiss it. Whatever its larger meaning, the extensive use of white marble must have been intended to evoke a sense of divine presence, for by the time of the monument's construction, white marble was used exclusively for the tombs of saints and for buildings intended solely for the emperor's use, thus employing architecture as a way to accentuate the Mughal emperor's semi-divine status.

While today the Taj is commonly seen from the entrance gate, in fact, relatively few ever saw it from this vantage. In Mughal times the public only viewed it from the river. Its exterior would loom large on the landscape, but access to the garden or mausoleum was denied to most. This may help to explain why it had less impact than commonly imagined. By the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, monumental tombs almost completely lost favor, in part due to financial restraints, but also as a reflection of the increased popularity of orthodox Islam. Modest grave markers, more in keeping with orthodox Muslim practice, replaced large structural

tombs such as the Taj Mahal, even for the Mughal royals.<sup>17</sup> While the architectural legacy of the earlier Mughals held great value for the later Mughals, the Taj Mahal itself played a minor role in this.

If there was relatively little interest on the part of Indians in the Taj Mahal, how did this monument become supersized; that is, how did it become central to the imagined memory of so many as they think about India? How did it come to be the subject of all those European artists who visited India?<sup>18</sup> The awe expressed by Francois Bernier, whom I will discuss below, appears to have set the tenor of European reactions to a building, transforming it from a private tomb to an object of public wonder.

A number of Europeans were present in 17<sup>th</sup>-century Mughal India, and some engaged in writing memoirs. Among those writing on the Taj only the account of Francois Bernier, a physician to the royal family, is fully credible.<sup>19</sup> Bernier writes about the tomb in a way that underscores his own uncertainty on how to appreciate Indian architecture, an attitude I argue at least continues into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Last time I visited Taje Mehale's mausoleum I was in the company of a French merchant, who, as well as myself, thought that this extraordinary fabric could not be sufficiently admired. I did not venture to express my opinion, fearing that my taste might have been corrupted by my long residence in the Indies; and as my companion was come recently from France, it was quite a relief to my mind to hear him say that he had seen nothing in Europe so bold and majestic.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the Taj's harmoniously balanced composition appealed to western sensibilities as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Taj Mahal was immortalized by a number of European artists. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Europeans continued to admire the Taj, and for the British it was the favored picnic spot.

The building's preeminent position today reflects the original but short-lived imperial view of its importance that was re-

created in the 19th and 20th centuries by a British colonial construction of India's past. In 1876, James Fergusson, the first European to write a history of Indian architecture, compared the Mughal mausoleum to the Greek Parthenon, stating that the Taj Mahal was a magnificent specimen of balanced architecture and ornament. But then he goes on to argue that "the Parthenon belongs... to a higher class of art, its sculptures raising it into the region of the most intellectual branch of ... art." Fergusson ends by noting that although the Taj's inlay was exquisite, it still lacked the "intellectual beauty of Greek ornament."<sup>21</sup> Thus Fergusson's colonial mind saw the Taj Mahal as a structure not quite equal to European architecture and as one whose decor reflected the inferiority of the "native" mind.

E.B. Havell, writing in 1913, had a very different notion of the Taj Mahal than did Fergusson, and it is Havell's view that fueled the views of P.N. Oak, a Hindu fundamentalist, who started writing in the late 1960s, and Oak's followers. Contrary to the work of Fergusson and others, Havell argued that the Taj Mahal has nothing in common with Islamic architecture outside of India, although the Mughals were descended from the Central Asian Timurids, who were famous for their architecture. Havell argues that the Taj is in fact essentially Indian—here we should read pre-Islamic India—in origin. He writes at length about how its plan, motifs and design elements symbolize ideals found in ancient pre-Islamic Indian art, not Islamic art.

I will only give two examples, but any scholar will see that they are fallacious. Havell argues that the overall appearance and plan of the Taj Mahal is not found in the Mughals' own architectural tradition, but rather in Hindu temples built some five centuries earlier. He argues that the dome of the Taj Mahal does not derive from other similar Mughal domes but in Buddhist stupas built centuries earlier, although he fails to acknowledge that the Mughals had no knowledge of these stupas.

The common view is that Havell was suggesting that all Indians—Hindus, Muslims and others—were valid Indian subjects of study. But recent work by the scholar Osman Jamal suggests that this innocent view is a misleading one, arguing that Havell was in fact more subversive than commonly

believed.<sup>22</sup> Jamal claims that in Havell's mind, only those historical features that date to India's ancient pre-Islamic past are validly "Indian," and that Havell was anti-Muslim. Havell's insistence that the origins of the Taj Mahal were to be found not in the buildings built recently by Shah Jahan's own predecessors but in ones unknown to the Mughals and built long ago would support Jamal's notion that Havell believed the "real" India was one rooted in its ancient pre-Islamic past.

What is important to note here is that while both Fergusson and Havell had radically different ideas about the origins of the Taj Mahal's form, they were nevertheless wrestling with its extreme beauty each in his own way. For Fergusson it was to admit its superlative appearance, but regard it as inferior to a recognized Greek masterpiece. For Havell it was to reject its Islamic origins by claiming ones originating in an ancient Indic past. Both men were carrying forth the tradition established by the Frenchman Bernier, who transformed the Taj into an object of wonder. And from those who treated it as a sublime work of art, it came to be treated as an object of popular culture, accompanying the use of India's historic past in indigenous advertising.<sup>23</sup> And from there, the Taj entered the broader public domain; it was featured in the work of ad agencies worldwide as they used it not as a tomb but rather as a symbol of elegance and luxury, a residence for the living more than a repository for the dead.

Other modern associations are more pernicious, and only based on a skewed understanding of history. For example, land for the Taj Mahal had been purchased from a Hindu, a fact distorted by authors, in particular the late P.N. Oak, from west India, associated with the Institute for Rewriting Indian History. He has presented the Taj Mahal as a product of earlier Hindu patronage, not the later Muslim one.<sup>24</sup> Oak's arguments appear compelling—except to knowledgeable scholars. The problem is most people lack this knowledge so his conspiracy theory wrapped in inflammatory rhetoric is compelling to those who wish to believe.

The material written by Oak is readily available on a number of Internet websites.<sup>25</sup> Most of these sites are stridently anti-

Muslim. The BBC posts a discussion site which gives a traditional version of the origins of the Taj Mahal and then below it Oak's version, which is recounted in greater detail.<sup>26</sup> Respondents to this site are either appalled by the Oak version—they are often Muslims—while others are taken by his argument. What we see here is that a new myth, or memory, of the Taj Mahal—one whose implications are both far-reaching and frightening—is being developed by Hindu fundamentalists, who through a massive network of electronic and paper publications, are attempting to reshape the Taj Mahal's past to meet their own immediate concerns. Recently a member of the Indian Parliament attempted to introduce a bill to officially declare the Taj a Hindu temple. A model of the Taj sold in tourist shops bears a trident, a Hindu symbol, on the dome,<sup>27</sup> transforming this souvenir into a Hindu temple or palace. Such claims employ revisionist histories and artistic creation to discredit Muslims, thus undermining the very basis of India's constitutional secular democracy.

Today various governmental agencies control the Taj Mahal and its surroundings. They have had to deal with a number of deep concerns, from pollution to separatist organizations threatening to blow up the Taj Mahal, and, more recently, the construction of a massive shopping centre nearby, which poses the potential of damaging the Taj's foundation. The shopping complex derives from an earlier scheme devised by an American university. The use of American, not Indian expertise has understandably created a huge controversy. The project was rooted in a desire to protect the complex from excessive tourist traffic and from terrorists, and in a desire to raise revenues. To achieve these goals, the visitor first purchases a dual priced ticket—25 cents for Indian nationals and 20 dollars for all others. The visitor then goes through metal detectors and other searches. While the concern for security is reasonable, the dual pricing, for which there is not even a student rate, has engendered a good deal of anger.

More controversial is the manner in which human traffic is now controlled. Until recently the Taj was open for seven days a week and Fridays were free. Now Friday is a closed

day. This decision appears to be targeted at the local, large, poor Muslim community who for years used the Taj as a place to relax on their weekly holy day. Muslims are allowed to use the mosque inside the complex for Friday prayers, but they are denied its use as place of leisure. The fee, 10 rupees—about 25 cents— for other days, seems low to the well-to-do or for foreigners, but for large Muslim families to pay this amount significantly restricts their visits. Certainly, they can not visit it once a week as they had done in the past. Tim Edensor, who interviewed local Muslim visitors to the Taj Mahal before these strictures were enforced, heard complaints from older men who already felt constrained when activities such as playing cards at the Taj were banned. One noted, “In the old days it used to be fun...; now... we are not allowed to do anything but sit here and look.”<sup>28</sup> Another local Muslim complained that tickets shouldn’t be required for a religious building they loved. Tickets, he argues, are simply an obstacle to a locale he feels belongs to the citizens of Agra.<sup>29</sup>

Recently these issues have been eclipsed by a new development that potentially might affect the very survival of this massive complex. Like the current situation at Bodhgaya, a controversy has emerged over who has rightful authority over this sacred site. In 2005, the Muslim Trust Board claimed the Taj Mahal was their legitimate responsibility and not that of the Government. Each side has filed a law suit on who should be the rightful protector of this complex that costs millions of dollars annually to maintain.<sup>30</sup> Due to the nature of Muslim Trust Board laws, this claim has more legitimacy than it might seem on the surface. This case of contestation is pending a decision by the Indian Supreme Court, and now that the Taj Mahal has recently been included among the Seven Wonders of the World, the issue is all the more loaded.<sup>31</sup>

What we have seen is that when one religious group—in this case majority Hindus with considerable political clout—decides that a structure built earlier by what is today a minority group—in this case Muslims—is on a spot that has become sacred to Hinduism—here we can read recently—that site becomes highly contested and charged. In the case of the Taj Mahal there are several contesters—the Indian government,

Hindus and Muslims, and tourists—all wishing to claim South Asia's most famous monument. Despite such fierce contestation at a number of religious sites, however, there still exist shrines, ones such as Shabul Hamid's, where ordinary people come together in respect for the spiritual and moral authority of saints. These are the sites that tend to remain uncontested, for they remain outside the realm of the political, serving only the interests of the average person, who is concerned with safety, spiritual welfare, and health.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>C.A. Bailey, "The Pre-history of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 19, 2 (1995), 177-203, especially, 177-181.

<sup>2</sup>Most of my information on Bodhgaya comes from years of discussion with Frederick M. Asher. Also see Frederick M. Asher, *Bodh Gaya: Monumental Legacy*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>The record of desecration comes largely from the Chinese pilgrims. See, for example, Xuan Zong's account in Samuel Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*. London: Trubner & Co., 1884, 121-22.

<sup>4</sup>For a perspective on the current dispute, see D.K. Barua, *Buddha Gaya Temple and its History*. Buddha Gaya: Buddha Gaya Temple Management Committee, 1981.

<sup>5</sup>Catherine B. Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 29-30.

<sup>6</sup>See Alexander Cunningham, *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, vol. I, reprint ed., Delhi: Indological Book House, 1972, plate XXXIX for a map of Mathura that shows the site, there called Katara.

<sup>7</sup>See V.S. Agrawala, "Catalogue of the Mathura Museum; III. Jaina Tirthankaras and Other Miscellaneous Figures," *Journal of the U.P. Historical Society*, vol. XXIII (1950), 46 and V.S. Agrawala, "Catalogue of the Mathura Museum; II. A Catalogue of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva in Mathura Art." *Journal of the U.P. Historical Society*, vol. XXII (1949), 109-110.



- <sup>8</sup>Cunningham, vol. I, 235.
- <sup>9</sup>Much of this history is summarized in C. Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*. 162-164.
- <sup>10</sup>*Madhya Pradesh District Gazetteers, Gwalior*. Bhopal: Government Central Press, 1965, 56, quoting a previous edition of the Gazetteer.
- <sup>11</sup>*Rajasthan District Gazetteers, Ajmer*. Jaipur: Government Central Press, 1966, 715, quoting a previous edition of the Gazetteer. See also Bayly for many other examples of sharing both space and ritual.
- <sup>12</sup>Vasudha Narayanan, "Nagore: Dargah of Hazrat Shah al-Hamid," in *Dargahs, Abodes of the Saints*, edited by Mumtaz Currim and George Michell. Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2004, 136-47.
- <sup>13</sup>Harjot Oberoi, *Construction of Religious Boundaries*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994, 10-12.
- <sup>14</sup>Oberoi, 8-9, makes the case that the 19<sup>th</sup> century imposed a classificatory model for religious identity that did not necessarily reflect indigenous reality.
- <sup>15</sup>See Begley and Desai, *Taj Mahal: the Illumined Tomb*, for the Mughal sources on the Taj Mahal. Also see Ebba Koch, *The Complete Taj Mahal and the Riverfront Gardens of Agra* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006), 256-57. Koch, 97-101 provides a detailed account of progress on the tomb based on her readings of original sources.
- <sup>16</sup>Wayne E. Bagley, "The Myth of the Taj Mahal and a New Theory of Its Symbolic Meaning," *The Art Bulletin* 61 (1979), 7-37 and Koch, 250.
- <sup>17</sup>For an example see Asher, *Architecture of Mughal India*, 296.
- <sup>18</sup>See Koch, *Complete Taj Mahal*, 231-40 for an overview of European artists illustrating the Taj Mahal.
- <sup>19</sup>See Begley and Desai, *The Taj Mahal: The Illumined Tomb*, 291 for issues of unreliability.
- <sup>20</sup>Begley and Desai, *The Taj Mahal: the Illumined Tomb*, 296-98.
- <sup>21</sup>James Fergusson, *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 2 vol. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. rev. James Burgess and R. Phene

- Spiers (London: John Murray, 1910), II:284; 316. The first edition appeared in 1876.
- <sup>22</sup> Osman Jamal, "E.B. Havell: The Art and Politics of Indianness," *Third Text* 39 (Summer 1997), 3-19.
- <sup>23</sup> For examples see, Samantha Harrison and Kajri Jain, *India Bazaar: Vintage Indian Graphics* (Koln: Taschen Books, 2004), pages not numbered; Sirish Rao, V. Geetha, and Gita Wolf-Sampath, *An Ideal Boy: Charts from India* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis Publications in association with Tara Publications, 2001), 103-04.
- <sup>24</sup> P.N. Oak, *The Taj Mahal is a Hindu Palace* (Bombay: Pearl Books, 1968) and his *The Taj Mahal is a Temple Palace* (New Delhi: Institute for Rewriting Indian History, 1974). Oak has a number of books along this same line.
- <sup>25</sup> Examples include:  
<http://www.swordoftruth.com/swordoftruth/editorial/editorial.html>  
[http://www.stephen-knapp.com/was\\_the\\_taj\\_mahal\\_a\\_vedic\\_temple.htm](http://www.stephen-knapp.com/was_the_taj_mahal_a_vedic_temple.htm)
- <sup>26</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A5220>
- <sup>27</sup> See: <http://www.heritagearcade.com/themes/gifs/taj-mahal-model-big.jpg>
- <sup>28</sup> Edensor, *Tourists at the Taj*, 118.
- <sup>29</sup> Edensor, *Tourists at the Taj*, 116.
- <sup>30</sup> For example, "Taj Now Waqf Property, ASI to Move Court," *Hindustan Times*, July 14, 2005, 1; "Government Rejects Waqf Claim on Taj," *Hindustan Times* (Lucknow edition), July 16, 2005, 1.
- <sup>31</sup> The summer when I spoke to officials at the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) they claimed that the Waqf Board issue is not a problem, although this is not necessarily true.